ANGLICAN SOCIALISM AND WELFARE:
JOHN MILBANK’S ‘BLUE SOCIALIST’ THINKING
AND
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND’S APPROACH
TO WELFARE SINCE 2008

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ABSTRACT

What approach should the Church of England take to welfare after the financial crash of 2008? This study answers that question by examining it through the lens of the Anglican Socialist tradition, with specific reference to the Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank. By taking an uncommon approach to contemporary Contextual Theology, that uses historical source criticism as its primary research methodology, it analyses Anglican Socialists’ theological perspectives on the state, and how they have contributed to shaping Church thinking on welfare, with a particular focus on Milbank. It examines the influence Milbank’s thinking has had on the Church of England’s approach to welfare since 2008; in particular, its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project following advice it received in a General Synod paper in 2010 (GS1804) from Malcolm Brown, its Director of Mission and Public Affairs, and it analyses the influences that shaped that advice.

It is critical of the way GS1804 sought to align the Church’s positioning on welfare, with the Blue Labour/Red Tory political phenomenon that Milbank’s Christendom theology partly underpinned. In significant part, it attributes the favourable response the Church gave to the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010, 2011 and early 2012 to this. It argues that that response was a theo-political misjudgement, which compromised its ability to hold the Coalition Government to account for the failings of the ‘Big Society’ project during its first two years. It partly attributes this misjudgement to an inadequacy in its current thinking on the theology of the state, and invites clarification on this from the Church as part of a wider review of how it should engage with the state in the future.

The study is the first analysis and critique of Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on welfare vis-à-vis its influence within the Church of England. It concludes that the Church should learn lessons from its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project and the influence Milbank’s thinking had on it, and return to shaping its approach to welfare around a defence of William Temple’s Welfare Statist legacy, but remaining open to the need for ongoing modernisation of it. It should therefore be sceptical of the broad thrust of Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision for determining the Church’s role in the provision of welfare.
DECLARATION

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Joseph Forde studied History as an undergraduate at the University of Lancaster: 1982–85 (winner of the Queen’s Scholarship prize in History, 1984), and completed an MA in History at the University of Sheffield in 1987, specialising in the history of ideas. After further professional training at the University of the West of England in Bristol, he became a Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in 1988 (elected a fellow in 2007), after which he spent 26 years working as an Employee Relations specialist in the National Health Service, the last nine at Assistant Director level. During that time he completed a further master’s degree in Human Resource Management at the University of Huddersfield in 2000, receiving a distinction for his dissertation on “The Third Way: Industrial Partnerships in the NHS”. His career thus afforded him considerable experience of working within a key institution of the British
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, both of whom died when I was young, and to all that they gave to me.
INTRODUCTION

1. Background

The idea for this thesis emerged out of a curiosity I had about a change in direction the Church of England had taken to welfare following the financial crash of 2008, when, in 2010, 2011 and early 2012, it offered qualified support to the Coalition Government’s ‘Big Society’ project. The thinking underpinning that project challenged some of the assumptions on which the post-war British Welfare State had been founded. Prior to 2010 the Church of England had been a staunch defender of the Welfare State. The favourable response it gave to the ‘Big Society’ project during its first two years, suggested a paradigm shift may have occurred in its thinking on welfare, and as a student of Contextual Theology I wanted to identify and understand the reasons for that.

After a considerable amount of exploratory reading, it became apparent that the Anglican Socialist tradition had played an important part in shaping the Church’s positioning on welfare since the middle of the nineteenth century. It was also evident that John Milbank’s influence on the Church of England’s repositioning on welfare in 2010/11, may have been a key factor in bringing about the change of direction, and on

shaping the Church’s response to welfare since. A research question was formulated to enable these aspects to be researched and critically examined.

2. Research Question

What approach should the Church of England take to welfare, in light of the tradition of Anglican Socialist thinking, with specific reference to the influential Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank?

3. My Approach

The research question is a contemporary one in Contextual Theology, the context being the Church of England and its approach to welfare since the financial crash of 2008. I have chosen to research it by looking at it through the lens of a historical tradition — Anglican Socialism. In this regard, the thesis is, in part, an analysis of Anglican Socialists’ theological perspectives on the state, and how this has contributed to shaping their thinking on welfare. It examines the influence this thinking has had, and continues to have, on the Church of England’s role in the provision of welfare.

John Milbank’s writings — on the rise of capitalism and the modern, Western state; Christian Socialism; Blue Socialism; Blue Labour; Post-liberalism; the British Welfare State; voluntarism; the ‘Big Society’ project; and the Church of England’s post-war role in the provision of welfare — feature prominently in what follows. As his writings on these are often multidisciplinary in scope and method, traversing the academic boundaries of theology, political theory, philosophy and history, the structure, research methodology and source materials used for this study often reflect this.
4. Outline of the Study

The study is split into three parts, each introduced and shaped by two Research Goals. The rationale for this structure — reflected in the drafting of the Research Goals (RGs) — is that it enables Milbank’s thinking on welfare and the Church to be examined in historical and theoretical context, as a contribution to the Anglican Socialist tradition out of which it has emerged (Part One and Part Two), before examining it in the context of the Church of England’s relation to the political field of welfare since 2008, and, specifically, its response to the ‘Big Society’ project (Part Three). It also enables the Church of England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project to be examined in historical and theoretical context (Part Three).

5. Part One

Research Goal 1 is to provide a historical and theoretical backdrop on the origins of the British Welfare State and the post-war Welfare State consensus and its collapse, as seen through the lens of the Anglican Socialist tradition. In addressing this goal, in chapter one I describe three distinct strands of Anglican Socialist thinking on the modern state. These have shaped their advocates’ views on the role the state should perform in the transition to a Christian socialist society, and the role the Church might play in that process, not least with respect to its interface with the state’s welfare arm. I argue that two of these strands, namely, the Welfare Statist strand and the English Pluralist Christendom strand, remain highly relevant for locating and understanding the role the Church of England might perform in the provision of welfare henceforth. In chapter two I argue that two dominant strands of economic thinking have characterised the history of the Welfare State consensus and its collapse. They have been Keynesianism for the period 1945–1976, and
neoliberalism for the period since. They have had a profound impact on the way welfare has been provided in the post-war period.

Research Goal 2 is to locate John Milbank’s thinking on welfare and the Church within the Anglican Socialist tradition. In chapter one, this is addressed by locating Milbank in the English Pluralist Christendom strand. In chapter two, it is addressed by contrasting the perspectives held on the modern, liberal capitalist state by R.H. Tawney, writing in the Welfare Statist strand, and Milbank, writing in the English Pluralist Christendom strand. It is argued that this is crucial for understanding why Milbank considers liberal democracy as having significant limitations in what it can achieve in advancing the kingdom of God on earth, not least with respect to the provision of welfare, and why he sees the need for the Church to play a much bigger role in the provision of welfare. I also argue that David Nicholls’ writings on English Pluralism were influential in bringing about a revival of interest in that perspective since the early 1970s, and on shaping aspects of Milbank’s later thinking.

6. Part Two

Research Goal 3 is to examine the Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank with reference to its key theoretical underpinnings and to some alternative perspectives and criticisms of them. In addressing this goal, in chapter three I provide further evidence of how Milbank’s thinking sits within the English Pluralist Christendom strand of Anglican Socialism via an analysis of his perspectives on the Middle Ages, the Reformation, Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, the Church and the modern, liberal capitalist state, and Christian Socialism. I argue that his critical thinking on state-provided welfare in a capitalist context stems from his view that the Church’s role in its provision has been
circumscribed by the rise of the modern, secular state and its ‘separation’ from the Church, and, more latterly, by its welfare appendages. For Milbank, the result has been an increasing relegation of the role of the Church to that of the private sphere. Core to his thinking on welfare, is that the Church of England must now adopt a new approach if it is to rediscover its original purpose, which is to be the “kingdom of God in embryo” in a re-established but contemporary vision of a Catholic Christendom for a post-liberal era. I also provide arguments that challenge Milbank’s historical perspective on religion and the rise of capitalism, as well as his thinking on Blue Socialism.

Research Goal 4 is to critique Milbank’s Blue Socialist perspective on the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, and the Church of England’s post-war role in the provision of welfare, and his proposed Blue Socialist, post-liberal alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare. In addressing this goal, in chapter four I critique Milbank’s perspective on the history of the British Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector providers of welfare. In particular, the way he feels it was at the expense of those intermediary level welfare providers such as church organisations, which resulted in a decline in church observance and affiliation in Britain in the post-war period, which he wants to see reversed. I further critique his Blue Socialist, post-liberal alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare, as central to his case for establishing a new post-liberal polity for achieving the common good in England in the twenty-first century.

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7. **Part Three**

Research Goal 5 is to consider John Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on the ‘Big Society’ project, and the influence it had on shaping the Church of England’s response to it, in the context of other perspectives from within Anglican Socialism, and from within the Radical Orthodoxy grouping as regards Phillip Blond’s *Red Tory* analysis. In addressing this goal, in chapter five I argue that much of the thinking on welfare in the Church of England in the period since 2008, particularly its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, can be located in the themes and perspectives on the Church, state and welfare that have been developed by writers from within the Welfare Statist strand and the English Pluralist Christendom strand of the Anglican Socialist tradition. I argue that the Church of England’s positioning on welfare underwent a paradigm shift in 2010, from what had previously been a default tendency to defend William Temple’s Welfare Statist perspective, to one more receptive to defending the communitarian critique of it, and I offer explanations for why this happened, including examining the influence Milbank had on bringing it about.

Research Goal 6 is to analyse and appraise the Church of England’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project, and to consider its future approach to welfare in light of that response. A particular focus is on the advice it received in GS1804 from Malcolm Brown, its Director of Mission and Public Affairs, on its handling of that project, and the influences he cites as key to shaping that advice. It was that advice that the Church of England endorsed at its Synod in November 2010, which set the direction on its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project in 2011 and early 2012. In addressing this goal, in chapter five I argue that GS1804 can, in significant part, explain the paradigm shift that occurred in the Church’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, and I analyse and critique the key
reasons underpinning that advice. I also argue that the key outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project, not least the contraction in state support for the voluntary sector, were foreseeable to Brown and, via GS1804, to the Church of England, based *inter alia* on things that Prime Minister David Cameron had made explicit, and I offer explanations for why that advice was framed in the way it was. I also argue that the rise in the levels of social action in the Church of England that were witnessed between 2010 and 2015, did not lead to an increase in Church affiliation of the kind Milbank’s perspective would have predicted — on the contrary, Anglican UK church membership reduced. This has implications for assessing the credibility of one line of argument Milbank adduces in support of his perspective on welfare and the Church. I also question whether the Church of England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project has implications for its positioning on the theology of the state — a point that I return to in chapter six.

In chapter six I offer some reflections on the research and its findings, and based on them reach conclusions to the lines of argument that are relevant for shaping the Church of England’s approach to welfare.

In the conclusion to the thesis, I summarise the salient points reached in chapter six, and discuss how the research has enabled the research question to be answered, and consider its significance as an original contribution to thought. Suggestions on the scope for further research are also offered.

8. **Research Methodology**

The chosen research methodology has, in the main, been historical source criticism and

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3 Anglican UK refers to Anglican Churches in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
hence is literature based. This is consistent with the choice made to examine this topic through the lens of a historical tradition — Anglican Socialism. Milbank often deploys historical analysis when writing on welfare and the Church of England, and it is therefore appropriate to use historical source criticism when examining that thinking. It is also a research methodology that I have studied to master’s degree level and have used for other research projects, and so I have acquired some level of expertise in its use. Further, it is a research methodology that is not commonly used for research projects in contemporary Contextual Theology, and so offers the potential for adding to the originality of the thesis.

Consistent with this choice of research methodology, and owing to the profuse amount of published material by Milbank on political theology and, specifically, on welfare and the Church of England, it has not been felt necessary to interview him. The approach has been to test his published thinking on the Church, the state and welfare against the historical evidence; and the same applies to the other writers engaged with, many of whom are now dead in any event. However, this was not possible regarding Malcolm Brown, as he has not published sufficient material on the thinking that shaped GS1804 for it to be examined to the degree necessary for this thesis. Therefore, a recorded, semi-structured interview was conducted with him (see Appendix Four). Dr Brown was afforded full editorial control over the transcript, and has made a small number of minor grammatical adjustments. He will be provided with a copy of the thesis once it has been formally assessed.

For addressing RG 1 and RG 2 (Part One), the research methodology has been an examination of key books and articles written by Anglican Socialists on welfare, and other socialist and non-socialist writers where they have relevance. For addressing RG 3 and RG 4 (Part Two), it has been an examination of the writings of John Milbank, with
particular reference to those on religion and the rise of capitalism, Christian Socialism, Blue Socialism, the Blue Labour project, welfare and the Church, and post-liberalism. Additional works have been examined that relate to these aspects of Milbank’s thought (including criticism of his thinking); and to welfare, voluntarism, the Church and the wider political context, including a number of committee reports, internal party political publications and historiographical interpretations. For addressing RG 5 and RG 6 (Part Three), the research methodology has been an examination of books, academic articles and church reports and papers on the Church of England’s post-war interface with the Welfare State, and government initiatives on welfare, including its response to the ‘Big Society’ project in the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008. Additionally, an examination of books, academic and journalistic articles relating to Milbank’s thinking on the ‘Big Society’ project and the Church of England’s response to it has been undertaken, plus an analysis of the transcript of the interview conducted with Malcolm Brown.

Consistent with the use of historical source criticism as the primary research methodology, Part One focuses on providing a historical and theoretical backdrop to much of what follows.
PART ONE

LOCATING JOHN MILBANK’S THINKING ON WELFARE AND THE CHURCH WITHIN THE ANGLICAN SOCIALIST TRADITION

Research Goals for Part One:

(1) To provide a historical and theoretical backdrop on the origins of the British Welfare State and the post-war Welfare State consensus and its collapse, as seen through the lens of the Anglican Socialist tradition.

(2) To locate John Milbank’s thinking on welfare and the Church within the Anglican Socialist tradition.
CHAPTER ONE

THREE ANGLICAN SOCIALIST STRANDS: WELFARE STATIST, ENGLISH PLURALIST CHRISTENDOM, REVOLUTIONIST

1.1 Introduction

A central argument of this thesis is that two strands within the Anglican Socialist tradition are particularly relevant to answering the research question. This is because the debate that has taken place on welfare in the Church of England since the financial crash of 2008 and the squeeze on public expenditure that followed has closely paralleled these two strands of thinking. First, the Welfare Statist strand, that since the 1940s has seen the Welfare State as a key provider of welfare support to those in need of it, and thus contributing to the goal of achieving a Christian socialist vision of society gradually via parliamentary democracy, a more progressive taxation model, and publically funded, state-managed government welfare departments as part of the overall mix. Second, the English Pluralist Christendom strand that since the early-twentieth century has seen the state as a hindrance to the goal of achieving a Christian socialist society. Instead, it has emphasised a need to empower groups and individuals in civil society, including the Church, rather than state-managed government departments, with more responsibility for the delivery of welfare, and thus to restore something of the pre-Reformation, Christendom vision of the role of the Church in society.

The debate has often been between those who — essentially, but not uncritically — have been defenders of the Welfare State, and those who have taken a more
unequivocally critical view of it. These more critical writers have argued instead for a more communitarian and voluntarist approach to aspects of welfare provision, with an enhanced role for the Church of England in the delivery of welfare, whilst still retaining aspects of state welfare provision that the Church of England and voluntary sector are insufficiently resourced and/or equipped to provide.

A third, revolutionist strand, primarily held by some Anglican Socialists in the interwar period and a smaller number in the 1970s and 1980s (and even fewer since), has seen state provision of welfare as a ‘sticking plaster’, only partly covering up the wounds of a corrupt capitalist order — one that needs to be overthrown by force via a popular revolution waged by the oppressed classes and replaced by a new socialist political, economic and social order. That strand has been included in the analysis in chapter one for the purpose of historical completeness, and as a contrast to the other two strands, though few Anglican Socialist writers now advocate it.

The central aim of this chapter is to analyse these three strands of Anglican Socialism with reference to their historical and theoretical lineage, so that, with respect to two of them, their relevance to the contemporary debates around the provision of welfare and the approach to be taken on welfare by the Church of England, can be analysed. These strands shall therefore be a lens through which to address Research Goal One. The chapter will also locate John Milbank’s thinking on welfare and the Church within Anglican Socialism (RG 2). After some brief definitions of four key terms (1.2), the chapter will include a section on socialism and the state (1.3), followed by sections on the three Anglican Socialist strands (1.4–1.6), and a conclusion (1.7).
1.2 Definitions

There are four terms for which definitions are essential.

Socialism

For this thesis, socialism refers to a strand of political philosophy that emerged in the nineteenth century in opposition to perceived economic and social injustices caused by capitalism. In significant part, it attributes these to the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange by a relatively small number of capitalists, who are then able to wield considerable power over the working classes, who only have their labour power, skills and intelligence to sell for a living. From this perspective, capitalism has resulted in high levels of exploitation, inequality and other injustices that a socialist transformation of society, based *inter alia* on securing a much wider level of social ownership over the productive forces, and greater levels of working class representation in the political, economic, social, cultural and intellectual features of society, is intended to remedy.\(^4\)

Anglican Socialism

By this is meant the tradition within Anglicanism that emerged in the 1840s and 1850s principally around the thinking of F.D. Maurice and later developed by many others,\(^5\) that has sought to fuse secular strands of socialist philosophy with Christian theology and practice. Common to both has been an emphasis on advancing social justice by improving


the lot of the industrial and post-industrial working-classes, the poor and dispossessed, with an emphasis on expanding their political, economic, social, educational and cultural levels of access and reward — the intention being to reduce inequalities and class-defined barriers to human flourishing. Although Maurice was not an Anglo-Catholic, the Anglican Socialist tradition has primarily been Anglo-Catholic in its origins and development, though it has been and remains a strand of Anglicanism with wider influence within the Church of England.

**English Pluralism**

By this is meant the thinking of English Pluralist writers such as John Neville Figgis, who, as David Nicholls has accurately summarised, envisaged “a situation in which members of the state pursue their chosen ends in life, as individuals and associated in voluntary groups, with as little interference from coercive governmental authorities as is possible in the context of order and peace”, and “when the state does not itself pursue some national policy which purports to realise a common good.” Hence, for English Pluralists, the primary role of the state should be to “maintain order by settling disputes between individuals and groups.” This is not to be confused with an alternative use of the term pluralist within American political theory, which “defines democracy as a form

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of stable and institutionalised political competition in which organised interests strive to
control government through taking part in electoral contests and / or strive to influence
the policies a government adopts”.\textsuperscript{11} Nor is it to be confused with the use of the word to
mean that one religion cannot be the sole or exclusive source of all religious truth. Not all
English Pluralist writers have been Anglicans, e.g. Harold Laski and G.D.H. Cole, but
several have, and it is these that this study will focus on.

\textit{Welfare State}

By this is meant what the historian Asa Briggs has described as follows:

A ‘welfare state’ is a state in which organised power is deliberately used (through
politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at
least three directions — first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum
income irrespective of the market values of their work or their property; second,
by narrowing the extent of ‘social contingencies’ (for example, sickness, old age
and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and
third, by ensuring that all citizens, without distinction of status or class are offered
the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social
services.\textsuperscript{12}

It can be argued that the British Welfare State embodies these three principles in its aims.

1.3 \textbf{Socialism and the State}

Since the publication in 1821 of G.W.F. Hegel’s \textit{Outlines of the Philosophy of Right}, a
work that explores the complex interface between family, civil society, the administration
of justice and the modern state, and argues that freedom is enhanced rather than
diminished via the application of state enforced laws, a debate has raged about the extent

\textsuperscript{11} P. Hirst, \textit{The Pluralist Theory of the State} (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{12} A. Briggs, “The Welfare State in Historical Perspective”, \textit{Archives Europeennes de
Sociologie}, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1961, p. 228. Available at:
to which the modern state diminishes or augments freedom. And though by no means confined to socialist writers, the debate has often been conducted by them. For example, Karl Marx, in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, reached different conclusions to those of Hegel about the extent to which the modern state augments individuals’ freedom. For Marx, the modern state was the bureaucratic preserver of a status quo, that owing to the existence of private property — something he advocated should be abolished — resulted in the subjugation of an entire class, the proletariat, and hence a negation of their freedom. By contrast, Ferdinand Lassalle, a socialist who had been influenced by Marx’s works and, in 1863, had founded the General German Workers' Association, nevertheless saw the state very differently from Marx. For Lassalle, the modern state was not a class-based power super-structure there to preserve the interests of the dominant bourgeois class and thus the subjugation of the proletariat class — something Marx had argued would “wither away” once private property and the resultant exploitation had been abolished and a classless society had been achieved. Rather, for Lassalle, the state was a necessary arm in the administering of justice to individuals, essential for a socialist transformation of society — a position that Marx later criticised in his essay *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

And this difference of perspective on the modern state between Marx and Lassalle resembles others that have since occurred in the history of the Marxist tradition: between

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those who have advocated the need for a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state apparatus and its replacement as a precondition for establishing a socialist society, such as Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky; and those who have seen the modern state as a necessary instrument of administrative and political justice, capable of being reformed to play an essential part in the delivery of a socialist transformation of society via parliamentary democracy, such as Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti.

Within the history of Anglican Socialism, the role the modern state can play in advancing a Christian socialist agenda has also been a major theme. One strand of thought, which can loosely be called ‘Welfare Statist’ and which can be traced back to Hegel, sees a positive role for the modern, liberal capitalist state and the potential it affords via parliamentary democracy, for advancing a Christian socialist transformation of society. Two influential Anglican Socialist thinkers who held this view were William Temple and, in his later writings, R.H. Tawney. Their thinking, in their lifetime and since, has played a significant part in influencing the politics of the British Labour Party, and was important for establishing the Welfare State in the 1940s, although, as we shall see in chapter two, the liberal thinking of William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes was also important. The lineage of Temple’s and Tawney’s thinking on the modern state

19 For more on this, see D. Nicholls, Deity and Domination, pp. 180-8.
can, in part, be located in the Hegel-inspired English Idealist movement of the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries: writers such as T.H. Green, F.H. Bradley, and B. Bosanquet.21

Another strand of Anglican Socialism, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in direct opposition to English Idealist thinking, has contributed to the English Pluralist movement of the early to mid-twentieth century, and to its renaissance since the early 1970s. Writers such as John Neville Figgis, V.A. Demant, and Maurice B. Reckitt22 (the latter two having been considerably influenced by a revival in Christendom thinking following the publication in 1922 of a pivotal work called The Return of Christendom)23 were critical of the thinking underpinning the English Idealist perspective on the modern state. Their views were to influence two Anglican Socialists of a later generation: David Nicholls and John Milbank, both of whose writings have been sympathetic to them.24 The English Pluralist perspective also had antecedents in the English Romantic Movement of the early to mid-nineteenth century. For example,

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William Cobbett, in his book, *Rural Rides* (1830), was wary of what he perceived as an increasingly over-encroaching, industrialising (and dehumanising) capitalist economy and state polity on the English countryside and its rural way of life, with insufficient heed being paid to the voices at the grassroots.

A third strand of Anglican Socialism can loosely be called revolutionist, having been influenced by the writings of Marx and by some of his later followers. This strand has tended to be more revolutionary in its aspirations, seeing the modern state as an instrument of capitalist exploitation, and hence something to be overthrown by force in the interests of advancing the socialist cause. It can be located in thinkers such as Conrad Noel and Jack Putterill from within the Catholic Crusade, an organisation established in 1918 by Noel around the parish church of Thaxted in Essex — Noel disbanded the Catholic Crusade in 1936. The Catholic Crusade was partly influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution that had taken place in Russia in October 1917, as well as by its aftermath, including the state collectivisation of farms which, according to one analyst, Noel had favourably likened to the Catholic medieval estates. Like Marx, Noel was fully committed to common ownership of land and industrial resources:

> Members of the Church of England are socialists and would establish a commonwealth whose people should own the land and the industrial capital and administer them cooperatively for the good of all. Such public ownership they regard as urgent and as a necessary deduction from the teachings of Christ.

Noel was also influenced by the writings of Trotsky, who, like Marx, throughout his lifetime advocated a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist states by the use of force as the

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only way of achieving a transition to socialism. Consistent with this revolutionary
tinking, Noel stated that the Catholic Crusade stood for a “revolutionary attitude in
politics, and the establishment, if necessary by force, of a classless cooperative society on
communist lines.”

This strand of thinking also later influenced Anglican Socialists such as Kenneth
Leech, who, in 1974, founded the Jubilee Group — a loose networking of radical Anglo-
Catholic Socialists that met until around 2003, and had some thinkers in its ranks who
were influenced by Marxist ideas. Leech stated in 1989: “While Christianity and Marxism
are the most distorted traditions in the modern world, an alliance between prophetic
Christianity and progressive Marxism, offers the last humane hope for mankind.”

However, as shall be argued at 1.6, unlike Figgis and Temple, writers such as Noel and
Leech did not develop a theory of the state in their works, and as their revolutionist
perspective is also not one that features much in contemporary debates within Anglican
Socialism, it is a strand of the tradition which, for the purposes of this study, we can leave
behind at the conclusion of chapter one. For now, though, we turn our attention to the
Welfare Statist strand.

1.4 The Welfare Statist Strand

The term “welfare state” was popularised by William Temple in 1928 when, as Bishop of
Manchester, he undertook the Henry Scott Holland Memorial Lectures, subsequently

28 Cited by Leech, “Turbulent Priests”.
29 K. Leech, “The Radical Anglo-Catholic Socialist Vision”. A lecture given at the Centre
for Theology and Public Issues, University of Edinburgh, on 13 March 1989. Available
at:https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Radical_Anglo_Catholic_Social_Vision.h
tml?id=NwR0Zk5WME8C (accessed on 23 April 2016).
published as *Christianity and the State*, where he characterised the First World War as:

> a struggle between the idea of the state as essentially Power — Power over its own community and against other communities — and of the state as the organ of community, maintaining its solidarity by law designed to safeguard the interests of the community. The power-state might have yielded to sheer pressure of circumstance in course of time; but it is contrary to the psychology of the power-state to suffer conversion; it was likely to fight before it let a welfare-state take its place.  

Thus, for Temple, it was necessary for the Allied powers to have fought Germany and to have diminished its “power-state”. But this perspective, as the above quote suggests, was far from being non-statist, a theme that his later work of 1942, *Christianity and Social Order*, was to develop. Rather, Temple had a different vision of what the state could potentially achieve as an “organ of community”. He saw the need for it to be more than the British ‘minimalist’ state that he perceived as having been deficient in its ability to address some of the social problems that many of those who had fought in the First World War had since endured, not least the consequences of prolonged unemployment, poor educational opportunity for their children and, for some, poor housing. But, as we have seen, he was also critical of what he described as the German power-state that, in some respects, he saw as being a cause of the First World War.

Temple’s thinking in *Christianity and the State*, was, in part, derived from a theology of the state that he was developing at that time, and that his later work of 1941, *Citizen and Churchman*, was to articulate more fully. He had been influenced by the Christian socialist writings of F.D. Maurice and those in the Christian Social Union of

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31 This is the work that most fully reflects Temple’s thinking on welfare.
32 That is, the ‘Bismarckian’, authoritarian style state that predated the democratic reforms brought about under the Weimar Republic.
1889 to 1919, such as Henry Scott Holland and Charles Gore, who had argued for the need for a moral state, dovetailed with a national church as part of an organic nation. Temple joined the CSU whilst he was at Oxford and remained in it for several years. In 1908 he stated: “Socialism … is the economic realisation of the Christian Gospel … The alternative stands before us — Socialism or Heresy; we are involved in one or the other.”

Charles Gore, a leading member of the CSU, had stated in his preface to *Lux Mundi* (1889) that the principal role of the Church was to “throw herself into the sanctification of each new social order” — and that included secular states. W.J.H. Campion, in the same volume, declaring that, despite its limitations, “the State is sacred: it is ‘of God’”, argued that a Christian view of government via the state necessitated that it must realise “the common good”. Similarly, Temple, in *Citizen and Churchman*, described the state as:

… an organ of the community, indispensable to the continued existence of the community but entirely subordinate to it. Its end is the welfare of the community. And the community consists of persons. It is not an entity existing somehow in detachment from its members; it is essentially those persons united in social unity.

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Thus, for Temple, “the State exists for the citizens, not the citizens for the State”. But, crucially, for Temple, the state was also “a servant and instrument of God for the preservation of Justice and the promotion of human welfare”; as such “the State has a moral and spiritual function [my italics]. It is not possible to divide human interests into two categories — the material and the spiritual — and to assign the former to the State, the latter to the Church.” Therefore, for Temple, Christians, although embodying a higher loyalty to God than to any state, could nevertheless give to a state conditional approval if its purpose was to enhance the welfare of its citizens. We shall see in what follows that the “spiritual function” Temple ascribed to the state, as well as his view that it was a “servant and instrument of God”, are antithetical to the broad thrust of Christendom theology, which sees the Church, not the state, as the kingdom of God in embryo, and thus the place where spiritual functionality resides. The state, by contrast, is seen by exponents of Christendom theology such as David Nicholls and John Milbank as essentially secular and a product of the modernist challenge to Christendom that the Protestant Reformation represented. A key theme of this thesis is that this contrasting theology of the state held by Welfare Statist Anglican Socialists and English Pluralist Christendom Anglican Socialists, explains some of the differences in their perspectives on the provision of welfare.

Temple’s vision of a Welfare State, though rooted in the Anglican Socialist tradition, built on work that had already been undertaken to improve the lot of the

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41 Temple, Citizen and Churchman, p. 28.
42 Temple, Citizen and Churchman, p. 36.
43 Temple, Citizen and Churchman, p. 36.
44 Nicholls even claimed that any “attempt to sanctify the secular order, breaking down any distinction between sacred and secular, has totalitarian implications”. D. Nicholls, God and Government (London: Jubilee Pamphlet, 1991), p. 21.
disadvantaged by Asquith’s Liberal administrations from 1908 to 1916. Lloyd George, Asquith’s Chancellor of the Exchequer for 1908–1915, had established a more progressive income tax regime to fund old age pensions and provide some redistributive assistance to the unemployed and the wider pool of disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{45} Temple’s vision was more ambitious in scope and resourcing, however, and contributed to the thinking of William Beveridge and his report of 1942 that modelled the Welfare State project, which will be considered in 2.2. Temple was a member of the Labour Party in the years between 1918 and 1921,\textsuperscript{46} and a key socialist influence on him was the friendship and writings of Anglican Socialist R.H. Tawney, a fellow Labour Party member to whom he dedicated his book \textit{Christianity and the State}.\textsuperscript{47} However, in addition to these socialist influences he was also influenced by the philosophical writings of T.H. Green.\textsuperscript{48}

Stemming in part from Green’s works, the English Idealists had taken a paternalistic view of the role of the state as being a protector of the economic, social, political and cultural fabric of the nation. Thus, from this perspective, the state retained an important function in the development and maintenance via parliamentary democracy, of a system of rights and obligations that was conducive to the realisation of human self-actualization, whilst safeguarding personal liberty. This perspective stemmed from a belief, held by Green, that personal liberty, for it to be realised, was more than merely the absence of restraint; hence, more than a negative definition of freedom could accommodate: “The mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man [sic] to do as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] For more on this, see R. Jenkins, \textit{Asquith} (New York: Harper Collins, 1988).
\item[46] Kent, \textit{William Temple}, p. 25. In this work Kent also argues that Temple was very influenced by Tawney, see pp. 16-17.
\item[47] Temple, \textit{Christianity and the State}. See the dedication on an unnumbered page before page vii.
\end{footnotes}
he likes”, Green argued, “is in itself no contribution to true freedom.” Instead, Green argued for freedom “in the positive sense; in other words, the liberation of the powers of all men [sic] equally for contributions to the common good”. 49 Hence, for Green, freedom was “a positive desire or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying”. 50 Therefore, without the capacity to do something worth doing or enjoying, freedom, for Green, was little more than a theoretical abstraction. To take just one field of human endeavour, Green argued in support of the 1870 Education Act in the following terms:

Without a command of certain elementary arts and knowledge, the individual in modern society is as effectively crippled as by the loss of a limb or a broken constitution. He is not free to develop his faculties. With a view to securing such freedom among its members it is as certainly within the province of the state to prevent children from growing up in a kind of ignorance which practically excludes them from a free career in life, as it is within its province to require the sort of building and drainage necessary for public health. 51

And while Green set limits on state action, such as with respect to morality: “it is the business of the state, not indeed directly to promote moral goodness, for that from the very nature of moral goodness it cannot do, but to maintain the conditions without which a free exercise of the human faculties is impossible”, 52 he clearly saw a vital role for the state as an enabler of human freedom in a practical sense. His writings were to be influential on the thinking of Anglican Socialists such as Henry Scott Holland, as well as Temple. 53

51 Green, Collected Works, III, pp. 373-4.
52 Green, Collected Works, III, p. 374.
53 Henry Scott Holland had been a student of T.H. Green while at Balliol College, Oxford where he had come under his influence. See Colloms, Charles Kingsley, p. 362.
Temple was also influenced by other English Idealist writers such as Bernard Bosanquet and Thomas Arnold. But he was never an out-and-out English Idealist thinker, and his thinking on the state displays a level of scepticism about some of what he perceived as being their more idealistic views on the state, that the following quote alludes to: “Hegel himself had bewilderingly treated the national State as a kind of incarnation of the Absolute … His English disciples did not follow him in his virtual deification of the State, but they were not far behind.” 54 However, Temple was clear that for so long as the human condition remains fallen “So there must be the restraint of law, as long as men have any selfishness left in them. Law exists to preserve and extend real freedom.” 55 For Temple, then, parliamentary democracy afforded the right of elected representatives to enact laws, enforced by the state, which enhanced the total amount of freedom in society. As he put it:

But the law which restrains any occasional homicidal impulse that I may have, by threatening penalties sufficiently disagreeable to make the indulgence of it seem to be not good enough, also protects my purpose of good fellowship against being violated by that same impulse. In such a case the restraint of the law increases the true freedom of all concerned. 56

For Temple, therefore, in a parliamentary democracy, state enforced laws enhanced the sum of freedom in society. But, unlike English Pluralists (as described in 1.5) he did not see this as necessarily being at the expense of, or in contradiction to, vital components of civil society: “Now actual freedom is the freedom which men enjoy in these various social units … those intermediate groups — the family, the Church or congregation, the guild, the Trade Union, the school, the university, the Mutual Improvement Society.” 57

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54 Temple, *Christianity and the State*, pp. 81-82.
55 Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 68.
56 Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 8.
57 Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 70.
Indeed, he saw the state as a guardian of liberty that:

will foster all such groupings, giving them freedom to guide their own activities
provided that these fall within the general order of the communal life and do not
injure the freedom of other similar associations. Thus the State becomes the
Community of Communities — or rather the administrative organ of the
Community — and there is much to be said for the contention that its
representative institutions should be so designed as to represent the various
groupings of men [sic] rather than (or as well as) individuals.\(^{58}\)

However, for Temple, unlike for English Pluralist writers, government departments
responsible for Education, Health, Social Security and so forth, could legitimately operate
within, and be an integral part of, this vision. This was particularly so when seeking to
tackle the social ills of Squalor, Ignorance, Want, Idleness and Disease, as William
Beveridge had defined them, which will be considered in 2.2. His report of 1942 was to
inspire and in large part define the reality of the Welfare State in the years that followed.
But Temple was at pains to say that this perspective on the state, and the role of
government departments in the provision of welfare, was not a recipe for unfettered
collectivisation or a negation of individual liberty:

But modern democracy, though more in its continental than in its British forms, …
has been impatient of these intermediate groupings, and has moved towards
‘individualism’ or ‘collectivism’, as if there were no third alternative. But it seems
scarcely too much to say that neither individualism nor collectivism is compatible
with a truly Christian understanding of man or of life.\(^{59}\)

Thus, it can be argued that Temple was less ‘state-collectivist’ than writers in the English
Idealist tradition, but more ‘pro-statist’ than those in the English Pluralist tradition. He
thought that the Welfare State was capable of enabling major social improvements in the
field of housing, education, fairness in income, advances in industrial democracy, leisure,

\(^{58}\) Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, pp. 70-71.
\(^{59}\) Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, p. 72.
and freedom of worship. He set out a programme for action along these lines in the Appendix to *Christianity and Social Order* (see Appendix One), which was influential in shaping political policy in the years that followed, such as the slum clearance initiatives in Britain in the post-war years. But he also supported local councils as a way of spreading democratic representation and constraining any tendency towards over-centralisation of power in parliament, stating: “But there is much to be said for the establishment of subordinate functional Councils with powers of action in their several provinces subject to Parliamentary veto”.  

Temple cannot, therefore, be fairly characterised as an out-and-out statist collectivist; but neither was he as hostile to the modern state, and particularly the role of government in the provision of welfare, as John Neville Figgis and his later followers, including Milbank, were. This was partly owing to the theology of the state that Temple had developed, which, as we have seen, ascribed a “spiritual function” to the state and saw it as being a “servant and instrument of God”. However, a further aspect of Temple’s thinking as set out in *Christianity and Social Order*, often referred to as middle axioms, offers one approach for addressing the role the Church can play in the political affairs of the state, which we now consider.

**1.4.1 Temple’s thinking on Middle Axioms**

In *Christianity and Social Order*, Temple sets out how the Church should “interfere” in society. He talks about three ways: (1) Church members fulfilling their “moral responsibilities” within the social order; (2) Church members exercising their civil rights within the social order; and lastly, the one that relates to middle axioms: (3) the Church

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60 Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 71.
supplying “a systematic statement of [social] principles” to aid Church members in doing (1) and (2).\footnote{Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, p. 43.} In this way, Temple steers a clear path so that the Church of England is not seen as formulating political policy or allying itself with one particular political party or stance, although individual Christians may. In this regard, he had been influenced by the thinking of J.H. Oldham, who, in the preparatory material for the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State held in 1937, described middle axioms as “attempts to define the directions in which, in a particular state of society, Christian faith must express itself.”\footnote{Cited in D.P. McCann, “A Second Look at Middle Axioms”, \textit{The Annual Society for Christian Ethics}, Vol.1, 1981, p. 76. See also J.H. Oldham, \textit{The Church and its Function in Society} (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937).} It is a view Temple embraced:

Religion may rightly censure the use of artistic talents for making money out of men’s baser tastes, but it cannot lay down laws about perspective or the use of a paint-brush. It may insist that scientific enquiry be prompted by a pure love of truth and not distorted (as in Nazi Germany) by political considerations. It may declare the proper relation of the economic to other activities of men, but it cannot claim to know what will be the purely economic effect of particular proposals. It is, however, entitled to say that some economic gains ought not to be sought because of the injuries involved to interests higher than economic.\footnote{Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, p. 32.}

For Temple, then, “the Church is concerned with principles and not with policy”, \footnote{Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, p. 43.} and “the Christian citizen applies them; and to do this he [sic] utilizes the machinery of the State.”\footnote{Temple, \textit{Citizen & Churchman}, p. 83.} He therefore saw a positive role for the Church in influencing the political direction of the state when moral principles had relevance, and included some objectives in the Appendix to \textit{Christianity and Social Order} that some commentators have since interpreted as middle axioms. But he circumscribed the extent and type of such interventions because technical complexities/expertise (economic, financial, scientific,
aesthetic, administrative, etc.) went beyond the Church’s capacity, stating: “A policy always depends on technical decisions … about these a Christian as such has no more reliable judgement than an atheist.”

Temple’s thinking on middle axioms, though not universally accepted, has held sway in Anglican theological circles ever since (see Appendix One). However, this is a view which is antithetical to the vision held by many Anglican Socialists writing in the English Pluralist Christendom strand, who see it as putting unacceptable limits on the role of the Church in political affairs. Hence, we need to consider their approach as part of their wider theo-political perspective on the Church and state.

1.5 The English Pluralist Christendom Strand

Anglican Socialists who have been influenced by, and have contributed to, the English Pluralist Christendom strand offer a critique of unlimited power vested both in an individual or a political state and regardless of whether that power has been vested via a popular democratic mandate at an election. For these writers, such power, exercised by way of a hierarchy of authority, is seen as a threat, both to the existence of individual freedom and the autonomous associations that individuals freely form when freedom of association exists. One of these writers is John Neville Figgis, who in his work of 1913 Churches in the Modern State develops most fully his thinking on the state. This is his most relevant work for our purposes. It is fervently English Pluralist in its Anglican Socialist perspective, and although its primary focus is on the relationship between Church and state, its wider relevance as a work in the history of political thought has

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66 Temple, Christianity and Social Order, p. 40.
rightly not gone unnoticed. For, in this work, he crystallises in his argumentation so much that has since become central to the English Pluralist frame of reference, particularly on the strengths and weakness of representative, parliamentary democracy, both as a concept and an actuality. The following summary of its salient arguments is offered as a way of illuminating the contribution Figgis has made to it.

1.5.1 John Neville Figgis’s thinking on the Modern State

Figgis was highly sceptical of any political dispensation that vested political sovereignty in one individual, such as in the form of an absolutist monarchy, and also of a constitutional monarchical or republican dispensation that incorporates representative, parliamentary government as part of a centralised, statist system of rule. Thus, Figgis argues in *Churches in the Modern State*: “What we actually see in the world is not on the one hand the State, and on the other a mass of unrelated individuals; but a vast complex of gathered unions, in which alone we find individuals, families, clubs, trade unions, colleges, professions, and so forth”.67 And it is in these associations that individual freedom is attained and retained. In an earlier work published in 1907, Figgis similarly argues:

> What is needed nowadays is that against an abstract and unreal theory of the state omnipotence on the one hand, and an atomistic and artificial view of individual independence on the other, the facts of the world with its innumerable bonds of associations and the naturalness of social authority should be recognised and become the basis of our laws, as it is of our life.68

Hence, for Figgis, the purpose of a state was to enable people to form and engage in voluntary associations, mediating as necessary between them, and not to seek to make

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67 Figgis, *Churches*, p. 70.
claims to representing the ‘public interest’ or ‘general will’ or ‘common good’. Indeed, for Figgis, the state existed “to control and limit within the bounds of justice, the activities of all minor associations whatsoever.”\textsuperscript{69} This is a view that Nicholls, an expert on Figgis, was later to describe in the following terms: “What most of the English pluralists rejected was the idea that the state should interfere with groups in order to protect the interests of members, and impose upon the group the kind of polity which it thought best.”\textsuperscript{70}

And, for Figgis, the Reformation and the emergence of the modern state had done just that, concluding:

nor is there any of that system of checks and balances which are the result of medieval life, and preserve freedom at the expense of efficiency — no it is the omnicompetent, universal, all absorbing modern State, the mortal God, the great Leviathan of the later teachers … not power divided, but power concentrated and united [that had come into being].\textsuperscript{71}

And not only was it for Figgis, but later also for V.A. Demant, M.B. Reckitt and other early-twentieth century English Pluralist Christendom Anglican Socialists, that this support for a view that the role of the state should be little other than a mediator between groups, was underpinned by a favourable historical perspective they shared on how social life had existed in the Middle Ages. Figgis published \textit{Churches in the Modern State} in 1913 and died in 1919, three years before the publication of a book by a group of churchmen, including M.B. Reckitt, P.E.T. Widdrington, A.J. Carlyle, A.J. Penty and N. Carpenter, that was to have a major impact on Anglican Socialists writing in the English Pluralist Christendom strand. That book was called \textit{The Return of Christendom}, and in

\textsuperscript{69} Figgis, \textit{Churches}, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{70} Nicholls, \textit{The Pluralist State}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{71} Nicholls, \textit{The Pluralist State}, p. 28. (The quote from Figgis is cited as being from Lecture III on Marsilius; Mirfield MSS, notebook 3).
some respects Figgis’s writings can be seen as a precursor to the views expressed in it. A brief summary of its core thesis as it relates to the modern state follows.

1.5.2 The ‘Return of Christendom’ vision

In one of the chapters, Fr Paul Bull states: “The disease of our age is disintegration of human life due to organisation apart from God”, and: “The Church to-day has lost the millions because she has failed to sanctify politics and economics through a pietistic and individualistic interpretation of the Gospel.” 72 Essentially, the Christendomists held to a view that the pre-Reformation, pre-capitalist, Catholic medieval society, partly characterised by its merchant and craft guilds, was truer to the creative and associational instincts and needs of human beings, than, as Reckitt argues in another chapter “the subjection of the community to capitalist Industrialism”, 73 which he saw as being antithetical to the “mediaeval standards of Vocation and Fraternity”. 74 The division of labour, which factory production via the Industrial Revolution had brought about, was thus seen by these writers as alienating to the workers, and a contributor to the “moral hideousness of capitalism”, 75 as Reckitt described it. But, crucially, the Christendomists were also highly critical of the way the Church, as they perceived things, had, via the Protestant Reformation, ceded too much ground to the state in bringing this about, with Reckitt bemoaning the fact that the Church “has not yet revealed herself as the enemy of plutocracy.” 76 Hence, a key goal of the Christendomists was for the Church to claw back

74 Widdrington, The Return, p. 2.
75 Widdrington, The Return, p. 2.
76 Widdrington, The Return, p. 2.
power and influence from the modern state in the quest for greater perceived relevance in society, as, in the words of Fr Bull: “the Kingdom of God is that principle which alone can weave up the life of man [sic] into a perfect synthesis.” He later summed up this aspect of the Christendom perspective as follows:

That a false presentation of Christianity has disintegrated Christendom, and left the vast forces which largely control the life of man [sic] unconsecrated to the service of God. The evil tradition, which is not yet abandoned, that Christianity has nothing to do with politics and economics has banished God from 95 per cent. of the life of man [sic]. For politics and economics regulate homes, housing, schools, education, wages, sanitation, industry, and commerce, with all the relationships these involve. If this 95 per cent. of the life of the people is dissociated from God and religion, what wonder it is if they feel that God doesn’t count in the battle of life.

The contrast between this view and the one held by Temple, for example, that sought to establish limits for Church engagement in the modern state, is thus apparent, and, as we shall see in this thesis, is crucial for grasping an understanding of the difference in perspective on state provided welfare held by Welfare Statist and English Pluralist Christendom Anglican Socialists.

Figgis, and later Anglican Socialists writing in the English Pluralist Christendom strand, interpreted the Church of England as one of the associations its congregations voluntarily choose to enter, and much of Churches in the Modern State is a trenchant critique of the way he saw the rise of state sovereignty as a threat to religious liberty and the autonomy of religious associations. Figgis did not, however, envisage the abolition of a public state as either viable or desirable despite the threat it posed to liberty as he saw things. But he envisaged its main function as being to make laws that would strengthen the role and popular sovereignty of the voluntary associations individuals freely entered

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into such as the Church — a view that was also shared by V.A. Demant, an admirer of Figgis, whose thinking we now consider.

1.5.3 The Christendom thinking of V.A. Demant

V.A. Demant, an Anglican Socialist writing in the English Pluralist Christendom strand, delivered his influential Henry Scott Holland Lectures in 1949, later published as *Religion and the Decline of Capitalism* in 1952. Unlike Figgis, Demant had knowledge of how an over-collectivist state could result in a totalitarian outcome of the kind witnessed in Russia and Germany under the leadership of Stalin and Hitler. For Demant, this reinforced the dangers of the Church ceding too much power to the modern state, to a point when:

… the omnicompetent state rides in as the moral and cultural preceptor and takes the place of the Church. That is what rightly worries Professor Hayek who wrote, in *The Road to Serfdom*: ‘The state ceases to be a piece of utilitarian machinery intended to help individuals in the fullest development of their individual personality and becomes a “moral” institution — where “moral” is not used in contrast to “immoral” but describes an institution which imposes on its members its views on all moral questions.’

Indeed, for Demant: “That is one reason why the state takes on a sacred character”. And, for him, the antidote to the threat of omnicompetent statist collectivism was, in significant part, a return to the pre-Reformation, Christendom vision, to bring about a decline of the secular, capitalist modern state, and reverse the reasons for its rise. Like Tawney, who, in his Henry Scott Holland lectures of 1922, later published as *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

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Capitalism (1926), had attributed the rise of capitalism in part to the Protestant Reformation, so also had Demant. For Tawney, Christian history had led him to conclude that the post-Reformation “abdicaton by the Christian Churches of one whole department of life, that of social and political conduct” was what in significant part had led to the emergence of an “acquisitive society”. In agreement with this thinking, Demant, in his lectures, argued:

the success of Puritanism meant the triumph of the new commercial morality which held good among monied men; capitalists had established their right to secure a return for their money, and there was no authority to insist upon any correlative duty when they organised industrial undertakings and obtained control over the means of production.

What is more, for Demant: “Capitalism was a part of the whole movement known as liberalism … It was this liberalism which dispensed with ‘the sacred’ as a real element in existence and gave the ‘secular’ all the religious valuations previously accorded to the divine realm.” The result was that “Associative impulses were weakened, to be replaced by collective cement of cash or state.” This had led to a situation in which, for Demant: “The supervening bonds of contract only, which tended to make men [sic] related only as economic atoms, powerfully burdened the ministerial work of the Church.” For some churchmen this had led to a view that, in the words of Scott Holland: “The State must take up her neighbourly responsibility” and, for Temple, as has been argued, to thus become a Welfare State. For others: “The faith that ‘the State principle’ would restore the

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84 Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 19.
85 Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 37.
87 Cited in Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 55.
social bonds which a hypertrophied market principle had weakened … was not so straightforward”.

The reason Demant attributes to this is:

the principle of the omnicompetent state and the myth of the self-sufficient individual are both twins of the same parentage, that of naturalist humanism which distils from human life in its biological, community and spiritual setting, the two abstractions of individual and state which reason can encompass.

This view is shared by John Milbank. For Milbank, writing as an Anglo-Catholic in the English Pluralist Christendom strand of the tradition, naturalist humanism (that is, scientific method combined with social and ethical values) embodies the separation of nature from grace that occurred in late medieval theological tradition. This, he believes, enabled the rise of the modern, Western secular state, and capitalism via the Protestant Reformation, with a resultant diminished role for the Church in society, and, specifically, in politics. Thus, only by way of a recovery of patristic and Thomist ontological thinking that is devoid of any separation of nature from grace, can a truly authentic and viable political theology emerge that is post-liberal and Catholic. This theme will be further

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88 Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 55.
89 Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 57. For more on Milbank’s thinking on this, see D.M. Bell, “Post-liberalism and Radical Orthodoxy”, in C. Hovey & E. Phillips (eds), The Cambridge Companion to Political Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 110-132.
90 Thus establishing a dualism that had not existed previously in Christian theology. For Milbank, it was this dualism that in large part spawned the de-politicisation of the Christian Church in early modern Europe, marginalising its presence and influence in the body politic to a point where secular politics came to increasingly prevail over what had been a superior Catholically Christocentric intellectual and cultural epoch. Thus, Milbank sees this as “the turning point in the destiny of the West.” See J. Milbank, The Word Made Strange (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 44. Indeed, for Milbank, this new cultural reality (the autonomy of the secular) increasingly came to consider any recourse to transcendence (the supernatural) in the political sphere, as an unwelcome intrusion in the state’s political affairs. For Milbank, moreover, the ideal would be to bring about a dissolution of this act of dualistic “ontological violence” via proclaiming the post-secular, thus enabling the Christian Church to regain its rightful place in a new Christendom, mediating grace and embodying the “kingdom of God in embryo”, though he is, to a degree, pragmatic about how this could be achieved.
developed in Part Two. However, for Demant (and later for Milbank) the outcome of the rise of naturalist humanism was, in part, a “state [that] can never be an object of emotional attachment which could replace a man’s roots in home, property, neighbourhood and craft association”.\(^{91}\) Nor could the omnicompetent, secular, modern state be permitted to ride in, “as the moral and cultural preceptor that takes the place of the Church”.\(^{92}\)

It is thinking like this which made Demant so wary of the rise of the Welfare State in the 1940s, as a possible solution to the immorality of capitalism and its injustices, stating: “that when the state principle is invoked as a remedy for the sickness of a society over-weighted by market and contract relationships, then the real disorder is more effectively concealed”.\(^{93}\) By the “real disorder”, Demant meant what he saw as being the marginalisation of the Church in relation to the modern, secular state in post-Reformation, liberal capitalist society, and the absence of “a common allegiance to the religious and moral axioms of Christendom”.\(^{94}\) This is a view that is central to Milbank’s perspective on the liberal-capitalist state, welfare and the Church, and it is why it can be located in the English Pluralist Christendom strand of the tradition, which he readily acknowledges:

Indeed, there has always been a debate within Anglicanism between the statist Temple-tradition on the one hand, and the “Christendom” perspective of John Neville Figgis through to V.A. Demant and T.S. Eliot — deriving variously from the Oxford Movement, Radical Tory evangelicalism, non-statist Christian socialism and Catholic distributionism — on the other.

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\(^{91}\) Demant, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 95.


\(^{94}\) Demant, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 98.
And he goes on to say: “Rowan Williams, the Radical Orthodoxy group (to which I belong) and increasingly many of the current Anglican episcopal bench, represent the latter ‘Christendom’ legacy.”95

Milbank’s Christendom thinking will be further considered in chapter two. Before, then, however, we need to briefly consider the revolutionist strand.

1.6 The Revolutionist Strand

Anglican Socialists from within the revolutionist strand have tended to be influenced by the writings of Leon Trotsky. Trotsky believed that capitalism, in its various nation-state settings, had to be overthrown by way of force in the form of a proletarian-led revolution. Lenin, in 1917, described this as necessary for establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat”.96 A period of “democratic centralism”, as had been defined by Lenin in 1902,97 would then be necessary to enable a bourgeois state to be transformed as part of the move to a society formed around workers’ councils. These workers’ councils would then become the cornerstone of a socialist society, where common ownership of the land and industrial resources would exist, enabling levels of direct democracy to flourish that would be far superior to the parliamentary representative models that existed in Western, liberal capitalist democracies. And while it was appropriate in the period leading up to the proletarian revolutions for workers’ vanguard parties to put forward transitional demands, as a means of influencing bourgeois parties to implement benefits that would stimulate

96 V.I. Lenin, The State and Revolution (1917).
the class consciousness of workers (such as state welfare programmes), for Trotsky, and for his later followers, these were never seen as anything other than temporary measures, to be overthrown when the time was ripe as part of the workers’ revolution and the transition to socialism.98

This form of Trotskyist revolutionary socialist perspective is thus in stark contrast to the Welfare Statist approach advocated by Temple whereby, as we have seen, the state gradually becomes more of a Welfare State than a power-state via parliamentary legislative sovereignty and the social programmes it affords on education, health, social security, etc., on behalf of the population that have elected representatives to parliament to bring this about. It is also different to the English Pluralist Christendom perspective advocated by Figgis, et al, which has sought for the state’s role in society to be tailored to enabling people to form and engage in voluntary associations — one being a revitalised church — with the state merely mediating as necessary between these groups. And, of course, neither the Welfare Statist nor English Pluralist Christendom perspectives advocate revolution by force, or anything resembling “democratic centralism” via establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the complete removal of the capitalist state apparatus as being necessary for a transition to socialism.

There are references to Trotsky in the writings of revolutionist Anglican Socialists such as Kenneth Leech: for example: “I write as a revolutionary socialist who has learnt much from Marxist analysis, particularly in its Trotskyist form”.99 One study of

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International Trotskyism also argues that Conrad Noel had lent support to the *British Provisional Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky*, and had signed a letter defending Trotsky’s right to asylum and calling for an international inquiry into the Moscow Trials being conducted by Stalin between 1936 and 1938. However, unlike Figgis and Temple, neither Leech nor Noel’s writings contain *a developed theory of the state*, or, for that matter, unlike Trotsky’s, *a developed theory of the state and revolution*.

What is more, though undoubtedly committed revolutionary socialists, it cannot be assumed that either writer *wholly* endorsed the perspective on the state and revolution developed by Trotsky, as their writings do not provide confirmation of such an out-and-out endorsement. Also of relevance is that whilst in the context of the post-2008 financial crash, discussions and analysis within Anglican Socialism concerning welfare provision in England and the Church of England’s role in its provision have been vibrant and influential on the shaping of events, it has been noticeable that whereas defenders of the Welfare Statist model such as Stephen Shakespeare, and of the English Pluralist Christendom alternative such as Milbank, have been vocal and forthright in their views, any remaining defenders of the revolutionist strand have been noticeably absent from these debates. With the death of Kenneth Leech in September 2015, it may be that the last significant standard-bearer of that strand of Anglican Socialism has left the stage, though

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102 J. Milbank, “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”.
there remains in existence a small Society of Sacramental Socialists as an offshoot of the Jubilee Group. Therefore, that strand will not feature any further in the analysis that follows.

1.7 Conclusions

It has been argued that there are three distinct strands of Anglican Socialist thinking on the modern state that have shaped their advocates’ views on the role it should perform in the transition to a Christian socialist society. They have also shaped their views on the role the Church might play in that process, not least with respect to its interface with the state’s welfare arm.

Moreover, two of these strands remain relevant for locating and understanding the debate that has taken place in the Church of England since the financial crash of 2008, concerning welfare provision and the role the Church of England should perform in its delivery. Should its approach be one characterised primarily as shaped around a defence of the Welfare State and consistent with the thinking of Temple as, by and large, it had been up to 2010, or should it be one characterised by a move towards a more communitarian, voluntarist, Christendom model of delivery, with the Church of England playing a greater role in the provision of welfare and a smaller Welfare State as argued by Milbank? To answer that question some further historical and theoretical analysis of the period from 1945 to 2010 is necessary in chapter two (hence before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project which will be considered in Part Three), with respect to the setting-up of the Welfare State, and to the rise and fall of the post-war Welfare State consensus.
CHAPTER TWO

ANGLICAN SOCIALISM AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BRITISH WELFARE STATE CONSENSUS

2.1 Introduction

To locate within the Anglican Socialist tradition the contribution John Milbank has made to debates concerning welfare provision in England since 2008, both within the Labour Party and the Church of England (RG 2), it is necessary to provide a brief historical analysis of the post-war welfare-statist Keynesian consensus that lasted until circa 1976 (RG 1) (2.2). The writings of Anglican Socialist R.H. Tawney from within the Welfare Statist strand will also be analysed, including the influence he had on shaping that consensus (2.3). The challenge to that consensus, via the rise and consolidation of neoliberalism in the period since, will then be examined (RG 1) (2.4–2.5). This is necessary for contextualising and analysing the Church of England’s approach to welfare provision since 1945, which will be considered in Part Two and Part Three.

The writings of David Nicholls, an Anglo-Catholic author in the English Pluralist Christendom strand, will also be analysed (2.6). It will be argued that his works on the Church, the modern state and welfare have been influential within Anglican Socialism — including on the thinking of Milbank — and that a familiarity with his perspective is thus helpful for understanding contemporary debates within the Church of England on welfare, and for historically locating and understanding Milbank’s contribution to them. The chapter ends with conclusions (2.7).
2.2 The Welfare State Consensus: 1945‒1976

In his first speech as Prime Minister to the House of Commons,\(^{103}\) Winston Churchill called for “blood, toil, tears and sweat” as necessary to defeat the Nazi threat. Total war required nothing less, as Britain’s contribution to winning the Second World War owed as much to the efforts of the whole population as to the military. Total war also required a level of state-directed economic and social activity of a kind previously unseen, including state-directed labour deployments on a wide scale. And these events had for John Maynard Keynes (at the time working for the British Treasury) reinforced a belief that state economic stimulus and planning could achieve real economic, political and social benefits.\(^{104}\)

To get a flavour of the mood of the times: *The Times* editorial on 1st July 1940, stated:

> If we speak of democracy we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live. If we speak of freedom we do not mean a rugged individualism which excludes social organisation and economic planning. If we speak of equality we do not mean a political equality nullified by social and economic privilege. If we speak of economic reconstruction we think less of maximum production (though this job too will be required) than of equitable distribution … The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege.\(^{105}\)

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There is a strong echo in this quote of William Beveridge’s view that a people’s war demanded a people’s peace, and to avoid what had happened after the First World War, when those returning from battle had frequently to endure prolonged periods of unemployment, inadequate healthcare provision, housing and educational opportunity for their children. In his report of 1942, Social Insurance and Allied Services, a work influenced by the thinking of Temple, Beveridge — though an agnostic in faith matters and a Liberal ‘collectivist’ not a socialist politically — identified five giant evils in society requiring remedy via state legislation and, in significant part, ongoing state welfare provision: Squalor, Ignorance, Want, Idleness and Disease. His solution was a Social Security Scheme that he described as follows (for more on Beveridge’s report see Appendix Two: 1):

The principle of the Social Security Scheme is to ensure for everyone income up to subsistence level, in return for compulsory contributions, expecting him [sic] to make voluntary provision to ensure income that he [sic] desired beyond this. One consequence of this principle is that no means test of any kind can be applied to the benefits of the Scheme. Another is that the Scheme does not guarantee a standard of life beyond subsistence level.

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106 As Beveridge stated in 1942, public interest in what happened after the war: “represents simply a refusal to take victory in war as an end in itself; it must be read as a determination to understand and to approve the end beyond victory for which sacrifices are being required.” W.H. Beveridge, The Pillars of Security (1942), pp. 107-8. Cited by Fraser, The Evolution, pp. 247-248.


109 W.H. Beveridge, Papers by W.H. Beveridge to Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, 11 December 1941. Cited by Fraser, The Evolution, pp. 358-359.
Hence, Beveridge’s Social Security Scheme offered a possible solution to the problem of want; but he was clear that the other four giants also needed slaying, as part of a comprehensive set of state welfare reforms. Thus, for Beveridge, as historian Derek Fraser aptly puts it: “true freedom lay in freedom from want, from disease, from ignorance, from squalor and from idleness.”\textsuperscript{110} For Beveridge, then, as it had been for T.H. Green and, later, for Temple, true freedom was not an abstract notion but a tangible, measurable outcome for citizens delivered, in significant part, by way of state intervention and, specifically, after 1944/5, by way of state welfare provision. All that was needed was a government that shared his vision and had the political mandate and will to bring it about. The Attlee Government broadly fitted that bill, though Beveridge was to disagree strongly with Attlee on the extent to which his government removed the role of the friendly societies in the post-war provision of welfare.\textsuperscript{111} This is an aspect of the implementation of his report of 1942 which will be further examined at 4.4.1.1 when considering his report of 1948, \textit{Voluntary Action}, and at 5.5.5 when considering the Church of England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project.

\textbf{2.2.1 The Attlee administration (1945–1951) and the creation of the British Welfare State}

The British Welfare State has been described as having twin pillars: the Social Security System and the National Health Service. Under the Attlee administration, via the passage of several major pieces of legislation (see Appendix Two: 2), the Social Security System

\textsuperscript{110} Fraser, \textit{The Evolution}, p. 255.

\textsuperscript{111} He had put in his 1942 report that the friendly societies should be allowed to continue to administer state provided sickness benefits under the new arrangements; something that Attlee saw as impractical and rejected. For more on this see J. Harris, “Voluntarism, the state and public-private partnerships in Beveridge’s social thought”, in M. Oppenheimer & N. Deakin (eds), \textit{Beveridge and Voluntary Action in Britain and the Wider British world} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 10.
was substantially reformed and, in 1948, the National Health Service was established. Moreover, with respect to Beveridge’s goal of achieving and maintaining full employment, high levels of unemployment having been the scourge after the First World War, Attlee’s administration tackled this head on, by adopting an economic policy that was heavily state controlled and directed. Ports, canals, railways, airways, coal, gas and electricity, as well as the Bank of England, were taken under state control. Keynesian management of the economy was the economic tool deployed, with a combination of increases in taxation, especially for the more well-off, and use of the peace dividend derived from reductions in defence expenditure from five billion pounds in 1945 to less than one billion in 1950,112 to fund the new welfare services. In the two decades following the end of the war, unemployment rarely rose above 2 per cent113 and thus Beveridge’s target of less than 3 per cent as constituting full employment was achieved. Overall, this response by the Attlee administration to slaying the five giants was seen by many as broadly commensurate with the scale of the task, and was also seen as impressive in terms of its delivery of the goals that inspired it. Thus, it came to significantly define the political landscape in the decades that followed up to 1976; a period of government that has since been described as one of “welfare consensus”.114

2.2.2 The period of Welfare State consensus: 1951–1976

One historian describes this period as one when: “The support for the welfare state was

113 Weeks, “1945 and 2015: They really don’t match”.
114 See Fraser, The Evolution, p. 287.
part of a broader ‘social democratic’ policy consensus, which also included the adoption of Keynesian economics, a commitment to full employment and a high level of government intervention, expenditure and planning”. In support of this, Fraser cites Conservative’s Chancellor Rab Butler as saying, in response to an article in the Economist in 1954 that had drawn similarities between his approach and that of his predecessor, Labour’s Hugh Gaitskell: “Both of us, it is true, spoke the language of Keynesianism but spoke it with different accents and a differing emphasis”, leading to the coining of the term ‘Butskellism’ that described this consensual approach. However, the Labour Governments during this period, whilst adopting a Keynesian approach to economic policy with more economic planning and state intervention than had existed in the pre-war economy, saw the Welfare State more as a way of advancing a social democratic agenda. And, in this regard, as shall be argued below, they were influenced in part by the writings of Tawney, and the need, as he argued, for greater equality in society — this being a key democratic socialist aim for him and his followers.

From this perspective, the British National Health Service was one example of how this could be achieved. Universal, cradle-to-grave in its coverage, free at the point of delivery, and classless in its access, it embodied much that those from within the Welfare Statist strand of the Anglican Socialist tradition such as Temple and Tawney, had dreamed of. For here was a state-funded and state-run institution derived from a popular

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115 See Fraser, The Evolution, p. 287. There was a Conservative administration from 1951 to 1964 and from 1970 to 1974. Labour administrations existed in the remaining periods from 1964 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1979.

mandate and from which tangible benefits to health care were being realised on a scale previously unknown to the industrial working class (and to many in the middle class, too). This had led to a point where it was electorally (and hence politically) non-viable for any government not to be seen to be in support of it. However, by the 1970s serious tensions over the funding of the Welfare State were to arise, not least owing to a significant deterioration in the British economy. In the words of Richard Crossman, writing in December 1970, there was “a cracking sound in the political atmosphere, the sound of the consensus breaking up.”

2.2.3 The Callaghan administration’s response to the oil crisis in the mid-1970s

In the early 1970s the British economy had entered a period of economic downturn. With the quadrupling of oil prices in the mid-1970s, leading to a major dip in economic growth, the Callaghan Labour Government made substantial cuts to public expenditure in return for an IMF loan. Callaghan went on to tell Labour Party members in a speech in Blackpool delivered in 1976: “we used to think you could spend your way out of a recession … I tell you in all candor that option no longer exists.” Thus, Keynesian

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118 Thus, ‘One-Nation’ Tories such as Harold Macmillan, saw the National Health Service and the wider Welfare State as a necessary part of the economic, social and political landscape, not least because it coexisted with a period of economic and social improvement famously described by Macmillan in July 1957, as a time when “most of our people have never had it so good.” See H. Macmillan, speaking at a Tory Party rally in Bedford in July 1957. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/20/newsid_3728000/3728225.stm (accessed on 25 August 2008).


economics was no longer *de rigueur* in government circles, and the scene was set for a
sea change in government policy, not least with respect to the Welfare State, with the
election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister on 4th May 1979. However, before we
consider that period of history, it is necessary to briefly examine the thinking of a key
Anglican Socialist whose influence on the events we have been considering was
significant, and was to remain so in the period since, as a perspective on the Welfare
State.

2.3 **R.H. Tawney as an Anglican Socialist writing in the Welfare Statist Strand**

R.H. Tawney’s influence on post-war Labour Party thinking and practice was significant
as evidenced, for example, by a remark by Hugh Gaitskell: “Looking back quite
objectively, I think he was the best man I have ever known.”121 Like Temple, he went on
to become a major figure in the Welfare Statist strand of the Anglican Socialist tradition.
Though essentially an economic and social historian of considerable reputation, he
published two books on socialist theory in the inter-war years: *The Acquisitive Society*
(1921) and *Equality* (1931) that for many in the Anglican Socialist tradition and the
Labour Party, then and since, have been seen as foundational for a defence of the Welfare
State and for democratic socialism.

For Tawney, equality of opportunity and some degree of equality of economic
outcome were not a challenge to personal freedom but, instead, were essential for it, and
for a democratic socialist society to exist. In defending the Welfare State in his epilogue

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121 H. Gaitskell, “Address at a Memorial Service for R.H. Tawney at St. Martin-in-the-
fields, on Thursday, 8 February 1962.” Cited in David Reisman, *State and Welfare:*
to *Equality*, written in the 1952 edition, he stated: “Those who hold that the resulting gains have been purchased by the sacrifice of liberty are under an obligation to state precisely the liberties held to have been injured or destroyed. Social policy has been specially concerned with health, education and security.”\(^{122}\) In defence of this position, he goes on to list improvements in the infant mortality rate, the height and weight of school-children, the disappearance of ailments previously afflicting them, improvements to educational opportunities and the virtual elimination of unemployment. He then states:

> It is not suggested that all these actions are due to the action of the State; but in most of them public intervention has played some part, and in several a decisive one. It is difficult to argue that they have been either prejudicial to freedom or without significance for it; nor would it be easy to show that their beneficial effects in diminishing inequality have been outweighed by incidental evils resulting from them.\(^{123}\)

Tawney’s defence of the Welfare State is thus clear: public intervention via the modern state can and should be a key part of the overall effort to improve the health and wellbeing of the populace, and reduce the levels of inequality in society.

Essentially, Tawney, though initially sympathetic to guild (‘non-statist’) forms of socialism in the 1920s, by 1930 had come to believe that a more progressive taxation system was a key mechanism for achieving greater redistribution of wealth and opportunity in society, and thus equality, arguing for “the pooling of its surplus resources by means of taxation, and the use of the funds thus obtained to make accessible to all, irrespective of their income, occupation, or social position, the conditions of civilization which, in the absence of such measures, can be enjoyed only by the rich.”\(^{124}\) And, for Tawney, state-run welfare services funded from general taxation or National Insurance

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were examples of redistribution in practice, and of ways of enhancing equality of opportunity and outcome, and hence democratic socialism and the Christian morality he believed underpinned it. As he argued:

> By taking money where it can be most easily spared, and spending it where it is most urgently needed, it produces the maximum of social benefit with the minimum of economic disturbance. By concentrating surplus resources, directing them to objects of primary importance, and applying them, as in the case of the services of health, housing, and education, under expert advice and in accordance with a specialized technique, it makes possible the attainment of results which no body of individuals, even though they spent ten times the sums involved, could achieve for themselves by their isolated action.\(^\text{125}\)

Like Temple, however, Tawney was by no means insensitive to the dangers of over-statist collectivism, not least with respect to democracy and socialism. Thus, with regard to Soviet collectivism, he stated: “Dams, bridges, power-plants and steel-works, however admirable, are not a substitute for human rights.”\(^\text{126}\) And in his 1952 Epilogue, he describes totalitarian regimes as being those “which have suppressed the primary liberties, and also those which give short shrift to demands for equality … and repudiate equality with the same ritual thunder as liberty.”\(^\text{127}\) However, whilst recognising these dangers, Tawney’s perspective on the state is unambiguously at variance with the more negative one held by writers in the English Pluralist Christendom strand such as Milbank. The following crystalises the reasons why:

> The idea that there is an entity called “The State”, which possesses, in virtue of its title, uniform characteristics existing independently of the varying histories, economic environments, constitutional arrangements, legal systems, and social psychologies of particular states, and that these characteristics necessarily combine the manners of a Japanese customs officer with the morals of a human tiger, is

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pure superstition … The State is an important instrument; hence the struggle to control it. But it is an instrument, and nothing more.¹²⁸

For Tawney, then, the state did not embody uniform characteristics: for it was “an instrument, and nothing more.” This was consistent with Temple’s view that “The State is, in practice, the people who administer it.”¹²⁹ Thus, any characteristics it had were those that had been given to it. For Tawney, moreover, even in a liberal capitalist context, the modern state, via parliamentary, representative democracy, with the checks and balances both constitutionally and electorally this afforded on the potential for the abuse of power, it was possible for it to be an instrument capable of enhancing freedom via democratic control over (and deployment of) its administrative apparatus, in the interests of furthering equality and thus the cause of democratic socialism by way of incorporating state provided welfare programmes. In this respect his view of the state chimed perfectly with that of Temple, who had argued: “The State was made for men and women, not men and women for the State”.¹³⁰

By contrast, for Milbank, as shall be argued in Part Two, the modern, liberal capitalist state possesses uniform characteristics pertinent to it — these often being defined by its secularity. Indeed, its character is that of a preserver of a modernist, liberal capitalist, socio-economic and theo-political reality — and, specifically, of the financial power elites that largely define and maintain it — even when incorporating welfare appendages as it did after 1945. For these in themselves, being redistributive and not pre-distributive in origin and character, do not fundamentally alter the underlying hegemonic

¹²⁹ Temple, *Citizen and Churchman*, p. 38.
¹³⁰ Temple, *Citizen and Churchman*, p. 27.
structural and cultural arrangements that maintain capitalism and its dominant economic elites. For Milbank, only a return to Catholic values (as he interprets them) and a much more elevated role for the Church in human affairs and a commensurately diminished one for the modern, liberal capitalist, secular state and its welfare appendages, could achieve the Blue Socialist, post-liberal outcome that he champions, and which will be considered in Part Two.

Thus, whilst Tawney and Milbank have a similar historical perspective on religion and the rise of capitalism, this being in significant part a result of the Protestant Reformation and its overturning of patristic and Thomist values *inter alia* on price and usury, it is clear that Tawney was not a Christendomist. He stated in his work of 1920: “The tradition of universal allegiance which the church — to speak without distinction of denomination — has inherited from an age in which the word ‘Christendom’ had some meaning, is a source not of strength but of weakness.”

Rather, he saw a potential for the modern state to be an enabler in the delivery of a Christian socialist vision of society via the Welfare State model, underpinned by a system of parliamentary, representative democracy such as existed in Britain, and shaped by a Labour Government of the likes of the Attlee administration, with a popular mandate commensurate to its task.

One final but important point to mention about Tawney’s perspective, before we consider the collapse of the Welfare State consensus, is that he also criticised those other reformers who he felt had gone astray for being preoccupied with relieving distress via a Welfare State. Tawney was of the view that what workers “want is security and opportunity”, and hence not merely “assistance in the exceptional misfortunes of life, but

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a fair chance of leading an independent, fairly prosperous life, if they are not exceptionally unfortunate.”

Personal aspiration for living a reasonably prosperous way of life, for Tawney, was thus a legitimate aim in a democratic socialist society, and would best be enabled via the increased equality that a Welfare State could provide.


It has been argued in 2.2 that the collapse of the Welfare State consensus began in the mid-1970s, and thus was a context that Margaret Thatcher’s Government inherited. However, her administration was to accelerate its decline. Her election as Prime Minister in 1979 began a period of government that would span three parliaments and last for eleven and a half years. Her administration was radical in its rejection of social democracy as an ideology of government, and thus much of the socialist philosophical underpinning of the Welfare State consensus. Indeed, her view was that the British people “had given up on socialism — the 30-year experiment had plainly failed and were ready to try something else. That sea change was our mandate.”

A major study of poverty in the United Kingdom published by Peter Townsend in 1979 had demonstrated that: “By the state’s own definition … there were between 15 and 17.5 million who were in or near poverty.” Hence, according to this study, poverty remained a major problem in Britain that the Welfare State had not managed to eradicate.

What is more, Frank Field, a Labour Party MP and Anglican Socialist who later

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contributed substantially to the Blue Labour initiative considered in Part Two, published a study in 1981 arguing that although some redistribution of wealth had resulted from the Welfare State, it had not had a positive impact on the condition of the poor, but had been more of a transfer of income from the very rich to the prosperous.135

Other criticisms of the Welfare State at that time, related to a view that it had spawned an underclass that was state-dependent and thus without incentive. This had led Keith Joseph, a key ally of Margaret Thatcher, to conclude that “the only lasting help we can give to the poor is helping them to help themselves; to do the opposite, to create more dependence, is to destroy them morally, whilst throwing an unfair burden on society.”136 There was also evidence of welfare fraud in the system and increased bureaucracy in its administration. Thatcher, in her memoirs, concludes:

The final illusion — that state intervention would promote social harmony or solidarity, or, in Tory language, ‘one nation’ — collapsed in the ‘winter of discontent’ [1978/1979] when the dead went unburied, critically ill patients were turned away from hospitals by pickets and the prevailing mood was one of snarling envy and motiveless hostility.137

Thatcher’s period in office coincided with the emergence of the ‘New Right’ — a group of thinkers who were anti-Keynesian, anti-welfare state, anti-public ownership of industry and thus against the mixed economy, preferring instead a return to more _laissez-faire_ economics, a more minimalist role for government in economic affairs, and a substantially reduced state sector, which we now need to consider.

137 Thatcher, _The Downing Street Years_, p. 8.
2.4.1 The emergence of the New Right’s perspective on the Welfare State

The foundations of the New Right can in part be traced at least as far back as the classical economic theories expounded by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* (1776).\(^{138}\) Smith had argued that free exchange is a transaction from which both parties to it, benefit from it, otherwise they would not voluntarily enter into it; or, as Milton Friedman, an American guru of the New Right, was to later put it — neoliberalism is underpinned by the “elementary proposition that both parties to an economic transaction benefit from it, provided the transaction is bilaterally voluntary and informed.”\(^ {139}\) From this perspective, then, put in its most unadulterated form, any restrictions on the freedom of trade (such as state interventions, regulations, laws, etc.) will reduce the wellbeing of individuals, by denying or diminishing their opportunity to improve their situation unhindered via the exchange mechanism referred to above. As such, the function of the state should not be to restrict and tax trade to support welfare projects and other social programs, but to extend the freedom of trade within and beyond national borders. Thus, as F.A. Hayek, a key intellectual influence on the New Right, argued with respect to parliamentary democracy: “Agreements by the majority on sharing the booty gained by overwhelming a minority of fellow citizens or deciding how much is to be taken from them is not democracy. At least it is not that ideal of democracy which has any moral justification.”\(^ {140}\) This thinking was influential on a key think tank of the New Right, the *Institute of Economic Affairs* and its offshoot, the *Social Affairs Unit*, which published


works such as *Wither the Welfare State* (1981) and *Breaking the Spell of Welfare* (1981) which used such arguments to attack the post-war Welfare State project.\(^{141}\) We shall see in Part Two that this thinking is considered by Milbank as antithetical to the Blue Socialist perspective which he champions as an alternative to it, even though both are highly critical of the Welfare State and its redistributive philosophical underpinnings.

The thinking of the New Right also chimed with the mandate Thatcher believed she had been given: to reduce public expenditure, rein in the role of the state, and thus enable a reduction in personal taxation and greater incentivisation in the economy, as well as to reduce what she saw as the scourge of welfare dependency. Thus, under her leadership, the 1982 Social Security and Housing Benefit Act included reductions to social security benefits by removing earning related supplements and, from 1982 onwards, pensions were increased in line with prices rather than earnings. Unemployment at this time had also risen from 3 per cent in 1974 to 12 per cent by 1982/3, which for some people represented an end to the post-war Keynesian consensus that unemployment should never again be permitted to rise to pre-war levels,\(^ {142}\) even though it reflected serious changes in the economy. And, in 1990, the Hospital and Community Care Act created in the NHS an internal market via the so-called purchaser/provider split that encouraged competition for the provision of services within the NHS (for more on this see Appendix Two: 3). When John Major became Prime Minister in 1990 he brought about further, less ambitious reforms on similar lines, which incrementally carried on much of what came to be called the ‘Thatcher Revolution’, with a particular focus on


\(^{142}\) See Fraser, *The Evolution*, p. 307.
target setting as a means of managing and demonstrating delivery of output from the services provided by the Welfare State. But he went on to lose the general election of May 1997, and so the stage was set for a period of Labour Government that was to last until May 2010 under the banner of ‘New Labour’.

2.5 New Labour and the Welfare State

In a book written in 1995, Frank Field said the following about the Welfare State:

“Britain’s present welfare system has the worst of both worlds: it is broken backed, yet its costs escalate. In its efforts to support it actually restrains the citizen offering disincentives rather than incentives, and educating people only about the need to exploit the system.”\(^{143}\) When Tony Blair won office in 1997, Field was encouraged to “think the unthinkable” and he contributed substantially to the thinking as set out in the Green Paper *A New Contract for Welfare* (1998). At this time, Field was not an out-and-out anti-welfare statist thinker, but he felt that it required substantial reform. His thinking was influential in the promotion of ‘Third Way’ thinking of the kind that Anthony Giddens’ book *The Third Way* had done much to champion.\(^ {144}\) Third Way thinking was aimed at being neither socialist nor free market, but instead would channel a middle-way between the two. As Blair put it in 1997: “we have reached the limits of the public’s willingness simply to fund an unreformed welfare system through ever higher taxes and spending.”\(^ {145}\)

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The focus was now to be “Welfare to Work” rather than welfare dependency, with youth unemployed being given options to either undertake subsidised work, education or training, work for an environmental task force or undertake voluntary work, and not just be expected to be entitled to receive unemployment benefit from the state.

In the years that followed, there were further initiatives concerning unemployment under Blair and later under the Gordon Brown premiership. They also decided to keep most of the structural reforms to the NHS that had occurred by way of the Hospital and Community Care Act 1990 (see Appendix Two: 3), including the purchaser/provider split and hence the internal market, GP involvement in healthcare purchasing, and NHS Trusts (essentially a re-badging of the former self-governing NHS Trusts). Therefore, the landscape of the NHS was pretty much as it had been under the previous Tory administration, though with significant increases in funding in Blair’s second and third terms (see Appendix Two: 4).

For some critics of Labour’s Third Way approach, this amounts to evidence that rather than reversing the ‘Thatcher Revolution,’ Labour, under the premierships of Blair and Brown, had consolidated it, and thus had further weakened the Welfare State and the post-war Welfare State consensus. In support of this view, they point to subsequent statements by Blair; for example, in an interview with the BBC: “My job was to build on some of Thatcher’s policies”. From Gordon Brown’s perspective, in 2008 the

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146 For example, in 2008, incapacity benefit was replaced by an Employment Services Allowance and a revised Jobseekers’ Allowance. As Gordon Brown said in the White Paper of 2008: “we have put not just rights but the responsibilities that match them at the head of our welfare reforms … a system that offers more support but that expects more in return.” Cited by Fraser, The Evolution, p. 316.


Welfare State was still intact but had been modernised along the lines of greater public and private sector partnership, and its future had been secured. So it was able to withstand the financial crash and the impact this would have on government policy. Yet for a third group, the Welfare State was seen as being in terminal decline and in need of being substantially replaced with another vision for the twenty-first century, and partly out of this revisionist thinking emerged the Red Tory/Blue Labour political phenomenon that is analysed in Parts Two and Three. Red Tory and Blue Labour thinking on welfare was developed in significant part by John Milbank, and theo-politically underpinned in significant part by Radical Orthodoxy, a grouping predominantly within the Anglican Church founded by Milbank in the late 1990s. Milbank was to influence the shaping of events that followed, not least with respect to the role the Church of England was to play in them.

However, before we address Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking and his contribution to the Red Tory/Blue Labour political phenomenon, a brief summary of David Nicholls’s English Pluralist thinking on the Church, welfare and the state is necessary. Milbank’s affinity with English Pluralism has, in part, been shaped by David Nicholls’s writings, as he has since acknowledged, stating that Nicholls “was a great friend” who he knew as part of the Jubilee Group, and that he had also “debated with him when he was part of the Christendom Trust”. In 2014 Milbank was of the view that, in an “era of a crisis of the nation state”, Nicholls’ work was “extraordinarily prophetic” and that he is now “closer to his [Nicholls’] positions than when he was alive.”

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2.6  David Nicholls as an Anglican Socialist writing in The English Pluralist Christendom Strand

The publication of V.A. Demant’s *Religion and the Decline of Capitalism* in 1952 marked a high point in the English Pluralist Christendom strand, after which there was a decline in interest until the late 1960s. After the publication in 1922 of the *Return of Christendom* volume, the *Christendom Group* had been formed, led by Maurice Reckitt, with a view to providing a vehicle for developing and promoting the ideas contained in that book. A quarterly journal was subsequently established, edited by Reckitt, called *Christendom*, which existed between 1931 and 1950. After the low point of the 1960s, on 31st March 1971 the *Christendom Trust* was established with Reckitt as leader, Demant as secretary and David Nicholls as a founding member and Chair from 1992 until his death in 1996.\(^\text{151}\) In 2006 Kenneth Leech described Nicholls as: “an old-style guild socialist, opposed to state socialism”.\(^\text{152}\) Owing in significant part to the works of Nicholls, in the 1970s there was a revival of interest in the English Pluralist tradition within sections of Anglican Socialism and, to a degree, an awakening of interest in it within the universities.\(^\text{153}\) Nicholls’ writings, in the main, are more academically detached in style than were those of his predecessors writing within that tradition. His training as a political scientist, historian, and theologian enabled him to approach his subject area in that way. Paul Hirst has rightly described the English Pluralist writers as not comprising “a comprehensive and coherent academic school” but instead “writing for popular and

\(^\text{152}\)  See K. Leech, “Farewell to the days of birettas and cassocks”, *Church Times*, November 2006.
\(^\text{153}\)  For example, P. Hirst, *The Pluralist Theory of the State* (London: Routledge, 1989) is in some ways indebted to Nicholls, as confirmed by Hirst in his acknowledgements (not paginated).
political effect.”¹⁵⁴ This need not diminish the value and significance of their work, of course, as Hirst acknowledges. What this more popular style of writing did result in, though, was a lack of profile for their work in the universities.

David Nicholls’s writings on English Pluralism were, to some degree, to redress this. In works such as Church and State in Britain since 1820 (1967), Three varieties of Pluralism (1974), and The Pluralist State (1975),¹⁵⁵ he did much to help distil and define the thinking of the English Pluralist writers, particularly Figgis, on whom he had completed a PhD thesis. His wide academic training and historical knowledge also enabled him to place their contribution to political theory and theology, within the wider historical and political context from which it had emerged and was partly shaped. In this regard, his work Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1989)¹⁵⁶ is a major work in both the fields of political theology and the history of ideas, and, specifically, the way God and the state have been seen by key writers of political theory and Christian theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not least by Temple.

But it is in his essay writing that one gets to see a more unbridled side to his thinking that is unambiguously sympathetic to the English Pluralist frame of reference. Thus, in one of his essays on Christianity and politics, he argues: “The population of a modern state cannot, however, legitimately be said to have the kind of coherence and

¹⁵⁴ Hirst, Pluralist Theory of the State, p. 15.
organic structure that is assumed in talking about its wishes.”\textsuperscript{157} What Nicholls means by this becomes apparent in the following statement:

representative government may be seen to encourage a subtle form of irresponsibility. Millions of adults hand over to a few hundred so-called representatives the right to make decisions on their behalf, while for the following five years these millions pursue in good conscience their own interests and pleasures.\textsuperscript{158}

This is a system of government that is too centralist and thus insufficiently democratic for Nicholls. It is a view he shared with the other English Pluralists. Yet he is more sceptical than they were (and that Milbank has since been) of representative government as a means of delivering genuine democracy. Milbank is of the view that representative government has its place, and could be made more representative via a substantially reconfigured role for the state and its relationship to the Church (as we shall see in Part Two). For Milbank this would be part of a wider series of reforms along the lines that writers in the English Pluralist Christendom strand have advocated. Nicholls was not, however “asserting that only individual persons can properly be said to have wishes, or make decisions. Certain voluntary human groups may develop sufficient of a common life and purpose to make it possible to speak of their wishes or decisions, but the modern state is not one of them”.\textsuperscript{159} Consistent with this thinking, in a short critique of Temple’s perspective on the state along these lines, he argues: “It is difficult to make sense of Temple’s ideas on state sovereignty and it would not be unfair to say that his political theory is generally a somewhat incoherent amalgam of notions inherited from his

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\textsuperscript{158} Nicholls, “Christianity and Politics”, p.176

\textsuperscript{159} Nicholls, “Christianity and Politics”, p.176.
undergraduate days.”\textsuperscript{160} The outcome of Temple’s thinking on the state is described by Nicholls in the following terms:

God and State — conceived of in terms of a conjunction of sovereignty and benevolence or welfare — are then features of the liberal capitalism of many western countries in our day. In these countries class conflict has been contained by paternalistic legislation, mitigating the harsher consequences of the capitalist system, combined with a subtle manipulation of political and cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{161}

For Nicholls this was not a satisfactory outcome, as containing class conflict had not removed it or its causes — these being in significant part the product of capitalism. What was also not a satisfactory outcome for Nicholls, was the circumscribed role that Temple had argued the Church should adopt towards the state in his thinking on middle axioms (see 1.4.1). In Nicholls’s view: “By insisting that Christians, as such, should be concerned with principles rather than with policies he ensured that nothing they said, as such, would be likely to have much immediate effect.”\textsuperscript{162}

It is views such as these on welfare and, indeed, on the interface between Church and state, that Milbank was to further develop in the 1980s onwards. Influenced by the thinking of Nicholls, as well as by the other English Pluralist Christendom writers previously mentioned, Milbank’s contribution to contemporary theology, whilst rooted in that Anglican Socialist strand, has nevertheless been broader and more complex than this label can fully encompass.\textsuperscript{163} Before we further engage with his thinking in Part Two, however, some conclusions to chapter two can be drawn.

\textsuperscript{163} For example, his incorporation of postmodern thinking into his systematic theology reflects other influences.
2.7 Conclusions

Two dominant strands of economic thinking have characterised the history of the Welfare State consensus and its collapse. These have been Keynesianism and neoliberalism. Keynesianism, with its emphasis on more governmental planning and state intervention in the economy, chimed with the ambitious implementation timeframe the Attlee administration had set itself for reconstructing the post-war economy and for delivering on the Beveridge report. In Britain, Keynesianism was the order of the day and remained so until the mid-1970s. However, since circa 1976, neoliberalism has been the dominant economic theory or paradigm underpinning much of the Conservative and Labour administrations’ approaches to the funding and management of the Welfare State. Thus, the Blair/Brown New Labour/Third Way administrations can be seen as having significantly accommodated neoliberalism in their policies and practices.

It has been argued that there is a fundamental difference between how Milbank sees the modern, liberal capitalist state as possessing uniform characteristics pertinent to it (these often being secular), in contrast to how Welfare Statist Anglican Socialists such as Tawney have seen it as not embodying uniform characteristics but, rather, as nothing more than an instrument. Thus, for Tawney, even in a liberal capitalist context, the state was capable of accurately reflecting the will and needs of the populous via the ballot box, not least with respect to the provision of welfare. This is a crucial difference between these two strands of Anglican Socialism. We shall see in Part Two and Part Three that it is partly the explanation for why Milbank considers liberal democracy as having significant limitations in what it can achieve in advancing the kingdom of God on earth,
preferring instead a reformed, post-liberal system of governance with the Church of England playing a more prominent role in the affairs of the nation, as well as in the provision of welfare.

It has been argued that David Nicholls’s work on the Church and state, particularly during the late 1960s and 1970s, was important in the way it made the English Pluralist perspective more widely known and understood within the university setting and beyond. He also influenced Milbank who has since described his work as “extraordinarily prophetic”.

In Part Two it will be argued that Milbank’s Blue Socialism offers (a) a post-liberal alternative to both Keynesianism and neoliberalism, and that this thinking, were it adopted by either a Red Tory or a Blue Labour styled administration, would have profound implications for the way welfare is provided in Britain, and (b) a vision of a post-liberal society that would have major implications for the role the Church of England would play in the provision of welfare, and for its relationship with the state per se.
PART TWO

JOHN MILBANK’S BLUE SOCIALIST THINKING AND HIS PERSPECTIVE ON THE BRITISH WELFARE STATE VIS-À-VIS THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND’S POST-WAR ROLE IN THE PROVISION OF WELFARE

Research Goals for Part Two:

(3) To examine the Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank with reference to its key theoretical underpinnings, and to some alternative perspectives and criticisms of them.

(4) To critique his Blue Socialist perspective on the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, and the Church of England’s post-war role in the provision of welfare, and his proposed Blue Socialist, post-liberal alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare.
CHAPTER THREE

JOHN MILBANK AS AN ANGLICAN SOCIALIST WRITING IN THE ENGLISH PLURALIST CHRISTENDOM STRAND

3.1 Introduction

In Part One, John Milbank’s thinking on welfare and the Church was located within the English Pluralist Christendom strand of Anglican Socialist tradition. This chapter will identify and analyse key elements of his thought on what he calls Blue Socialism (RG 3). After some definitions (3.2), I will focus on his perspective on the modern, liberal capitalist state and welfare provision, including key historical and theoretical influences that have shaped it (3.3–3.4). There will also be some reference made to alternative perspectives to Milbank’s thinking on the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and, specifically, to his interpretation of religion and the part he considers it played in the rise of capitalism in early-modern Europe, as well as to its consolidation in the centuries since (3.5). I will also describe key elements of Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking (3.6), and the influence of Catholic Social Teaching on his post-liberal vision (3.7). Some lines of criticism of his Blue Socialist thinking will then be developed (3.8), and a summary of his alternative ‘civil economy’ vision to that of Keynesian ‘statism’ and neoliberalism will be provided (3.9). Conclusions will then be reached (3.10). This will enable me in chapter four, to critique his perspective on the British Welfare State in relation to the voluntary sector, and the Church of England’s post-war contribution to the provision of welfare, and his proposed Blue Socialist, post-liberal alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare (RG 4).
3.2 Definitions

To begin, I consider seven contemporary terms for which definitions are essential.

Blue Socialism

Blue Socialism was first described in 2008 by Milbank as “socialism with a Burkean tinge”, and his interpretation of it therefore needs to be understood in this way. At first blush this would seem an unlikely juxtaposition, as Edmund Burke has been and remains a key theoretical underpinning for ‘One Nation’ Tory thinking, with his belief in the importance of safeguarding the traditional institutions of state and civil society, and the maintenance of continuity in the social structures that define a society’s economic, social, cultural, political and religious character. Yet Milbank is of the view that some of these values are by no means antithetical to a viable Christian socialist polity — indeed he thinks they are integral to one. So, for Milbank, Blue Socialism is a political philosophy that seeks to fuse aspects of traditional Christian socialist thought with aspects of Burkean ‘One Nation’ Tory thinking, offering an alternative to Keynesian ‘statism’ and to neoliberalism. This thinking will be explored in depth at 3.6, with some analysis of its salient features.

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Blue Labour

Blue Labour was a term coined by political theoretician Maurice Glasman in a speech made in April 2009 in Conway Hall, Bloomsbury. Glasman defined Blue Labour as a rejection of neoliberal economics, whilst also being highly critical of the Keynesian welfare consensus of the post-war years, which he considered as too statist an approach to advancing democratic socialism. Instead, Blue Labour would offer, "a new politics of reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity". A project group was subsequently established around the Blue Labour banner in the Labour Party aimed at devising a political strategy that would enable their leader, Ed Miliband, to move the party beyond the New Labour (Third Way) thinking of Tony Blair’s and Gordon Brown’s leaderships. Blue Labour was later described by two of its leading advocates as having its roots more in High Toryism and the cooperative movement than in Victorian Liberalism, and that it “seeks to recover and renew the radical conservatism that defines England and resonates strongly with cognate traditions across the rest of the United Kingdom.” Blue Labour thus became associated with being very critical of liberalism: both the ‘social-cultural’ and ‘secular’ liberalism it considered as influential on shaping the old welfare statist Labour left, and free-market liberalism associated with the right. Instead, it offered a more conservative approach to the importance of personal loyalty, family, faith, community and locality, whilst seeking to move beyond the Third Way centrist pragmatism of the Blair/Brown years.

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168 Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour, p. 4.
169 Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour, p. 5.
The Blue Labour project was shaped in significant part by Christian influences, with Ian Geary, an executive member of Christians on the Left, and Simon Oliver, William Van Mildert Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University and a member of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping (referred to below), being the main organisers of the Blue Labour seminars that took place in 2012 and 2013, that helped to define some of its thinking.170 Milbank, although not a member of the Labour Party, had, since early 2010, been a key influence and adviser to the Blue Labour project, and contributed substantially to the thinking underpinning the Blue Labour initiative, including publishing articles on Blue Labour. These were critical of the Welfare State as an approach to the provision of some aspects of welfare, preferring instead a more localised, community-based approach to their delivery, with the Church of England playing a key and enhanced role.171 Jon Cruddas MP, and Labour Party Policy Coordinator under Ed Miliband’s leadership, was of the view that Milbank’s thinking:

influenced in equal measure the Red Tory project of Phillip Blond [see below] and the Blue Labour movement founded by Maurice Glasman. Blue Labour’s work on an ethical market, a mutualist approach to welfare and a focus on vocationalism for all rather than just equality of opportunity, has been considerably shaped by Milbank’s work.172

170 Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour. Cited in the “Acknowledgements” section that is unpaginated.
Likewise, Maurice Glasman has said: “John Milbank has had a profound impact on the political position that has come to be known as Blue Labour.”

In October 2015, after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, the Blue Labour project group merged with other elements on the right of the party to form the Labour Together group (later to morph into the Future Britain group), that has sought to offer an alternative perspective to the one being put forward by the more traditional Red Labour elements in the party, as defined below. However, the thinking underpinning the Blue Labour project remains highly relevant, both within the Labour Party and wider afield, not least concerning possible approaches to welfare provision in England in the twenty-first century.

**Red Labour**

Since 2009 Red Labour is a term that has been used to describe those in the Labour Party who reject key aspects of the Blue Labour approach, such as its critique of the Welfare State. They identified with Corbyn’s far left socialist leadership and argue for a Keynesian approach to governmental economic management as an alternative to neoliberalism, based on the need, as they see it, for a substantial fiscal stimulus to fund major infrastructure and other projects, and replenish underfunding of the Welfare State and local government.

173 “Shaping the ideology of Red Tory and Blue Labour”.
175 For more on this see O. Wright, “Red, Purple or Blue: Which kind of labour are you?”, *The Independent*, 26 September 2011.
Red Tory

Although there is a tradition of Red Toryism that has its origins in Canadian politics, for this study the term refers to the ideas developed by Anglican political theologian, Phillip Blond, in his book: Red Tory: How left and right have broken Britain and how we can fix it, published in 2010. The book’s acknowledgements demonstrate his indebtedness to Milbank: “my most commensurate thanks and deepest debt go to John Milbank without whose time, dedication and sheer editorial enthusiasm this book would not have appeared”. Furthermore, Blond is a member of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping and was a PhD student under Milbank’s supervision whilst at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, in the early 1990s. Milbank is also Chair of Trustees for Blond’s think tank ResPublica. Red Toryism attempts to fuse economic equity (that is, the principle that an economy must achieve an apportionment of its resources and goods that is considered fair by the people who operate within it) with social conservatism, and is highly critical of the Welfare State and the welfare dependency he argues it produces. It is also highly critical of neoliberalism (what he calls the free-market economy) and instead calls for a reduced role for the state and the market in society, and, in their place, the strengthening of local communities and economies and the need to bring about a restoration of the family as the source of social stability. Hence, it has a strong communitarian and voluntarist focus to some of the alternatives it offers to statist forms of social and economic delivery.

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177 P. Blond, Red Tory: How left and right have broken Britain and how we can fix it (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. ix.
These ideas, though not identical to those advanced by the Blue Labour project,\(^{179}\) have much in common with them, and thus with Milbank’s thinking, particularly concerning welfare, voluntarism and the Church. They will be covered in Part Three when we examine the influence they had on shaping the ‘Big Society’ project, and that Milbank’s support for the ‘Big Society’ project had on shaping the Church of England’s approach to welfare in the aftermath of the financial crash.

*The ‘Big Society’ project*

The ‘Big Society’ project was launched by the Conservative Party in the summer of 2010 as part of its election manifesto, and lasted until around the end of 2013. At its outset, it was described by David Cameron as follows:

> The start of a deep and serious reform agenda to take power away from politicians and give it to people. That’s because we know instinctively that the state is often too inhuman, monolithic and clumsy to tackle our deepest social problems. We know that the best ideas come from the ground up, not the top down. We know that when you give people and communities more power over their lives, more power to come together and work together to make life better — great things happen.\(^{180}\)

The key aims of the ‘Big Society’ project were subsequently defined in a speech by Cameron in July 2010 at Liverpool Hope University:

> *Social Action.* The success of the Big Society will depend on the daily decisions of millions of people — on them giving their time, effort, even money, to causes around them. So government cannot remain neutral on that — it must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, and social action.

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Public Service Reform. We’ve got to get rid of the centralised bureaucracy that wastes money and undermines morale. And in its place we’ve got to give professionals much more freedom, and open up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies so we get more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need.

Community Empowerment. We need to create communities with oomph — neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them.\(^{181}\)

Though the term was coined by Steve Hilton, then Director of Strategy for the Conservative Party, the ‘Big Society’ project was substantially underpinned by the Red Tory thinking of Blond, who was an adviser to Cameron on it.\(^{182}\) It was also a project that was viewed favourably by Milbank.

Radical Orthodoxy

Radical Orthodoxy can be defined as a post-modern, post-liberal theological grouping, and is situated predominantly (though not exclusively)\(^{183}\) within the British Anglo-Catholic tradition. It is highly critical of radical, liberal strands of Protestant theology, and sees orthodoxy as a more radical interpretation of the Christian tradition and its outworking. It has sought to fuse post-modern philosophical and theological perspectives with pre-modern, and thus is highly critical of the paradigm of modernism. It has much in common with Christendom thinking, particularly with regard to its perspective on the Middle Ages and the Reformation, and its highly critical interpretation of Protestantism

\(^{181}\) See D. Cameron, “Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19\(^{th}\) July 2010.” Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech (accessed on 1 December 2016).

\(^{182}\) See, for example, J. Harris, “Phillip Blond: The Man Who Wrote Cameron’s Mood Music”, Guardian, 8 August 2009.

\(^{183}\) There are a small number of Roman Catholics who have contributed to Radical Orthodoxy thinking. See, for example, G. Loughlin, “Erotics God’s Sex”, in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock & G. Ward (eds), Radical Orthodoxy (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 143-162.
as being a major reason for the rise and consolidation of capitalism, something that it opposes. Considerable elements of its thinking can be traced to Milbank’s book of 1990, *Theology and Social Theory*, and Milbank remains a key founding member of the Radical Orthodoxy group of thinkers. A key intellectual influence thus running through Red Tory and Blue Labour thinking, has been the theology of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping.

*Liberalism*

Milbank defines liberalism as the “the social-cultural liberalism” of the left and “the economic-political liberalism” of the right. He sees these as being two sides of the same (modernist/rationalist) coin, arguing that: “Far from representing genuine alternatives to one another, the two liberalisms are mutually reinforcing in that they fuse economic-political individualism with bureaucratic-managerial collectivism and social-cultural atomization — as Max Weber realised better than Karl Marx.” Milbank’s reference to Weber partly relates to his affinity for the perspective developed in Weber’s

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184 J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, Second edition, 2006). Not all members of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping think the same on all aspects of its theology. For example, with respect to the Christendom vision, Milbank argues: “Only the Church has the theoretical and practical power to challenge the global hegemony of capital and create a viable political — economic alternative,” thus very much in line with Christendom thinking. See Milbank, *The Future of Love*, p. xi. However, Graham Ward offers a minority opinion in the grouping, stating: “Christendom is over; and with it Christian hegemony” as he finds Christendom thinking too “restorationist”, though he remains post-liberal, post-modern and post-secular in his outlook. See G. Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 257.


The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism\textsuperscript{187} in which he identified Protestant (particularly Calvinist) thinking on work and the merits of financial gain, as being conducive to the emergence of capitalism.

And, from Milbank’s perspective, liberalism (the theoretical credo underpinning capitalism) has been the dominant (though not exclusive) economic, political, social and cultural ideology in the West since the Reformation. What is more, for Milbank, the “triumph of liberalism more and more brings about the ‘war of all against all’ (Hobbes) and the idea of man as self-proprietary animal (Locke) that were its presuppositions”\textsuperscript{188}

In an article published in 2015 and co-authored with Adrian Pabst, an Anglican political theologian in the Radical Orthodoxy grouping, he attributes this tendency as partly responsible for why liberalism is now in a state of meta-crisis, contending:

Just as liberal thought redefined human nature as isolated individuals who enter into formal contractual ties with other individuals (instead of the ancient and Christian idea of social, political animals), so too liberal practice has replaced the quest for reciprocal recognition and mutual flourishing with the pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure.\textsuperscript{189}

For Milbank and Pabst:

It subjects the real economy of productive activities to relentless commodification and speculation, while at the same time separating symbolic significance, equated with pure exchange value, from material space which is seen increasingly as just an object for arbitrary division, consumption and destruction.\textsuperscript{190}


\textsuperscript{188} Milbank, “The Downward Spiral”.

\textsuperscript{189} Milbank, “The Downward Spiral”.

\textsuperscript{190} Milbank, “The Downward Spiral”.
These ideas will be further analysed in what follows, not least because Milbank’s definition of liberalism, so central to his overall perspective on Blue Socialism, modernism, secular politics, the liberal-capitalist state, and welfare and the role of the Church in its provision, is far from being immune to challenge.

3.3  **John Milbank’s Contribution to the English Pluralist Christendom Strand**

It is no coincidence that Milbank dedicated his magnum opus *Theology and Social Theory* to “surviving members of the Christendom Trust”.¹⁹¹ His affinity for their ideas is evident in much of his writing on political theology, as he readily acknowledges: “I stand on the whole within the tradition of non-statist Christian Socialism which regards modern statism as involving the support of the very rich, a guarantee of their finances, and an enabling additional support through ‘welfare’ of their disposed workforce.”¹⁹² In common with the other English Pluralist Christendom writers previously discussed, Milbank perceives the modern, liberal-capitalist state as a secular entity encroaching into areas previously within the purview of the Church. Thus, he argues, there has been a “tendency since the nineteenth century to hand over the incarnational mission of the church to the state. In other words, to see the state as the more complete realisation of the church’s social mission than the church itself.”¹⁹³ And, whilst he acknowledges that “in certain

¹⁹¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, where it is stated immediately prior to the contents pages: “For Alison, and the surviving members of the Christendom Trust”.
respects such an advance is crucial” and that “we can’t stop at charity”, he nevertheless goes on to say:

> there is a profound question mark over the whole tradition which William Temple exemplified. It is a rather Hegelian tradition that tends ultimately to surrender things to the state and risks eroding both the interpersonal and the sense that people are mutually responsible for each other at the immediate social level.\(^{194}\)

The resemblance in Milbank’s thinking on the modern, liberal-capitalist state to that held by Figgis, Reckitt, Demant and Nicholls (see Part One), is thus apparent and is what in significant part accounts for his scepticism of the state as a provider of welfare.

Furthermore, from Milbank’s perspective, this Hegelian, ‘secularist’, statist trajectory has profound theological implications. For it runs counter to his view that the Church, not the state, represents the “kingdom of God in embryo”. Thus he says "the church is trying to be the kingdom in embryo. The church itself is the site of the true society. It is the project which brings in everything: there are no easy boundaries between the secular and the sacred.”\(^{195}\) This is not to suggest, however, that Milbank, in his contribution to the Blue Labour project or in his more recent book co-authored with Adrian Pabst on post-liberalism and the politics of virtue,\(^{196}\) is advocating an out-and-out Christian theocracy as either achievable or viable at this moment in history, as a solution to the contemporary theo-political challenges that the Church of England faces. But it is one reason for why he wants to see an enhanced role for the Church of England in society and politics, as well as a diminished role for the state, in preference to greater levels of institutional subsidiarity.

He adduces examples of how this might be achieved, via augmented local government

and more localised decision-making autonomy for schools, colleges, universities and NHS hospitals, for example. ¹⁹⁷

However, as the lineage of Milbank’s thinking on Church and state can, like the thinking of Figgis, Reckitt, Demant and Nicholls before him, in significant part be attributed to his perspective on how life was in the Middle Ages and how it changed via the Reformation, it is to these that we must next turn our attention. What follows will therefore be a summary analysis of Milbank’s perspective on the Reformation and the rise of capitalism (3.4), followed by a section identifying some alternative perspectives (3.5). This should enable us to see more clearly why he holds the views he does about the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, and the Church of England’s post-war role in the provision of welfare, which will be developed, analysed and critiqued in chapter four.

3.4 From Pre-Reformation “Socialism of the Gift” to Post-Reformation “Commodity Exchange Subject To Contract”

Milbank’s interpretation of how life was in the Middle Ages is pivotal to his Christian socialist thinking. His account is rich with praise for the virtues he argues were present

¹⁹⁷ Whilst this study focuses on Milbank’s and Pabst’s writings on post-liberalism, it is a term that can be interpreted with different levels of emphasis and meaning. George A. Lindbeck’s The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984) is a key work in this field. He takes a cultural/linguistic approach to religion and theology that emphasises the importance of religious narrative as a framework for apprehending reality through the story of a given community. This approach can be seen as an alternative to the emphasis that modernist thinkers have placed on reason (Descartes) or experience (Locke) as the epistemological foundations for belief. Post-liberal theologians such as Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas have often been critical of capitalism, challenging the pre-eminence that Enlightenment thinkers such Locke have placed on individual rights and freedoms for shaping the economic and political order, instead placing more emphasis on a need for communal structures and collective engagement. A useful introduction to post-liberal theology that covers their work and the work of others is R. T. Michener, Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed (London: T&T Clark, 2013).
and later diminished as a result of the Reformation:

In the Middle Ages, charity was a reciprocal ‘state’, not just an ‘action … there were founded work and trade guilds, monasteries and universities, which were both free and associative, and therefore … the most genuine kind of community … the arrival of these modes of organisation coincided with the emergence of a town-based market economy, and they represented a certain way of making exchanges, or of organising freedom as collective freedom. They were in a sense proto-socialist, and not simply destined to disappear. If they did disappear, then this was a contingent result of the collapse of a certain cultural consensus.  

The medieval “cultural consensus” he is referring to is a Catholic “proto-socialist” one, as he interprets it, underpinned by a Catholic theology of social reciprocity, in which he argues there existed a charitable ethos where exchange was based on more than a profit motive: instead, it embodied the notion of “socialism of the gift”. He describes this as a society where:

religion, organicism and community seem to belong together … for these societies a thing exchanged is not a commodity, but a gift, and it is not alienated from the giver but expresses his personality, so that the giver is the gift, he goes with the gift. Precisely for this reason a return on the gift is always due to the giver, unlike the modern ‘free gift’. Yet this gift is still a gift and not a commodity subject to contract.

For Milbank, then, for a Christian socialist ethos and post-liberal society to exist, there has to be significantly more than a profit motive to any exchange; rather, it must also embody a Catholic notion of “the gift” (that is: a Catholic understanding of social reciprocity based, as it must be, on the need for respect to exist between each party to the exchange, and a shared recognition of the mutual benefit that should come from it, resulting in the receiver’s inclination to want to reciprocate the gift). Thus he argues: “In

every exchange, something other than calculation of profit and loss must enter”. And although this runs antithetically to the emphasis he believes capitalist, free-market economies place on profit as being the key motivator/driver/necessity underpinning the exchange of goods and services in a capitalist defined marketplace, he argues pre-Reformation, Catholic society demonstrated that the human condition is well capable of embodying such an ethos.

In support of this, he alludes to how artisans in the Middle Ages (and, in some contexts, since) have made goods as expressions of creative endeavour: artistic, technical, cultural, as well as for their functionality/utility; and also with regard both to the price they could secure for them in the marketplace, and the intrinsic pleasure they derived from making them in that way, and that they hoped the purchasers would derive from them having been made in that way. Likewise, he refers to how doctors historically and contemporaneously, even in capitalist contexts “do not normally and as a rule pursue money alone, because they would despise themselves and others would despise them if they did”. Rather, the doctor “goes with what he [sic] does, because of the gifts he [sic] bestows”. Yet, like Marx (whose labour theory of value owed much to the thinking of Thomas Aquinas), he deplores the alienation (estrangement) he believes workers in capitalist economies and societies often experience from the commodities they produce or the services they provide. This is a result of a requirement for them to be made and

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delivered for exchange in a context that is often subservient to, and characterised by, a modernist, liberal-capitalist, individualist, free-market driven, utilitarian, secularised and, as he sees it, immoral ethos, that is based on little other than the profit motive.\textsuperscript{203} And, from Milbank’s perspective, the Catholic “proto-socialist” ethos of the Middle Ages, underpinned by its Catholic theology of social reciprocity that emphasised “gift exchange” in economics, was, to a significant degree, theologically and politically mutated as a result of the Reformation. For it was the Reformation, he argues, which brought about the rise of its antithesis — capitalism; this being in part a result of the abandonment of the Catholic doctrine of the Just Price and the Prohibition of Usury, to which we now turn.

\textit{3.4.1 The abandonment of the Catholic doctrine of the Just Price and the Prohibition of Usury}

To get a sense of the theological paradigm shift Milbank is referring to, it is worth briefly revisiting the thinking of Temple, who states: “The two main pillars of medieval theological economics were the doctrine of the Just Price and the Prohibition of Usury.”\textsuperscript{204} Contrast the rejection of interest charged on a loan in the works of Aquinas (1225–1274) — his writing in line with the patristic equation of usury with greed (believing that charging interest would be a violation of natural law) — to that later developed by Jean Calvin (1509–1564), whereby interest could be charged on a loan

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\item \textsuperscript{203} For more on Marx’s theory of alienation (estranged labour), see K. Marx & F. Engels, \textit{Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844} (sometimes referred to as the Paris Manuscripts), first published in 1927. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm (accessed on 26 October 2016).
\item \textsuperscript{204} Temple, \textit{Christianity and Social Order}, p. 53.
\end{enumerate}
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(except when lending to the poor),\(^\text{205}\) and we begin to see the theological underpinning for Milbank’s view that Protestantism was in significant part responsible for the rise and consolidation of capitalism. This was a view also held by Temple, who, following Weber and Tawney, had concluded: “Calvin had unwittingly opened the way for the coming of Economic Man.”\(^\text{206}\) Whereas Aquinas had believed that “the just price equals the seller’s cost” — that is, that it should correspond with the labour and costs to the producer of making the commodity or of providing the service to the purchaser — after the Reformation, thinkers such as Adam Smith came to argue that the just price of goods and services equals the one that the free-market determines based on supply and demand determinants.\(^\text{207}\) From Milbank’s perspective, it is difficult to imagine how capitalism could have emerged as an economic system, without interest being charged on loans and profit being charged as part of the price of goods and services where the market mechanism could accommodate it. This necessitated the abandonment of the Catholic doctrine of the Just Price and the Prohibition of Usury — this also being a key theme running through Tawney’s analysis of religion and the rise of capitalism, which Milbank professes to endorse (see below).\(^\text{208}\) However, recognising that does not, for some historians of the Reformation, mean that this change in theological perspective was (even in part) the cause of the rise of capitalism; from their perspective it was more a case of the Protestant religion having been usurped by the rising capitalist class to serve its own ends. Thus, Max I. Dimont argues:


\(^{206}\) Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 54.


\(^{208}\) Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, pp. 52-55.
Though Protestantism had begun as a strictly religious reform movement, the people behind the new economic forces seized the Reformation and bent it to their own economic needs … As the modes of production changed, the people responsible for these changes searched for a state that would legalize what they were doing and for a religion that would sanctify it. They adopted the Protestant religion and made it embrace the capitalist state. The two went hand in hand like bride and groom.209

Unsurprisingly, however, given Milbank’s perspective, he is far more sympathetic to the interpretation of the rise of capitalism that he ascribes to Tawney’s study:210 “Here I would argue that High-Church Anglican and socialist historian R.H. Tawney was after all essentially right: the process has to do with religion — with Christianity and late medieval and early modern developments within Christian theology and practice.”211

A key strand of Tawney’s analysis was that, stemming in significant part from Calvin’s theology, Puritanism had developed:

a creed which transformed the acquisition of wealth from a drudgery or a temptation into a moral duty [and] was the milk of lions. It was not that religion was expelled from practical life, but that religion itself gave it a foundation of granite ... The good Christian was not wholly dissimilar from the economic man.212

However, a distinction can be drawn between Tawney’s analysis of religion and the rise of capitalism and the argument being made by Milbank as set out below, which places much more emphasis on the changing interpretation of ‘the fall’ as an explanation of the rise of capitalism, which Milbank appears to acknowledge, by prefacing his argument

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210 Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.


with the words “in considerable extension of Tawney”. For whereas Tawney’s analysis sees the nexus between religion and the rise of capitalism as being bi-directional — that is, one that emphasises how events shaped ideas and ideas shaped events, Milbank’s appears to place far greater primacy on ideas being the shaper of events. For example, Tawney argues that the Church’s diminishing influence in economic and political affairs played a part in capitalism’s ascendancy: “side by side with the expansion of trade and the rise of the new classes to political power, there was a further cause, which, if not the most conspicuous, was not the least fundamental. It was the contraction of the territory within which the writ of religion was conceived and run.” Hence, for Tawney, the diminishing role the Church played in society as a result of the upheaval the Reformation caused, was part of a wider socio-economic dynamic, with the expansion of trade also being key, that could partly explain the rise of capitalism. Contrast this with the perspective held by Milbank (see below), which emphasises the role ideas played in that process to the apparent marginalisation of so many of the other contributing factors evident in Tawney’s analysis, such as improved transportation and trading routes.

Milbank argues: “In keeping with, but in considerable extension of Tawney, one can say that Protestant theology inherited and developed a dis-connection of reality — a nominalist denial that all effects analogically echo their causes in a great chain of being leading back to God.” And, for Milbank, this “dis-connection of reality” embodied “a poor reading of the Bible, which saw in it an excessive paganism and wished rather to celebrate an entirely inscrutable, self-willed God who had created the world as an

arbitrary set of disconnected things linked only by mechanism”.\textsuperscript{216} It was this thinking that, for Milbank, could largely account for the rise of capitalism. For it had meant that: “Human beings are then thought to operate on this natural order, no longer in the first place with respect to justice towards all creatures, including human beings, but in the image of a self-willed God as mere dominators and manipulators of dead, meaningless processes.”\textsuperscript{217} What is more, for Milbank, it was this Protestant (and flawed Catholic Jansenist) misinterpretation of ‘the fall’ that was the religious underpinning of capitalism’s rise and subsequent consolidation. As he puts it:

another important root of modern liberalism, traceable for example in Adam Smith, derives from an extreme ‘Augustinian’ theology in both Calvinistic and Jansenistic versions. For this theological outlook (which was not that of Augustine himself), original sin is so extreme that human beings must be considered to be by nature ‘totally depraved’.\textsuperscript{218}

For Milbank, then, the fact that prior to his 	extit{Wealth of Nations (1776),}\textsuperscript{219} Adam Smith had written his 	extit{Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759),}\textsuperscript{220} in which he had argued for some moral underpinning as necessary for capitalism to work effectively, does not in any way negate the fact that free markets, operating as the means by which the price of goods is determined and driven by the profit motive and Smith’s “invisible hand” mechanism as the reconciler of supply with demand, are, by their very nature, lacking in moral direction and outcome.\textsuperscript{221} In Milbank’s words: “Belief in the ‘invisible hand’ as the only remaining economic and social bond — has left us with both rampant individualism and excessive

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\footnote{\textsuperscript{216} Milbank, “Can Markets be Moral?”, p. 4.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{217} Milbank, “Can Markets be Moral?”, p. 4.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{218} Milbank, “Can Markets be Moral?”, p. 4}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{221} Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation Labour and Post-liberalism”, pp. 1-2.}
\end{footnotes}
abstraction.” And, for Milbank, the result of this flawed thinking on ‘the fall’, has been nothing less than the spawning of a theo-political disaster in the form of a modernist (hence rationalist), individualist, liberalist, capitalist credo crystallised in the writings of Protestant thinkers such as Grotius, Hobbes and Locke of the seventeenth century, which Milbank considers as basically “secular and materialistic”.

3.4.2 Summary Position Statement

Liberalism, for Milbank, is an ideology founded on a flawed Protestant perspective on human nature (on ‘the fall’), that celebrates individual desire in a way that makes human association or relationship one based on distrust, “since it is held that it is bound to be perversely motivated”. As he puts it: “liberalism assumes that we are basically self-interested, fearful, greedy and egotistic creatures, unable to see beyond our own selfish needs and instincts.” And, for Milbank, the implications of this thinking on the characterisation and consolidation of capitalism as an economic, political, social, cultural and theological epoch, have been immense. As he argues, because of this flawed interpretation of ‘the fall’ and thus of human nature, in capitalist societies:

order must either be imposed by an absolute ruler, or distilled from the balancing of vice with vice. Inherent justice therefore vanishes in favour of technological procedures for coordinating and turning into profit or political power our worst human instincts, the lowest common human denominators.

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224 Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation Labour”, p. 4.
226 Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation Labour”, p. 4.
For Milbank, then, as it had been for Figgis, Demant, and the authors of the *Return of Christendom*, the rise of the modern, secular, state and its ‘separation’ from the Church via the Reformation can in large part be explained as the means by which order was imposed in a capitalist context. That is, by a ‘Hobbesian’ style ‘absolute ruler’ in the form of a secular, omniscient state; a capitalist state often characterised by the “technological procedures for coordinating and turning into profit or political power our worst human instincts”, only subsequently to be softened at the edges by way of the welfare appendages after 1945. As Milbank puts it: “For what are the real motivations of the state after all (at least, after it has cast off any lingering odour of British Hegelianism)? Surely they are to secure its economic and military might, combined with the desire to keep the populace in order through a neo-pagan deployment of bread and circuses?”  

Therefore, for Milbank, the modern Welfare State is, in significant part, the means by which the capitalist ruling financial elites preserve their socio-economic hegemony. They do this by acquiescing in a centralised and limited parliamentary, representative system of government, and the redistribution of wealth via the handing out of ‘crumbs from the table’ to the oppressed populace by way of state-provided welfare programmes, in order to keep them quiescent.

For Milbank, moreover, the emergence and consolidation of the modern, secular, liberal-capitalist state has increasingly and regretfully marginalised the role of the Church in society to that of the private sphere. He thus argues: “The new, secular dominium could not … really tolerate a ‘political’ Church as a cohabitant. Hence, it was first necessary, with Marsiglio and Luther, to produce the paradox of a purely ‘suasive’

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227 Milbank, “The Big Society Depends on the Big Parish”, p. 4.
Church which must yet involve external state coercion for its self-government.”228 Unlike Temple, whose theology of the state had afforded it a “spiritual function” — it being a “servant and instrument of God” — for Milbank, by contrast, the state is a secular product of modernism, with no spiritual functionality. Needless to say, he is critical of middle axiom thinking that imposes limits on the extent to which the Church should intervene in the socio-political affairs of the state, whilst nevertheless acknowledging that: “If theology is to have the right to speak in the socio-economic domain, then it has to earn such a right.”229

Milbank’s views on the Reformation and the rise of capitalism are not shared by many writers and historians of the period, and a selection of these counter-perspectives is considered in the next section.

3.5 Alternative Perspectives to Milbank’s Thinking on the Reformation and the Rise of Capitalism

There are numerous alternative perspectives on the Reformation and the rise of capitalism, to that held by Milbank. Although the following can offer no more than a sample, they are nevertheless illustrative of grounds for contestation of his perspective. One, relating to the chronology of events, was developed by Amintore Fanfani, who, in his work of 1935, argued: “Europe was acquainted with capitalism before the Protestant revolt”, and thus cannot adequately be explained as being a result of it.230 This has been a theme other historians of the Reformation have since further developed such as Kurt

228 Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 19.
229 Milbank, The Future of Love, p. 76.
Samuelson and R. Stark. These historians often point to how the first bank, for example, was established in Venice in 1157, leading to the expansion of banking in Italy, a Catholic country, in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and hence prior to the ‘Protestant Revolution’ and the emergence of banking in Protestant countries. This is suggestive, they argue, of how the theology prohibiting usury was being undermined by a newly emerging commercial economy and its financial transactions in late medieval Italy. Indeed, it was this reality that had partly spawned what Tawney described as follows: “There was plenty of the ‘capitalist spirit’ in the fifteenth-century Venice and Florence, or in South Germany and Flanders, for the simple reason that these areas were the greatest commercial and financial centres of the age, though all were, at least nominally, Catholic.”

Another alternative perspective to that of Milbank’s, was produced by Jacob Viner. He argues that well into the eighteenth century, Scotland was a poor country, and his study attributes this in significant part to the economic teachings of the Scottish Calvinists, which he contends encouraged frugality and not acquisitiveness, and thus were antithetical to a capitalist spirit (ethos). His study of Scottish Calvinism, therefore, if one interprets it as being fairly typical of other strands of European Calvinism, is thus at odds with a view that Calvinism could have been a major reason for the rise of capitalism in

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A different line of interpretation has been advanced by Marxist historians of the Middle Ages such as Rodney Hilton. Hilton has argued that Catholic medieval Europe embodied a socially stratified society often characterised by class struggle between the exploited peasantry/serfs and the aristocracy, as evidenced by the Peasants’ Revolt in England in 1381 which was largely the result of high taxes stemming from the conflict with France during the Hundred Years War. Indeed, according to this perspective, Catholic medieval society was more akin to a proto-capitalist than to the “proto-socialist” society of the kind described by Milbank.235

Also of relevance are studies into global history that argue that previous interpretations of the rise of capitalism have been too Eurocentric, and thus incorrectly assumed that capitalism first arose in Europe, and that the reasons for its rise were unique to the European context of the time, such as the ‘Protestant Revolution’. For example, J.M. Blaut’s work argues that there were trade routes between Asia, the Middle East, the northern half of Africa, right up to the southern edges of Europe in the Middle Ages, that meant that in each of these there was a “process of increasing urbanisation and increasing long distance commodity movements which characterised the late middle ages throughout the hemisphere.”236 He thus argues it is an error to draw comparisons with Europe, Africa, India or China in the way that earlier studies of the rise of capitalism often have. Instead, he contends that attention should be given to enclaves of ‘proto-capitalism’ that were

evident in each global sphere.\textsuperscript{237} This line of argument is also supported by several other studies into the rise of capitalism undertaken from a global perspective.\textsuperscript{238}

One of these is the extensive study by Janet Abu-Lughod into the development of trade and economic output in the period before 1500 in ‘the Orient’.\textsuperscript{239} Another is by M.S. Alim, who argues: “The historical evidence indicates that wages in India and Egypt were comparable to those in the historically advanced countries … The leading industrial countries in 1750 had only a modest lead over lagging countries in manufacturing output per capita.” Hence, the thrust of his argument is that there was: “a near parity of economic development of western Europe and China, India and the Middle East as late as 1800”.\textsuperscript{240}

Another is the epic ‘bottom-up’ global account of the rise of capitalism produced by the Marxist historian, Chris Harman, which led him to conclude: “It was not ‘European values’ that created capitalism, but rather capitalism that created what we think of as European values. And capitalism did not arise because of some unique European occurrence, but as a product of the development of the forces and relations of production on a global scale.”\textsuperscript{241} These global studies of the rise of capitalism have implications for Milbank’s perspective on the Reformation and the reasons for the rise of capitalism that go far wider than the debate concerning the influence the ‘Protestant Revolution’ may have had. For they also impinge on his view that the emergence of the modern, Western

\textsuperscript{237} Blaut, \textit{The Colonizers}, p. 157.


\textsuperscript{240} M. S. Alim, “How Advanced was Europe in 1760 After All?”, \textit{Review of Radical Political Economy}, Vol. 32, No. 4, September 2000, p. 625.

state and its ‘separation’ from the Church that occurred in the early-modern period, can in significant part be accounted for as being necessary for the rise of capitalism.

What this handful of counter-perspectives reveals is that it can be reliably argued that Tawney’s analysis of religion and the rise of capitalism cannot possibly account in toto (and for some historians in large part) for the causes of such a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon as capitalism’s ascendance. Yet, with respect to Tawney’s analysis, there is a nuanced, bi-directional and balanced emphasis between the various contributing factors he argues were responsible, of which Protestant theology was only one (albeit a key one) which is less evident in Milbank’s perspective. Thus he states: “Religion influenced, to a degree which today is difficult to appreciate, men’s [sic] outlook on society. Economic and social changes acted powerfully on religion.”

Tawney’s analysis places more emphasis than Weber’s had and, it would appear, than Milbank’s does, on Protestantism having adopted the risk taking, profit-making ethic of capitalism both theologically and culturally, as much as (if not more than) the other way round, saying: “it seems a little artificial to talk as though capitalist enterprise could not appear till religious changes had produced a capitalist spirit. It would be equally true, and equally one-sided, to say that the religious changes were purely the result of economic movements”. For Tawney: “material and psychological changes went together, and of course the second reacted on the first.” He reconfirmed this view in his preface to the 1937 edition, stating: “Puritanism helped to mould the social order, but it was also itself increasingly moulded by it.”

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242 Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. xii.
244 Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 312.
245 Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. xiii.
work that has been amassed on this subject, not least because, for some historians, it has not been discredited by subsequent research, at least with respect to its central arguments. However, it is but one of many compelling and often mutually contradictory interpretations.

Yet it is Milbank’s historical perspective on the reasons for the rise and consolidation of capitalism that is foundational for his thinking on so much that has followed, not least his perspective on welfare and the Church.

However, there is another aspect to Milbank’s thinking on Anglican Socialism that now needs to be analysed, as it will help to locate the nature of his contribution to the Blue Labour project and its critique of the Welfare State model of delivery, and his affinity for much of the Red Tory critical perspective on the Welfare State advanced by Phillip Blond and covered in Part Three. For Milbank defines his Anglican Socialist perspective as: “Blue Socialism”, that is “socialism with a Burkean tinge.”

3.6 A Blue Socialism that is beyond Left and Right?

Burke had, of course, famously written in his Reflections: “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.” The importance that Burke attached to loving the “little platoons” that we belong to in society resonates with Milbank’s sense of the importance of small associations and other intermediate groups in society. These often

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define a sense of the local (the provincial) that is so important to his Christian social anthropology (that is, his Catholic sense of what community relations should embody). And it immediately suggests that the more traditional positioning of socialism since the French Revolution as being an ideology of ‘the Left’, is seen as less than adequate for Milbank, for the reasons set out below.\textsuperscript{248}

Milbank sees some areas of common ground between the ‘High Tory’ Anglican tradition and the ‘High Socialist’ Anglican tradition when compared to either liberalism or secular strands of socialism. He argues that these put Blue Socialism beyond what has traditionally been seen as left and right:

(1) Both have historically been opposed to liberalism and thus, from his perspective, can be seen as being “counter-enlightenment”.\textsuperscript{249}

(2) Both have strands within their respective traditions that have been wary of statist paths to tackling social problems at the expense of community based initiatives.\textsuperscript{250}

(3) Neither has argued in favour of overtly rationalist or, in the case of Marxism, scientifically materialist accounts of history or society, based on supposedly objective empirical knowledge.\textsuperscript{251}

(4) Crucially, both embody a sense of the reality of sin in human affairs, thus avoiding, as Milbank sees it, the danger of utopian tendencies in secular liberalism (such as displayed by Jean Jacques Rousseau,\textsuperscript{252} for example) or secular socialism (such as displayed by Marx and Engels).

\textsuperscript{248} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, p. xvii.

\textsuperscript{249} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, p. xvi.

\textsuperscript{250} For example, “Neoliberalism” and “Guild Socialism”.


\textsuperscript{252} Milbank’s view of Rousseau is: “there is another ‘romantic’ variant of liberalism that was invented in the late 18th Century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau … [He] inverted Thomas Hobbes by arguing that the isolated, natural individual is ‘good’, lost in contemplative delight at the world around him, satisfied with simple pleasures and provisions.” See Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation Labour”, p. 2.
Both have distinctly Christian moral underpinnings unlike secular versions of liberalism such as that espoused by Jeremy Bentham,\textsuperscript{253} for example, and secular versions of socialism such as that advocated by Marx and Engels.\textsuperscript{254}

Therefore, for Milbank, aspects of both of these anti-liberal political traditions can and should inform the thinking necessary for forging a new paradigm of socialist theory and praxis for the twenty-first century along the lines he calls “Blue Socialism” (see 3.2). He sees this Blue Socialism as a possible political path towards the goal of achieving a post-liberal world; one that, from his perspective, would be underpinned by a Catholic theological-political outlook,\textsuperscript{255} with the Church of England playing a more prominent role in the affairs of the nation, including in the provision of welfare, as part of a strategy Milbank and Pabst describe as: “Restoring the State as also the Church”.\textsuperscript{256}

Blue Socialism being a relatively new term on the political horizon is thus an evolving body of thought. It has only partly been developed by Milbank, and is a term, therefore, which can be understood with different levels of emphasis. However, there are common elements to this thinking that attempt to fuse ‘One Nation’ Burkean Tory thinking with ‘non-statist’ socialist thinking within sections of the Labour Party which Milbank has helped to shape, of which the following are key:

\begin{itemize}
\item[(1)] It is highly critical of neoliberalism, both with regard to its economic and philosophical underpinning and its global socio-political consequences since the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{257}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{253} See, for example, J. Bentham, \textit{Defence of Usury: Shewing the Impolity of the Present Legal Restraints on the Terms of Pecuniary Bargains in a Series of Letters to Adam Smith} (1787), in which he defends usury on the grounds of what he terms liberty, that is: “the liberty of making one’s own terms in money-bargains”. Available at: \url{http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/bentham/usury} (accessed on 2 November 2016).

\textsuperscript{254} For Marx and Engels’ critique of religion, see, for example, \textit{The Communist Manifesto} (1848).

\textsuperscript{255} See Milbank & Pabst, \textit{The Politics of Virtue}.

\textsuperscript{256} Milbank & Pabst, \textit{The Politics of Virtue}, pp. 230-240.

\textsuperscript{257} Geary & Pabst (eds), \textit{Blue Labour}, pp. 28ff.
(2) It is highly critical of the overreliance by post-war Labour Governments on the state as a vehicle for advancing democratic socialism via the Welfare State model. Indeed, in this regard, its thinking would chime more with that of Demant, in his assertion that: “the state can never be an object of emotional attachment which could replace a man’s [sic] roots in home, property, neighbourhood and craft association”.258

(3) It is highly critical of the Welfare State as a means of providing welfare, seeing it as too centralist (thus insufficiently associational in comparison with the voluntary sector), excessively bureaucratic, impersonal and over-prescriptive in its universalist approach to the provision of welfare. By contrast, it advocates an alternative approach to the provision of welfare, based increasingly on empowering intermediate level community groups and associations in society (a key one being the Church), with more responsibility for areas that since 1945 have been seen more as the preserve of the Welfare State, including education, health, support to the unemployed, shelter for the homeless and poverty avoidance generally.259

(4) It is critical of the overreliance it considers New Labour placed on market mechanisms as a means of reconciling supply and demand in the interests of the citizen, including the management of state welfare functions. Instead it prefers to engage with ideas from guild socialism and continental corporatism (that is: increased government intervention in the economy underpinned by moral precepts such as just price thinking) as possible alternative options.260

(5) It places a greater emphasis on the importance of Family, Faith and Flag as being key Blue Socialist foundational values, in contrast to how they have traditionally been considered as Tory ones: emphasising reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity as key for shaping this new vision.261

(6) It considers the traditional internationalist positions often adopted by British post-war Labour Governments on domestic and geopolitical matters, including immigration control, may have been insufficiently nuanced, and thus at the expense of a national sense of pride that citizens want to feel about their cultural identity and national achievements.262

258 Milbank, “The Big Society Depends on the Big Parish” and in “The Blue Labour Dream.” See also, Demant, Religion and the Decline, p. 95.
259 This theme is covered extensively in Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour.
262 D. Goodhart, “Globalisation, Nation States and the Economics of Migration”, in Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour, pp. 121-140.
As this study is focused on Milbank’s influence on reshaping the Church of England’s strategy on welfare, it is not necessary to analyse each of these elements, though element number (3) will be covered in 4.4–4.6 on the aspects that directly relate to the research question.

3.7 The Influence of Catholic Social Teaching on Blue Socialist Thinking and on Milbank’s Post-liberal Vision

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been a significant theoretical influence on some of those developing ‘Blue Socialist’ thinking, and is particularly prominent in Milbank’s most recent work with Adrian Pabst on “the politics of virtue”. As Milbank puts it elsewhere:

However, one needs also to recognize a wider family resemblance with many variants of Christian social teaching which categorically stress subsidiarity (the distribution of money and power to appropriate levels, not necessarily the lowest) and the break-up of central sovereignty through the operation of intermediary associations.

Two key elements of Catholic Social Teaching commended by Milbank as being consistent with Blue Socialist thinking, are as follows:

(1) A theory of labour value (stemming in large part from the works of Aquinas) that sees labour as more than merely physical space and time,

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263 Milbank & Pabst, The Politics of Virtue, pp. 70, 86, 135 and 142.
265 Glasman, “The Good Society, Catholic Social Thought and the Politics of the Common Good”, in Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour, p. 20.
in contrast to the way many see the impersonal neoliberal market mechanism, thus placing more emphasis on the experience, skill, expertise and human dignity required to produce a commodity when determining its exchange value.

(2) A body of thought based around the concept of subsidiarity that places great emphasis on the principle that a central authority (which can be interpreted as the state) should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level.\textsuperscript{267}

It can be argued CST thus offers a potential alternative both to unmediated statist collectivism and unfettered non-statist individualism by way of what Glasman describes as: “The reintroduction of institutional mediation” — this being the “task of contemporary statecraft”.\textsuperscript{268} Indeed, in this regard, the Blue Socialist perspective on the role of the state appears to be close to that of the English Pluralist tradition — to mediate between groups and associations in civil society and in large part as considered necessary by them.

3.8 Criticisms of Milbank’s Blue Socialist Perspective

In what follows I will provide five criticisms of Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking as it relates to the categorisations he uses, which are illustrative of the wider problematic with his Blue Socialist outlook — an outlook that underpins much of his thinking on the provision of welfare.

One of these is a distinction he draws between two branches of the socialist

\textsuperscript{267} On subsidiarity, see Pius XI, \textit{Quadragesimo Anno}, an encyclical issued by the Pope on 15 May 1931. Available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html (accessed on 5 January 2017). Essentially, subsidiarity is the principle that central institutions such as those comprising the modern state’s administrative apparatus, should only perform those functions that cannot be performed at a more local level.

\textsuperscript{268} Glasman, “The Good Society”, p. 20.
tradition. Firstly, the Fabian and Marxist strand, which he categorises as “the social/cultural liberalism of the left” and the other side of the same coin as “the economic-political liberalism” of the right.\textsuperscript{269} And, secondly, the contrasting Christian ‘conservative romantic’ socialist strand derived in part from High Anglican/Tory lineage (John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, F.D. Maurice, J.N. Figgis, et al),\textsuperscript{270} that he considers as being more authentically ethical. Yet it can be argued that Marxist and Fabian strands of socialism (themselves so different from one another in so many respects) were more a reaction \textit{against} the strands of economic, political, liberal individualist philosophy that emerged in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (their scepticism of Adam Smith’s unfettered free marketism being just one example). For Milbank’s definition of liberalism is so broad as to include thinkers as diverse as Hobbes, Smith, Rousseau and Marx, all categorised with the same liberal ‘umbrella’ term. Thus, the question immediately arises: how can Hobbes, for example, with his more negative view of human nature that provides the underpinning for the need for a social contract theory that affords legitimacy of authority of the state over the individual, in preference to the alternative barbaric and anarchic state of nature, be credibly categorised in the same way as Marx? Marx had a more optimistic view of human nature and a vision of a stateless communist society, without need for any hierarchical forms of authority. The answer, for Milbank, is that they both represent strands of modernist thinking underpinned by \textit{rationalist} philosophical assumptions.\textsuperscript{271} But it can be queried whether that is sufficient to categorise them in a way that underrepresents their obvious differences as political

\textsuperscript{269} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, pp. 242-263.
\textsuperscript{270} Milbank, “The Downward Spiral”.
\textsuperscript{271} Milbank & Pabst, \textit{The Politics of Virtue}. This theme is covered at length as an underpinning for their definition of liberalism.
philosophies.

A second line of criticism, again relating to categorisation, is that socialism, both as a philosophical and historical tradition, has tended to place a desire to achieve greater levels of equality in society — often by way of establishing human rights via the passage of legislation — as being a key priority. By contrast, Burke argued that: “Political equality is against nature. Social equality is against nature. Economic equality is against nature. The idea of equality is subversive to order, it is a monstrous fiction.”

Indeed, he placed great emphasis on "an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity." In this regard, his scathing critique of the French Revolution is an attack on abstract rights over inherited rights, and has since been seen as a key plank of conservative political thought, and thus to be in direct opposition to the socialist pursuit of greater levels of equality in society. Yet Burke’s perspective on equality is in significant part the underpinning for Milbank’s “Blue Socialism with a Burkean tinge,” with its unambiguous critique of statist redistribution that evidently is not confined to material wealth, but also pertains to legislative state-established and enforced human rights, of which Milbank has been unambiguous in his criticism — seeing them as a product of liberalist individualism.

For this reason Burke’s perspective on equality and rights does not sit easily with those who identify democratic socialism with the pursuit of greater levels of equality as a human right (such as those in the Tawney

274 Burke, Reflections.
tradition) by way of advancing an egalitarian model of social justice via the passage of legislation, and often in part delivered via a welfare state model of redistribution.

A third line of criticism relating to categorisation pertains to Milbank’s novel attempt to fuse Burke’s anti-rationalist thinking with socialism, a strand of political philosophy that has been shaped more by an Aristotelian affinity for rationalist solutions to societal woes. Indeed, it is Burke’s preference for experience and tradition over rationalistic theorising as the guide for political governance, that is a key reason why his thinking has been the bedrock for so much conservative political philosophy ever since. For example, Michael Oakeshott’s conservative critique of rationalism owes much to Burke as he acknowledged; that is, his rejection of the idea that you can impose a plan on people and make state institutions the primary vehicle for delivering a better society. By contrast, socialism has often emphasised the need for rationalistic planning in economic, political and social spheres. This has been in the interests of the perceived collective needs of society as a whole, and especially those of the working class. Indeed, it is this emphasis on planning that has often been seen by socialist writers in the Marxist, Fabian and wider labour traditions, as the best means of bringing about a society characterised by a fair and equitable distribution of its resources. Often this has been via collective control over of its means of production, distribution and exchange and thus the workings of the market, or, alternatively, via a Welfare Statist model of delivery premised on a mixed economy as per the Fabian model. This emphasis that socialism has placed on rationalism thus calls into question the extent to which Milbank’s “socialism with a Burkean tinge” can credibly be categorised as being socialist. This is not, of course, to

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suggest that all socialist writers have placed the *same level of need* for rationalistic planning as necessary or desirable for a transition from a capitalist to a socialist society.

George Orwell, for example, a writer who Milbank admires, was more cautious of this approach, perceiving the danger of a totalitarian outcome. But it is to suggest that a *level of rationalistic planning* can be seen as essential to socialist thinking *and praxis*, in a way that is antithetical to Burke’s philosophy.

A fourth line of criticism relates to the way Milbank categorises Blue Socialism as being a strand of the tradition that is centred on religious (essentially Christian) moral underpinning *in contrast* to the way the post-war democratic socialist left, allegedly, “increasingly understands itself as liberal, and frequently, in addition, as atheist and anti-religious”, and that an opposition to the free market thus “can only be ‘conservative’.”

The emergence of Red Labour under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn (see 3.2) as a more dominant grouping in the Labour Party since 2015, does not appear to accord with such a categorisation. It is not apparent how Red Labour supporters — unambiguously opposed to unfettered free market economics — regard themselves as being either liberal or anti-religious; neither is it apparent how that strand of the Labour Party tradition has ever regarded itself as such. Certainly there are Red Labour supporters who do not have a

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278 Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation”, pp. 4-5.
279 He insisted: “My novel Nineteen Eighty-Four is not intended as an attack on socialism, or on the British Labour party, but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable.” It was rationalistic, centralised, state planning of the economy that he railed against, not democratic socialist philosophy *per se*. The above quote is from a letter to F.A. Henson, 16 June 1949. Cited in A.L. McKay, “Wrong about Orwell being on the Right”, August 2012. Available at: https://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/28/wrong-about-orwell-being-on-the-right/ (accessed on 25 November 2019.)
281 For example, consider the Methodist influences on the emergence of trade unions and the British Labour Party. For a good introduction to this aspect, see N. Scotland, *Methodism and the English Labour Movement 1800 to 1906*. Available at: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anvil/14-1_036.pdf (accessed on 25 January 2017).
religious affiliation or belief; but that does not imply they are anti-religious, with connotations of intolerance towards those with a religious belief, and Milbank has not provided any evidence to the contrary.

A fifth line of criticism relating to categorisation is Milbank’s view, shared by other Blue Labour advocates, that Blue Socialism connects with an interpretation of British labour history that Pabst describes as one in which Labour roots had “much less to do with Victorian liberalism than with High Toryism and the cooperative movement”, and: “Labour has always been conservative in this sense of a genuine popular rootedness and belief in the best of the British legacy.”282 This is also the perspective argued by Glasman:

The founders of the labour movement understood the logic of capitalism as based upon the maximisation of returns on investment, and the threat this posed to their lives, livelihoods and environment, but they did not embrace class war, and clung stubbornly to an idea of a common life with their rulers and exploiters.283

Blue Socialist advocates such as Milbank, Pabst and Glasman thus invite us to interpret British labour history in a way that is problematic, owing to the popular labour struggles in British labour history that ‘High Toryism’ tended to oppose. Take the Chartist Movement (1838–1857) as one example of a predominantly working class movement for political reform and increased democracy in Victorian Britain. Robert Saunders’ study provides evidence of substantial fear held by the political Whig and Tory elites of the Chartism threat.284 Likewise, the study into Chartism by Michael J. Turner, which

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282 Geary & Pabst (eds), Blue Labour, p. 5.
focused on local politics in Manchester and concluded that the movement challenged and undermined the old Tory Anglican power elite which it opposed.285 And, in a similar vein, the study by Emma Griffin, which forcefully argues that such a radical movement of millions of working men and women, with no experience of ‘bourgeois’ civic engagement, could not have happened without a growing sense of anti-establishment class consciousness, and a resultant growing and radical working-class solidarity.286 These studies illustrate the difficulties of interpreting the Chartist struggle through the lens of the Blue Socialist perspective on British labour history; on the contrary, there is compelling evidence that Chartism was seen as dangerously subversive by the British establishment, including the Tory elite.

In a similar vein, it is not clear how one is to interpret a British labour struggle such as the 1889 London Dock Strike, key to the formation of the trade union movement, as being consistent with the values and aspirations of ‘High Toryism’. Over 100,000 workers took part in that strike for better working conditions and fairer wages; a labour struggle that was summed up by John Elliot Burns, a key organiser of the dispute, in the following terms:

Still more important perhaps, is the fact that labour of the humbler kind has shown its capacity to organise itself; its solidarity; its ability. The labourer has learned that combination can lead him to anything and everything. He has tasted success as the immediate fruit of combination, and he knows that the harvest he has just reaped is not the utmost he can look to gain. Conquering himself, he has learned

that he can conquer the world of capital whose generals have been the most ruthless of his oppressors.\footnote{J. Burns “The Great Strike”, \textit{New Review}, Vol. 1, No. 5, October 1889, p. 40-82. Available at: http://www.portcities.org.uk/london/server/show/ConNarrative.77/chapterId/1868/The-Great-Dock-Strike-of-1889.html (accessed on 27 January 2017).}

The outcome was not only a victory for the strikers, but has generally been regarded as pivotal to the events that led to the formation of the Labour Party in 1900.\footnote{A. Thorpe, \textit{A History of the British Labour Party} (London: Palgrave Macmillan, Third edition, 2008).} We begin to see, then, how even making brief reference to just two of the major movements of popular protest in nineteenth century British labour history, reveals the Blue Socialist perspective as being at variance with other substantial historical accounts and interpretations, as well as with their evidential underpinning.

What these five criticisms of Milbank’s perspective reveal is that the novel categorisations adopted by him that underpin much of his Blue Socialist outlook result in a portrayal of British labour history and its philosophical influences, as well as the part played by Marxist, Fabian and, indeed, by some Anglican Socialists within these popular protests and struggles, that is inconsistent with much of the more mainstream historiographical interpretations and their evidential underpinning — this being just one example of a wider tendency in Milbank’s overall interpretation of history. Of course, that, in itself, for some, may not invalidate his perspective on British labour history or, indeed, his approach to the study of history \emph{per se}; but it does mean that for one to be convinced of its interpretation requires accommodating his novel categorisations which are by no means immune to challenge when one examines the historical evidence.

However, it is Milbank’s interpretation of history and his critique of capitalism that is so
indebted to it, that has, in significant part, led him to offer alternatives to it that are summarised below.

3.9 Milbank’s Blue Socialist, Post-liberal, Civil Economy Alternative to Capitalism

The Blue Socialist, post-liberal, civil economy alternative to capitalism that Milbank has put forward via the Blue Labour project and since, is premised on the following — that there needs to be much greater emphasis on pre-distribution over statist re-distribution. That is: “an attempt to produce a just economy in the first place as a major vehicle of material equity”, rather than by way of statist re-distribution (e.g. welfare) initiatives, as a way of mitigating the worst effects of an unjust economy. From Milbank’s perspective, a greater focus on pre-distribution would achieve: “the removal of many people from welfare dependence — something that neo-liberal policies only create.”

Milbank thus sees the civil economy option as offering an alternative both to Keynesian redistributionist ‘statism’ and to neoliberal anti-redistributionism; and the emphasis it places on the need for pre-distribution over redistribution is critical for grasping his perspective for bringing about a diminished need for welfare in society per se, as well as for a diminished Welfare Statist model of delivery when it is still required, in preference to a church provided one. He succinctly lists the following six components as necessary for a civil economy alternative in an essay on the Blue Labour project:

(1) The sharing of risk in all financial transactions — including house mortgages — between lenders and borrowers, investors and owners, shareholders and managers, employers and employees.

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(2) The rewriting of company law to demand statements of social purpose and profit sharing as conditions of trading.

(3) A new public institutional ‘trust’ for the pooling of technological knowledge to replace the current patenting system.

(4) Ethical as well as economic negotiation of wages, prices and share-values amongst owners, workers, shareholders and consumers who would all be given real political and economic stakes in every enterprise.

(5) Arrangements for passing through vocational training and membership of various recognised professional vocational associations, encouraging an honourable ethos, being made conditions of entry to business practice.

(6) A contributory welfare system whose mutualism would preclude any need for means-testing to ensure a safety net. Such a ‘civil economy’ alternative system to that of liberal capitalism, would be underpinned by a Catholic theology of social reciprocity (“socialism of the gift”), and have the further merit of encouraging people to take greater risks in business in the knowledge that, if they failed, not all their gains would be lost.

The result is a Blue Socialist, civil economy, post-liberal alternative that would lead to an outcome that Milbank and Pabst describe as follows:

Overwhelmingly, it ties economic profit to ethical and social purpose, and seeks to ethicise exchange. In the same spirit, it replaces the separation of risk from reward with risk and profit-sharing models. In both respects, it publically requires an economic pursuit of honourable practice and genuine benefit rather than just abstract wealth and power.²⁹³

Indeed, for Milbank, his alternative would restore a link between politics and economics that he considers has been lost in the contemporary neo-liberal paradigm, and hence that acts as an impediment for restoring a sense of the Christian concept of the common good, and a means of delivering it.

Clearly, this is a wide-ranging and ambitious set of proposals that has significant theo-political implications. In chapter four, these will be analysed and critiqued as they relate to Milbank’s critical perspective on the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector,

and the Church of England’s contribution to the provision of welfare in the post-war period. However, before then, there are a number of conclusions stemming from the analysis in chapter three.

3.10 Conclusions

It has been argued that Milbank’s perspective on the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Church and the modern state, and Protestantism and the causes of the rise of capitalism, sits within the English Pluralist Christendom strand of the tradition. In this respect at least, we can see how much of his thinking is derivative, owing a lot to those who came before him in that tradition, particularly Figgis and Demant. We have seen how his criticism of state-provided welfare in a liberal capitalist context, stems from his view that the Church’s role in its provision has been circumscribed by the rise of the modern, secular state and its ‘separation’ from the Church, and, more latterly, by the state’s welfare appendages. The result has been an increasing relegation of the role of the Church to that of the private sphere — a process that Milbank thinks has been compounded by Temple’s theology of the state and, most specifically, his thinking on middle axioms. As we saw at 2.6, this was a view that Nicholls also held, and is core to Milbank’s thinking that the Church of England must abandon that approach if it is to rediscover its original purpose, which is to be the “kingdom of God in embryo” in a re-established but contemporary vision of a Catholic Christendom for a post-liberal era. At 4.5, this perspective will be revisited when we examine Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision of a post-liberal alternative role for the Church of England in the provision of welfare in the twenty-first century.
In chapter three it has been argued that Milbank’s historical perspective on religion and the rise of capitalism in Western Europe is open to challenge, and places too much emphasis on ideas as being the shaper of historical events. This partly reflects Milbank’s postmodern unease with positivist, a posteriori research methodologies and his scepticism of their epistemological merits — social science being one example\(^{294}\) — which is also reflected in his thinking on the writing of history, which can be located in the anti-historical determinism school. For Milbank, the writing of history can legitimately be approached, at least in part, via an a priori commitment to adopting a “romantic” perspective on history, to counter what he describes as liberalism’s tendency to “rewrite history in its own image”. It does this by “augmenting our tendencies to pursue wealth and prestige instead of human and divine love.” The result is that “history is retrospectively understood as ‘horrible’”. Instead, history should be written in a way that emphasises the “positive human good”, as “life as such depends upon a bedrock of gift-exchange and it develops in time through the astonishing and gratuitous irruption of charisms.” Thus, for Milbank: “It follows that a romantic view of history is more realistic than a cynical one”.\(^{295}\) However, as shall be evidenced in Chapter Four, an a priori commitment to adopting a “romantic” view of history does not always result in a convincing interpretation of history. This is a point I will return to in 6.2.6 when reaching conclusions to my lines of argument.

Also, it has been argued that Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking, that categorises political theorists with widely divergent perspectives as liberals, largely because their thinking has been shaped by post-medieval, modernist/rationalist philosophical

\(^{294}\) Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 49-101.

\(^{295}\) Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation”, p. 5
assumptions, is less than convincing. It does not do justice to the sophistication and divergence of their political philosophies. Four other criticisms of Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking has also been provided that are illustrative of how, on theoretical and empirical grounds, it is open to challenge. Its marginalisation of growing working-class consciousness in England, characterised by growing hostility to the emerging industrial capitalist class since the late eighteenth century, as well as to aristocratic power and privilege, does not accord with other substantial archival based studies of the history of popular labour protest in late eighteenth century and nineteenth century England, such as E.P. Thompson’s study of the *Making of the English Working Class* and several others.²⁹⁶ The Chartist struggle (1838–1857) and the 1889 London Dock Strike are two examples illustrative of this point.

However, the above analysis provides a platform on which we can now analyse and critique Milbank’s perspective on the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, and the Church of England’s role in the provision of welfare in the post-war period in chapter four, as well as his Blue Socialist, post-liberal perspective on the role he thinks the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare.

CHAPTER FOUR

A HISTORICALLY BASED CRITIQUE OF JOHN MILBANK’S THINKING ON THE BRITISH WELFARE STATE VIS-À-VIS THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND’S POST-WAR ROLE IN THE PROVISION OF WELFARE

4.1 Introduction

We saw in chapter three how John Milbank’s English Pluralist Christendom perspective on history is foundational to his theo-political outlook. It is hardly surprising, then, that this perspective has also shaped his critical interpretation of the impact the British Welfare State has had on the voluntary sector, and on the Church of England in the provision of welfare. Therefore, before we analyse his endorsement of the ‘Big Society’ project in Part Three, and the influence his thinking had on shaping the Church of England’s response to it, it is necessary for us to examine whether his perspective on the history of the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector providers of welfare, including the Church of England, is consistent with the historical evidence (RG 4). We also need to begin to assess critically his proposed Blue Socialist, post-liberal alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare (RG 4). Therefore, the critique that follows has been structured with these two purposes in mind. It will cover:

(1) Milbank’s critical perspective on the history of the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector providers of welfare, and the way he feels it was at the expense of those intermediary level welfare providers such as church organisations, and resulted in a decline in church observance and affiliation in Britain in the post-war period that he wants to see reversed. The critique
will cover the period up to the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in mid-2010 (4.4) — the period since then will be covered in Part Three.

(2) His Blue Socialist alternative vision of the role he argues the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare, as central to his case for establishing a new post-liberal polity for achieving the common good in England in the twenty-first century (4.5).

Before we embark on this critique, however, there will be a section on definitions (4.2) and a section on Milbank’s perspective on welfare and the Church (4.3). At the end of the chapter there will be conclusions (4.6). In keeping with the methodological approach underpinning the first three chapters, the critique will draw heavily on the historical evidence for its support.

### 4.2 Definitions

A difficulty with examining the interface between the British Welfare State and the so-called voluntary sector providers of welfare, is that the latter can be described in different ways. This reflects the diversity in the sector regarding *inter alia*: size; scope of activity; funding streams; whether local, national or international; whether faith based or secular; and whether wholly or partly reliant on volunteers (this is not an all-encompassing list). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the terminology used to describe this sector has been varied: philanthropic, voluntary, community, intermediate, non-governmental, charity, being six terms in current use. New Labour governments attempted to overcome this difficulty by using the term ‘Third Sector’, and ascribing it to those bodies which were neither state nor market (private) sector organisations, and this is a term that John Milbank has also used.²⁹⁷ However, though this term has not completely disappeared from use, it has not

²⁹⁷ For example, Milbank, “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”, p. 2.
featured much in political language since 2010. For this study I intend to describe it as the voluntary sector, as this is the term often used by social historians.298 It can be defined as that which encompasses not-for-profit organisations such as: social enterprises; co-ops; charities; mutuals; faith-based groups; churches; trade unions; and a variety of pressure groups. Voluntary sector organisations can have salaried employees but are often, at least in part, staffed by volunteers. Their funding is usually via voluntary donations or state grants, and is the sector between the state and the citizen that is separate to that of the private (market) sector.

4.3 John Milbank’s Perspective on Welfare and the Church

We saw in chapter three how Milbank is highly critical of Temple’s perspective on the liberal capitalist state, and the role Temple envisaged for the Church in relation to it. He argues:

Temple’s middle axiom approach … tends to divorce goal from means and thus be content to achieve an abstract end in the impersonal utilitarian way … Only a revived Christendom can possibly resist this, because it is only in that structure that genuine western principles of constitutional liberty and equity have been forged — and atheism has inevitably eroded them.299

We saw at 3.4 that Milbank’s thinking on “gift-exchange” as the outworking of a Catholic theology of social reciprocity is foundational to his perspective on history.

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Unsurprisingly, it also features in his perspective on work in a contemporary context. For Milbank:

gift exchange or social reciprocity … would transform politics and the economy away from abstract standards and values associated with the prevailing technocratic managerialism towards the dignity of the person and human flourishing within a common polity based on a shared ethos of work.\textsuperscript{300}

We see from this quote that Milbank’s perspective on work is \textit{highly values based}, consistent with Catholic Social Teaching, which, as we saw at 3.7, sees labour as more than merely physical space and time. Labour has to be managed in a way that is consistent with the needs of persons \textit{as persons}, both with respect to the giver and receiver in the gift exchange. For Milbank, then, any form of organisational thinking that does not place ethical values pertaining to the dignity of the person (e.g. caring, honesty, fairness, integrity, loyalty, confidentiality, reciprocity) and a desire for human flourishing at its core, cannot be Catholic, and is unlikely to foster a vocational ethos.

And, unlike Temple who saw the modern state as having a “spiritual function” and being “a servant and instrument of God for the preservation of justice and the promotion of human welfare”,\textsuperscript{301} Milbank is of the view that the Church is better equipped than the secular Welfare State to ensure that these values are at the core of the work necessary for the delivery of welfare. This is evident in his statement: “to imagine that the state and not the Church is the proper supplier of mercy, education and health is, quite simply, a form of practical atheism, of sheer disbelief”; rather, it is “only religion that is likely to care for


the person *as person* — as someone possessed of an immortal spirit who is therefore “more” than any collectivist whole”.\footnote{Milbank, “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”, p. 4.} For Milbank, then, the secularity of the modern, liberal-capitalist state and its welfare appendages means that it is not adequately equipped to care for the person *as person*: that is, as someone possessing a spiritual dimension that defines them in a way that secular, statist modes of welfare delivery cannot adequately cater for or properly address — only the Church can do that.

But what does this mean in practical terms for the Church and its role in the provision of welfare in twenty-first century England? Milbank argues that owing to its unique parochial system that “helps to structure and coordinate local life in diverse ways”, the Church of England provides “a ready-made platform for a great extension of such involvement in the future”.\footnote{Milbank & Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, p. 238.} But to maximise its potential it needs:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a shift in direction away from the Temple legacy of long reports telling the Government what to do … to a more authentic radicalism in which the church gets involved in all kinds of processes of welfare, medicine, banking, education, the arts, business, technology, ecology and more, and seeks to transform them in the joint name of reciprocity and virtue.\footnote{Milbank, “What a Christian View of Society says about Poverty”, p. 5.}
\end{itemize}

He concludes his argument with words that outline what he believes will be the result of this radicalism for the Church: “More than ever this is what the church now needs to do. And this may also prove the secret to increasing church attendance — for providing the consequences of Eucharistic sharing will surely lead many more to share in the Eucharist itself”.\footnote{Milbank, “What a Christian View of Society says about Poverty”, p. 5.}

Previously, the historical and ideological lineage of Milbank’s view, that the modern, secular, liberal-capitalist “omnicompetent” state, with its post-war welfare
appendages had marginalised the role of the Church in the provision of welfare, was identified (3.4.2). One consequence of this marginalisation, according to Milbank, has been that the Church has experienced a period of considerable decline, both with respect to observance and affiliation. As he puts it:

If Britain has become secularised over the past century or so, it has to do with two distinct yet complementary developments: first, the expansion of both state and market in hitherto autonomous, more mutually governed areas (including education, health, welfare, the family, etc.); secondly, the retreat of the Church from its traditional involvement in these social, charitable, educational and cultural activities.  

To reverse that decline, Milbank advocates a reclaiming of lost ground by the Church in the provision of welfare, in tandem with a reduced level of state-managed provision—hence his support for the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010, and his call for the Church of England to embrace it. That aspect of Milbank’s thought will be addressed in 4.5. Before then, 4.4 will offer a critique of Milbank’s perspective on the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, for the period from 1945 to the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in mid-2010.

4.4 John Milbank’s Perspective on the History of the British Welfare State vis-à-vis the Voluntary Sector: 1945–2010

Milbank describes the Welfare State in the following terms:

the 1945 and the 1979 welfare settlements represent two sides of the same coin: the former shifted the emphasis towards nationalisation while the latter accentuated privatisation – but both promoted impersonal universalism and predictability. In different ways, both relied on the strong state and centralised

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power at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation. Crucially, both further fragmented mutual organisation.\textsuperscript{307}

In this quote Milbank perceives the Welfare State as an entity that promotes “impersonal universalism and predictability”. By this he means it offers an impersonal delivery of welfare to its recipients. He further contends this is partly the result of an overly prescriptive universality in the design of its interventions, meaning that they are not always sufficiently tailored (bespoke) and holistic in their design and delivery to meet the specific needs of individuals (emotional, spiritual, as well as physical and practical), in contrast to the way he considers voluntary sector providers of welfare often are. This is a view that, to an extent, chimes with writers such as Digby Anderson, Brian Griffiths, Immanuel Jacobovits, Jonathan Sacks, Roger Hadley, Stephen Hatch and Ivan Illich (this is not an exhaustive list),\textsuperscript{308} who have been critical of the way they perceive the rise of professionalism and managerialism in state welfare provision, as prone to running counter to values such as self-reliance, responsibility, duty, localism, virtue and charity, in deference to an overreliance on the judgement of professionals, and on an impersonal state bureaucracy (as they perceive it) as the provider of welfare.

We also see from this quote that Milbank sees the British Welfare State as being “at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation”, having encroached on areas of activity that were previously undertaken by the voluntary sector.

\textsuperscript{307} Milbank & Pabst, “Post-liberal politics and the alternative”, p. 90.

And, crucially, he sees it, whether under Labour or Conservative administrations, as a major cause of what he describes as “fragmented mutual organisation”. By this he means it has regrettably fragmented the intermediate level groups and organisations in British civil society that had shouldered the burden of providing welfare prior to 1945 — church welfare organisations being one example — and thus has weakened them. These concerns will be critiqued in what follows under the three categories listed below.

(1) Governmental welfare policy and its interface with the voluntary sector before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ initiative

Governmental welfare policy is only one aspect of the history of voluntary sector provision of welfare in Britain since 1945; it does not, therefore, tell the full story. Nevertheless, it is an important part of the story, as it will throw light on whether Milbank is accurate in his criticisms of the Welfare State in relation to the impact it has had on the voluntary sector’s provision of welfare. In 4.4.1–4.4.4 I will consider it with respect to the post-war Labour and Conservative administrations.

(2) Increased governmental financing of the voluntary sector, and the impact it had on its delivery of welfare before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ initiative

Milbank argues that the Welfare State changed in character from its original intended purpose in ways that he is critical of, with a greater level of statist, governmental control over the voluntary sector evident from the 1970s onwards, stemming in part from increased state sector financing of the voluntary sector, with negative consequences on the way it has provided welfare. This will be examined in 4.4.5–4.4.7.

(3) The alleged retarding effect that Milbank argues the British Welfare State has had on church observance and affiliation
Milbank endorses the perspective advanced by the historian Frank Prochaska, who argues that the waning of Christianity in Britain and the growth of governmental involvement in the provision of welfare were closely intertwined. It is an interpretation that is open to challenge, as we shall in 4.4.8–4.4.9.

4.4.1 Governmental welfare policy and its interface with the voluntary sector. A ‘Big Society’ before the ‘Big Society’? The Welfare State and the Labour Administrations’ welfare policy towards the voluntary sector

Those who take a negative view of the post-war Labour administrations’ welfare policy and its interface with the voluntary sector such as Milbank, often quote Richard Crossman, who, in a speech delivered in 1973, lends support to this line of thinking. Crossman had been Secretary of State for Social Services from 1968 to 1970 in Harold Wilson’s administration, and his recollection of Labour’s approach to welfare in the post-war years was that we all “disliked the do-good volunteer and wanted to see him replaced by professionals and trained administrators in the socialist welfare state of which we all dreamed. Philanthropy to us was an odious expression of social oligarchy and churchy bourgeois attitudes.”

Certainly there is some evidence that within the post-war Labour Party’s rank and file, there existed elements that disliked the voluntary agencies, seeing them as inadequate to the task of achieving the democratic socialist society to which they aspired, and these views did not disappear overnight as a result of the creation of the Welfare State. However, they were not, and never have been, the views held by a

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309 See, for example, F. Prochaska, Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
majority in the Party’s leadership, and historians such as Nicholas Deakin and Justin Davis Smith have adduced evidence to suggest that a more nuanced picture of the history of Labour’s post-war welfare policy and its interface with the voluntary sector to that displayed by Crossman, is both necessary and defensible.312

We saw at 1.4 how Temple had considered the need for a balance between state sector and intermediate sector contributions to the provision of welfare, and saw them as complementary. Indeed, Temple envisaged a welfare state as becoming “the Community of Communities — or rather the administrative organ of the community”313 — not a replacement for the community. From Temple’s perspective, then, there was no reason why state and voluntary sector provision of welfare could not coexist and be mutually advantageous. The same view was also held by Beveridge, whose work of 1948, Voluntary Action makes clear.314 This report primarily concerned itself with two themes. One was to recognise and promote the value of philanthropic organisations and their contribution to making life better for the less fortunate in society, such as unmarried mothers, prisoners, the disabled, and in support of national heritage, the arts and the environment. This was something that Attlee’s welfare state policies had neither discouraged nor impeded, but had done little to actively promote. The other was to argue for more of what Beveridge called “mutual aid”. Mutual aid was what he described as “consciousness of common need” that “leads to combined action to meet that need, to

313 Temple, Christianity and Social Order, pp. 70-71.
helping oneself and one’s fellows together”\(^{315}\). And, for Beveridge, the mechanisms for delivering mutual aid were organisations such as friendly societies, cooperatives, trade unions, housing societies, social clubs, trustee savings banks, and churches (this is not an exhaustive list). Yet although it is a report that had nowhere near as much influence on the shaping of events as his 1942 report, it nevertheless has more recently been reappraised, with one contemporary biographer of Beveridge arguing that it became a blueprint for what happened after 1948, with the emergence of partnerships between government and the voluntary sector into the twenty-first century\(^{316}\). Therefore, we shall examine more closely the historical record to gauge whether this was indeed the case, as it would cast doubt on Milbank’s interpretation of the history of the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector.

### 4.4.1.1 The Attlee administration and the voluntary sector

As we saw at 2.2, Beveridge disagreed strongly with Attlee over the way his administration had weakened the place of the friendly societies, in contravention of his 1942 report which had argued for the preservation of the role they had performed in the administering of state benefits to those who were sick\(^{317}\) — something that, under Attlee, had been transferred to a government department. Yet Clement Attlee had stated in 1937: “I conceive that in the socialist state there will be, besides the democratic framework of the state and of industry, a great variety of voluntary societies controlled by the members,

\(^{315}\) W.H. Beveridge and J. Beveridge, *On and off the Platform* (Wellington, New Zealand, Hicks, Smith & Right, 1949) p. 64.

\(^{316}\) J. Harris, “Voluntarism, the state and public-private partnerships in Beveridge’s social thought”, in M. Oppenheimer & N. Deakin (eds), *Beveridge and the Voluntary Sector in Britain and the wider British world* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 9-20.

\(^{317}\) See Oppenheimer & Deakin (eds), *Beveridge and the Voluntary Sector*, p. 2.
wherein all the time a training in democracy will be taking place”. And he reconfirmed this thinking in a speech he made in 1947: “Alongside everything done by the local authority and by the state there are people who want to do a bit more … This country will never become a people of an exclusive and omnicompetent State.” It is clear, therefore, that Attlee was not ideologically opposed to the voluntary sector playing an important role in the provision of welfare in tandem with the state sector, and there is evidence of it doing that during the period of his administration. For example, Aneurin Bevan, Minister for Health in Attlee’s administration, told Parliament in 1947 that the government was committed to: “extending the field of voluntary work enormously.” Thus, whilst it was the case that after 1948, state-run hospitals and community-based health care services in the NHS relied less on voluntary sector funding for the delivery of patient care, this did not exclude volunteers from playing an important role in the NHS, or in voluntary organisations working in the field of health care and wellbeing, then or since. For example, during the period of the Attlee administration, the charity MIND (as it is now called) was formed in 1946, to campaign for the interests of the mentally ill, often working closely with the NHS in the shaping of thinking in this sphere of health care. In the same year MENCAP was founded to promote the interests of children with learning disabilities across the health and education sectors. In the following year the National Corporation for the Care of Old People (later renamed as the Centre for Policy on Ageing) was founded, to promote the interests and physical and mental wellbeing of old people, including in their interface with state sector provision of health care and social

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319 Cited in Finlayson, *Citizen and Social Service*, p. 281.
services. Cruse Bereavement Care was also established in 1950, and became a leading organisation in Britain in the provision of counselling support and bereavement advice in the years that followed. And while the newly established NHS took over the former Marie Curie Cancer Hospital in London, in the years that followed Marie Curie Cancer Care grew into a major health care support charity for those experiencing cancer, sometimes funding Macmillan Nurses who were directly managed by NHS health care providers. Charitable trusts such as the Nuffield (founded in 1939) also continued to provide indirect support to the NHS sector from 1948 onwards through a range of developmental projects — a trend that was to continue in the decades since via voluntary sector organisations such as The British Heart Foundation (1961) and the British Lung Foundation (1985). This was wholly consistent with how the National Health Service Act of 1946 and the National Assistance Act of 1948 had provided the legal framework for the state sector to utilise the voluntary sector to meet some of its statutory obligations.\(^{321}\) These are just a few examples of voluntary sector provision of health and wellbeing services under the Attlee administration, of the state and voluntary sector working in tandem, and in ways that were complementary, in the fields of mental and physical health care delivery.\(^{322}\) Indicative of this trend was that government grants to a variety of voluntary agencies in 1946/7 totalled 10 million pounds; a sizable sum at that time,\(^ {323} \) and this was to increase further in the years that followed.

\(^{321}\) Finlayson, *Citizen and Social Service*, p. 280.
\(^{322}\) Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, *Historical Guide to NGOs*, p. 34.
\(^{323}\) Finlayson, *Citizen and Social Service*, p. 280.
4.4.1.2 The Wilson administration and the voluntary sector

Labour’s periods in power from 1964–70 and 1974–79 provide evidence of a similar trend. These governments presided over an expansion of the Welfare State, particularly in the areas of health and education. But they also coincided with the emergence of other influential voluntary sector providers in the field of welfare such as the Child Poverty Action Group (1965), the Disability Income Group (1965), Shelter (1966), the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (1966) and Crisis (1967). Indeed, according to one estimate, by the end of the 1970s “there were 42 groups in existence which could be defined as belonging to the poverty lobby”, which has been perceived as “those on the political left losing patience with the Labour Party”.\(^{324}\) This is suggestive of a trend that, according to Rodney Lowe’s extensive study of the Welfare State in Britain since 1945, had led to a situation where: “The major national charities had also expanded so fast that by 1976 they were employing a permanent staff which was equivalent in size to one-fifth of that working for the social services departments. It was equally well trained.”\(^{325}\)

Harold Wilson had argued in 1975 that the role of voluntary organisations was seen by Labour as “not just a useful adjunct to government services but seen as fundamental and irreplaceable … It is a recognition of the distinct, indispensable and socially invaluable role that the voluntary organisations now play in tackling social problems and creating a better society.”\(^{326}\) Indeed, by the end of the Callaghan administration in 1979, the Welfare State, both with respect to its scope and

\(^{324}\) Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, Historical Guide to NGOs, p. 39.
responsibilities, had substantially increased since 1945; but so, too, had the role of the voluntary sector in the provision of welfare and related areas of activity, as evidenced by the rise in the number of registered charities in Britain. Their number had increased from 56,000 in 1948 to 130,000 by 1979, a trend that was to continue, reaching 171,000 by 2008; and the total income of registered charities had also increased, from £12 billion in 1970 to over £50 billion by 2008, with the total assets held by ‘general charities’ having tripled from £30 billion in 1980 to around £100 billion by 2008.

This recognition of the beneficial effects of the interdependence of government and voluntary sector provision was subsequently and unambiguously acknowledged by the Labour Party in its policy document of 1992: Building Bridges: Labour and the Voluntary Sector: “The inter-dependence of government and the voluntary sector is an established aspect of British society and is warmly welcomed by the Labour Party … We do not believe that voluntary activity is either a threat, or a cheap alternative to the provision of statutory services.”

4.4.1.3 ‘New Labour’ and the voluntary sector

Consistent with this thinking, the Labour Party’s policy document of 1997, Building the Future Together, significantly subtitled, Labour’s Policies for Partnership between Government and the Voluntary Sector, reinforced this thinking, arguing for a proposed Compact (essentially a formal agreement) between the public and voluntary sector. In the introduction to the finalised Compact in 1998, Tony Blair set out the underpinning of

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327 Cited in Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, Historical Guide to NGOs, p. 25.
328 Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, Historical Guide to NGOs, p. 31.
the government’s mission to support voluntary and community organisations: “They enable individuals to contribute to the development of their communities. By so doing they promote citizenship, help to re-establish a sense of community and make a crucial contribution to our aim of a just and inclusive society.”

These Compacts were later implemented across the majority of local authorities, and across the NHS and other national bodies.

This positive view of the role played by voluntary sector organisations in the provision of welfare, was also one shared by Gordon Brown, who, in a speech in 2004, argued for a: “Transformation of the Third Sector to rival the market and the state, with a quiet revolution in how voluntary action and charitable work serves the community.”

Thus the work of the Active Community Unit (later to become the Active Communities Directorate) that was established in 2001 within the Home Office, with a state grant of £300 million to spend over a three year period, was specifically intended to promote community action that would enhance and embolden state provision of welfare. The result of these kinds of initiatives was reflected in the Home Office Citizenship survey of 2003, which reported that more than 23 million people in England and Wales contributed 19 billion hours of voluntary work, equivalent to the work of 1 million full-time workers”.

Out of these initiatives the Office of the Third Sector was created in 2006,

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335 P. Thane, “Voluntary Action — renaissance or decline?”, History & Policy website: *Connecting Historians, Policy Makers and the Media*, 2006. Available at:
based within the Cabinet Office and with a Minister for the Third Sector. The upshot of these initiatives, according to a National Council for Voluntary Organisations report of 2009, was that income for charities (these only a part of the wider voluntary sector range of providers) over the period from 2000 to 2007, had increased from £24.2 billion to £33.3 billion, with around 31 per cent of this from statutory sources.336

In 2001 the Blair administration also created the Social Enterprise Unit (SEU) to provide support and coordination for social enterprises — newly emerging non-profit organisations in the voluntary sector with social and environmental purposes. It also established the Future Builders investment programme in 2005, initially with a state grant of £125 million over three years but later increased in 2008 to £215 million over three years, specifically to provide loans or grants to the voluntary sector to help equip it to bid for public funding.337 Thus, rather than an attempt to diminish the voluntary sector in favour of statist provision as has been argued by Milbank, partnership between state and voluntary sector became a word that could be used to describe this approach.338 Having briefly examined the post-war Labour administrations’ welfare policy towards the voluntary sector up to 2010, it is now necessary to similarly examine the relationship between the post-war Conservative administrations and the voluntary sector.

4.4.2 Governmental welfare policy and its interface with the voluntary sector. A ‘Big Society’ before the ‘Big Society’? Voluntarism, the Welfare State and the Conservative Administrations’ welfare policy towards the voluntary sector


337 Cited by Alcock, Partnership, p. 10.
338 For an interesting discussion of this, see J. Harris, “Voluntarism, the state and the public-private partnerships”.
Owing to the ‘Butskellite’ welfare consensus discussed at 2.2.2, there was little if any significant change in policy direction on the voluntary sector and the Welfare State under the Conservative administrations of Churchill/Eden (1951–55), Eden/Macmillan (1955–59), and Macmillan/Home (1959–64). The voluntary sector continued to expand, most notably with the founding of the Samaritans (1953), the Spastics Society (1953), the British Heart Foundation (1961), and Help the Aged (1961), whilst state welfare provision also increased. Significantly, Madeline Rooff’s audit of voluntary sector provision published in 1955 supports this interpretation, concluding that the voluntary sector was well embedded in the fabric of British society in the three areas of policy her review examined: services for the blind, maternity and child welfare, and mental health services. However, she did note that the voluntary services were increasingly reliant on the priorities laid down by public authorities in the shaping of their remit. \(^{339}\) And this trend was later to continue under the administration of Edward Heath (1970–74). In 1972 he established within the Home Office a dedicated body for coordinating the voluntary sector contribution to welfare provision called the Voluntary Services Unit (VSU), and government funding for the voluntary sector increased sharply. We shall see at 4.4.4 how this approach considerably increased the level of state funding of sections of the voluntary sector, a trend that was continued under the Thatcher and New Labour administrations, with consequences for the relationship between the two.

4.4.2.1 The Thatcher administration and the voluntary sector

With the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, however, there was a change of direction. Her administration became committed to encouraging an even greater input

from the voluntary sector in areas of welfare, suspicious of the ‘socialist’ welfare state and its collectivist underpinning, and committed to reducing it, influenced by the New Right ideology discussed at 2.4.1. Hence, her government was to put greater financial investment into the voluntary sector.\textsuperscript{340} Her vision on the merits of volunteering was set out in a speech she made to the WRVS in 1981: “The volunteer movement is at the heart of our social welfare provision.” Her view was that: “The willingness of men and women to give service is one of freedom’s greatest safeguards. It ensures that caring remains free from political control”.\textsuperscript{341} There were some cuts to state welfare provision during this period that engendered strong opposition from the churches and elements of the voluntary sector, such as the Social Security and Housing Benefit Act of 1982 that ended earnings related benefits and the automatic indexing of benefits. By the mid-1980s, with over three million unemployed, there was also a shift in direction via a policy introduced in 1986 called Restart, that required those on benefits to work or retrain (something that the New Labour administration under Blair later further developed in the form of the 1997 ‘New Deal’ initiative).\textsuperscript{342} Yet there were examples of novel ways in which the state sector worked with the voluntary sector, one being to help the unemployed find a route back into work.

The \textit{Opportunities for Volunteering Programme}, for example, administered by the Department of Health and Social Security, enabled the unemployed to undertake short-term unpaid work experience placements with charities and other voluntary providers.

\textsuperscript{340} E. Filby, “Faith, charity and citizenship”, in Hilton & McKay (eds), \textit{The Ages of Voluntarism}, p. 146.


Another was the Voluntary Projects Programme administered by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) that focused on providing opportunities for the long-term unemployed to undertake locally based community project work. Under this programme there were numerous examples of Church–MSC sponsored initiatives established to try to help the unemployed find work, with government providing participants with a modest living allowance in return for their participation. For example, the MSC funded Hartlepool Churches Unemployment Programme enabled seventy of the locally unemployed to undertake courses in areas such as Car Maintenance, Photography, and Computing, to help them find work in these areas.\footnote{F. Scuffham, “Foreword” to Action on Unemployment: 100 Projects with Unemployed People (London: Church Action With The Unemployed, 1984), p. 25.} Another example was in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, called the Liverpool RC Archdiocese Community Services Agency which began in 1982 and had oversight of 25 project areas with circa 500 participant workers. These were involved in environmental work, clearing wasteland and improving gardens for senior citizens, working with the disabled, and also training workers in fields of sewing, clerical skills, retail and distribution, and hairdressing, and many training options for the unemployed to access.\footnote{Scuffham, Action on Unemployment, p. 68.} A third example was one in Avonmouth called the Bristol Churches Community Programme, which ran courses for over 600 of the unemployed at any one time across 21 different community based projects, often with an ‘outward-bound’ emphasis.\footnote{Scuffham, Action on Unemployment, p. 13.} These are just three examples of over one hundred projects documented in Action on Unemployment. The result of these
and other such ‘Active Citizen’ initiatives was that state investment in non-governmental agencies increased from 18 to 76 million pounds between 1980 and 1986.346

4.4.2.2 The Major administration and the voluntary sector

The administration led by John Major (1990‒1997) was also enthusiastic about ‘Active Citizenship’, reflected in a speech he gave to business organisations involved in charity work: “People want a more responsible society — a less selfish society. I want you to come with us as partners as we spread the message of social responsibility and responsible capitalism.”347 In the same speech he reported:

Volunteers give a range of support in a vast range of areas. In the Health Service 60,000 volunteers have been recruited under the Department of Health opportunity for volunteering scheme; a further 60,000 work on over 2,000 conservation projects across the nation; and there are 2,000 or so volunteers abroad in support of development projects. Thousands more work in social service.

Major’s support for volunteering was also symbolically reflected in the way he brought about greater recognition for volunteers in the Queen’s honours list. Hence, under the Thatcher administration, and later under the administration of Major, the voluntary sector in Britain expanded, and often worked in unison with government departments such as the DHSS and the Manpower Services Commission. Far from being a period of decline, the post-war voluntary sector grew and adapted to the increased statutory provision of welfare, seeking opportunities to complement it wherever they could be found.

346 Filby “Faith, Charity and Citizenship”, p. 140. There was, however, some criticism in the churches that the MSC funded schemes came to a rather abrupt end, owing to funding streams not being renewed. See, for example, F. Davis, E. Paulhus & A. Bradstock, Moral, But No Compass: Government, Church and the Future of Welfare (Chelmsford: Matthew James Publishing, 2008), p. 22.
4.4.3 Summary Position Statement (1)

This historical analysis of the Labour and Conservative administrations’ welfare policy interface with the voluntary sector from 1945 to 2010, demonstrates that Milbank’s negative view of the impact the Welfare State had on that sector is open to challenge. There is compelling historical evidence that none of these administrations was hostile to voluntary sector involvement in the provision of welfare. Indeed the opposite was the case, with numerous examples of creative interface between the Welfare State and the voluntary sector, of which the above are a selection.\(^{348}\) Moreover, government statistics relating to the period immediately prior to the launch of the ‘Big Society’ initiative in the summer of 2010, portray a picture of continued vibrancy in the voluntary sector per se (hence not just those confined to welfare provision). The National Citizenship Survey for England 2009–10, reveals that 40 per cent of adults had ‘formally’ volunteered within the previous twelve months (that is, had taken part in some organised voluntary activity), 25 per cent at least once a month, compared with 27 per cent when the survey was first undertaken in 2001.\(^{349}\) But perhaps of even more significance for our analysis is that, using the widest definitions of the Non-Governmental Organisations operating in the sector covering all forms of associational life, the NCVO, in 2010, estimated there to be approximately 900,000 such organisations all over Britain, going from the tiny, local and informal to the huge and highly organised.\(^{350}\) This is indicative of a high amount of intermediary level activity between the state and the citizen, in contrast to the picture

\(^{348}\) For more examples, see J. Davis Smith, C. Rochester & R. Hedley (eds), An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector (London: Routledge, 1995).

\(^{349}\) P. Thane, “There has always been a ‘Big Society”, History Workshop, 2011. Available at: http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/there-has-always-been-a-big-society (accessed on 10 April 2017).

\(^{350}\) Hilton, “Charities”, p. 82.
Milbank paints of the British Welfare State being: “at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation”, and the cause of “fragmented mutual organisation”.351 There is considerable historical evidence, then, to support a view that a ‘Big Society’ existed in Britain before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project by the Cameron administration in 2010.

4.4.4 A ‘Big Society’ in Britain before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project

However, the ‘Big Society’ that existed in Britain before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project was different from what it had been in 1945. The voluntary sector experienced a considerable amount of change in the intervening period, with some sectors experiencing decline and others expansion. Between 1942 and 1979, for example, trade union membership in Britain increased from 8 million to over 13 million,352 an example of an intermediary level ‘grouping’ that thrived within an expanding Welfare State. The reasons for the subsequent decline in its membership to circa 6.5 million by 2008 are complex and multifaceted, including the near collapse in coal mining, major contractions in the manufacturing industries and the shrinkage of the steel industry since the 1980s, and increased legal restrictions placed on unions embarking on industrial action. But the previous period of growth in membership suggests its decline after 1979 is unlikely to be as a consequence of the Welfare State. Likewise, the demutualisation that occurred in the mid-1980s of a large part of the Building Societies sector (it being one intermediate level ‘grouping’ in British civil society that was separate from the public and private sectors) with several of the biggest names on the high-street converting to banks, was a result of the ‘Big Bang’ legislation of 1986 that allowed Building Societies to demutualise if they

351 Milbank & Pabst, “Post-liberal politics and the alternative”, p. 90.
could get sufficient support from their member owners.\textsuperscript{353} It had nothing to do with the Welfare State and government policy towards it.

Another key change was the decline in membership within traditional women’s organisations as more women entered paid employment. For example, the Mother’s Union membership dropped from 538,000 in the 1930s to 98,000 by 2009.\textsuperscript{354} But at the same time there was a considerable expansion in the number of voluntary sector organisations active in other areas. For example, the membership of environmental organisations (e.g. Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the World Wildlife Fund) increased from roughly half a million in 1971 to nearly seven million by 2008.\textsuperscript{355} Seen in the round, change rather than decline is the adjective best able to describe these trends. Certainly, in relative terms, between 1945 and 2010, the Welfare State assumed more of the burden of meeting the expanding welfare challenges than did the voluntary sector. But in absolute terms both saw an overall expansion in their activities. This historical evidence does not, therefore, lend support to Milbank’s view that the post-war Welfare State “fragmented mutual organisation” and was “at the expense of intermediary institutions”, at least with respect to their numbers, size and resourcing. Nevertheless, in the post-war period some sections of the voluntary sector changed in character in ways that Milbank dislikes, and which we now address.

4.4.5 “Should the salt of the earth be managed”? Increased governmental financing of the voluntary sector and the impact it had on its delivery of welfare

John Milbank is critical of the way the Welfare State has developed beyond what he

\textsuperscript{355} Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, \textit{Historical Guide to NGOs}, p. 289.
thinks was its original purpose:

To begin with, the British welfare state was understood as a mutual insurance compact against the worst natural and social threats to human survival and flourishing. But in time it has come to be dominated by its other genealogical route, which is the originally Prussian [Hegelian] desire for more efficient and quasi-military management of civilian populations.  

One aspect of his concern is the way that governments, especially since the 1970s, have increased the amount of state financing of the voluntary sector, resulting in increased levels of state influence over it. He perceives this as having altered its character in ways he considers are regrettable, diminishing its level of decision-making autonomy and flexibility of response via the incorporation of contract-based commissioning of services from the state sector, that have often been highly prescriptive in character. Influenced by the writings of Ivan Illich, who wrote about what he called the state institutionalisation of charity which turns it into bureaucracy, Milbank sees these developments as an example of how: “Mechanism has displaced the just pursuit of the common good”. Influenced also by the writings of the historian Frank Prochaska, he argues: “One can fear, with Prochaska, that if much of the money for charities comes from state provision that they will fall under bureaucratic control.”

The establishment of the Voluntary Services Unit (VSU) by Heath’s government is often cited as the start of this trend, though there were some signs of it before then.

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358 Milbank, “Can Markets be Moral?”, p. 5.
359 Milbank, “The Big Society Depends on a Big Parish”, p. 4.
Influenced by the work of the Aves Committee of 1969\textsuperscript{361} that examined the role of the volunteer in social services, and called for additional support to be made available for the training of volunteers and the coordination of these services, Heath was keen for his government to play a part in supporting that aspiration. The VSU was established to enhance the links between government departments and voluntary organisations to maximise the impact the voluntary sector could play in the delivery of welfare services.

There was also a significant increase in government grants to voluntary organisations. The Wolfenden Committee Report of 1978 shows that government funding of the voluntary sector increased from 19.2 million pounds in 1974/5 to 35.4 million by 1976/7.\textsuperscript{362} Grants distributed by the VSU to the voluntary sector between 1974 and 1986 also reflect this trajectory, increasing from £833,445 from 1974/5 to £17,110,140 in 1984/85, and grants distributed by the Home Office (including through the VSU) increased from £1,600,000 in 1972 to £103,000,000 by 1994.\textsuperscript{363} A substantial amount of academic work has been undertaken on the implications that this increased state funding of sections of the voluntary sector in Britain had on their character, which we now consider.\textsuperscript{364}


\textsuperscript{363} Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, \textit{Historical Guide to NGOs}, pp. 304, 306.

4.4.6 A summary of the key findings of academic work done on state funding of the voluntary sector

A summary of the key findings of these academic studies is as follows.

(1) The voluntary sector organisations increased in size and scale of operation, consistent with the analysis at 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.\textsuperscript{365}

(2) They became more bureaucratic and complex in their structures and contracting arrangements with government, both central and local.\textsuperscript{366}

(3) They became more result orientated, mindful of the need to meet the contract specifications that came with the state funding.\textsuperscript{367}

(4) They developed greater concerns with efficiency and effectiveness (these were seen as necessary for demonstrating effective and appropriate use of state provided funds, often as defined in contracts).\textsuperscript{368}

(5) They developed more sophisticated criteria and systems for monitoring and evaluating performance, including research based initiatives.\textsuperscript{369}

(6) They employed more salaried staff, often in recognition of the need to engage those with the necessary financial and managerial skills to undertake much of the work referred to above (though paid employees still only represented 2\% of the workforce of registered charities in 2006).\textsuperscript{370}


\textsuperscript{366} Kramer, “Change and Continuity” is particularly strong on this aspect. See also Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, \textit{The Politics of Expertise}, pp. 54-79.

\textsuperscript{367} See for example, Hilton, Crowson, Mouhot & McKay, \textit{The Politics of Expertise}, pp. 80-107.


\textsuperscript{369} See, for example, T. Darlington, \textit{Management Learning and Voluntary Organisations}, and Hilton, Crowson, McKay & Mouhot, \textit{The Politics of Expertise}, pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{370} Kuhnle & Selle, \textit{Government and Voluntary Organisations} p. 98, and see F. Prochaska, “Voluntary action – renaissance or decline?”, History & Policy website:
Some of these changes also occurred in voluntary sector organisations that did not receive government funding, partly the result of a general trend in the growth in professionalisation of key aspects of work within the wider economy, and partly a result of more stringent audit requirements of other funding bodies. Some of these developments also relate in part to changes in the remit of the Charity Commission that had occurred in 1960 when it was given wider powers, including compiling a register as a means of ensuring better monitoring and control over charities.\(^{371}\)

Unsurprisingly, these events have been interpreted by analysts in different ways. Some see them as evidence of what one has called a “‘colonisation’ by the state (government) sector of the voluntary sector, entailing ‘domination’ — imposing a hierarchy of control”, and “appropriation — redrawing and defining boundaries”.\(^{372}\) Milbank’s interpretation is in line with that way of thinking, seeing this process as an example of increased “remote bureaucratic control”\(^{373}\) by the state over intermediary level welfare providers, and state enforcement by contract of a “universality” of provision in that sector. Neil McIntosh, Shelter’s Director in 1978, also argued that this increased state funding compromised the ability of the charity sector to be critical of government.\(^{374}\) And a major evidence-based study published in 1989 by two researchers into the impact of increased state funding in the voluntary sector, concluded that it had led to ‘uniform


\(^{373}\) Milbank & Pabst, “Post-Liberal Politics and the alternative”, p. 91.

services’ being provided, whereby all users were to be treated alike on the basis of unambiguous criteria of eligibility; a view that chimes with Milbank’s criticism that the Welfare State promotes impersonal universalism and predictability in its service provision and that of the voluntary sector. They also argued “as government increasingly penetrates the non-profit sector, it undermines the civic virtues of non-profit organisations such as citizen participation in services development, voluntarism and community definitions of the needy”.\textsuperscript{375} This perspective was also reflected in an observation made by the Association of Charitable Foundations, and quoted by Ian Duncan Smith in a speech he made on 4 November 2005 to the “Britain’s Most Admired Charities Awards” dinner, stating: “in a world where funding comes from service contracts, there is a danger that passion is neutralised, in the interest of financial survival. People do what they are paid to do rather than what they care deeply about doing”.\textsuperscript{376}

Others, no doubt influenced in part by the “Handy Report” of 1981 into \textit{Improving Effectiveness in Voluntary Organisations},\textsuperscript{377} which called for more professional management practices to be introduced into that sector, have seen them as a necessary set of changes in the relationship between government and the voluntary sector, that ensured the latter was able to expand the range of its activities in ways that would otherwise not


have been possible.\textsuperscript{378} Arguments in support of this line of thinking have included the following:

(1) Many of these changes can be seen as inevitable and essential if the voluntary sector was to have kept pace with developments in British society and economy that have occurred since the 1970s. Examples of these have been: increased legal complexities; increased professionalisation and the deployment of modern, scientific management systems of working in organisations such as \textit{inter alia}: changes to financial and accounting practices and advances in technology and its use; and changes in public expectations as citizens became more aware of their rights to seek legal redress if they felt services they had received had been substandard.

(2) There is also evidence that professionalisation of voluntary bodies’ management and administrative arrangements delivered increased skills-based training of the volunteers, necessary to be sure they worked in ways that were consistent with meeting the quality standards required in contract specifications.\textsuperscript{379}

(3) Voluntary sector organisations that had not received any state funding often adopted similar practices, not least because other non-state grant providers to the sector often required similar levels of administrative competence, consistency in service provision, and financial accountability.

(4) State funding streams were often only a part of the wider range of funding sources being accessed by these voluntary sector organisations, amounting to 31 per cent in 2007.\textsuperscript{380} Indeed, in 2014 there were approximately 41,000 charities — hence only around twenty three per cent of those registered — that were in a contractual relationship with the state.\textsuperscript{381}

\textsuperscript{379} This was partly the result of increased professionalisation in the voluntary sector that occurred from the early 1970s, including the requirement to pass professional examinations for entry into some posts.
\textsuperscript{381} Cited in Prochaska, \textit{The State of Charity}, p. 16.
Therefore, from this perspective there is a danger of exaggerating the extent of governmental ‘control’ of the voluntary sector organisations since the 1970s, when one takes into account that only around a quarter of them were in contractual arrangements with the government to provide welfare. And all voluntary sector organisations retained their own Boards, constitutions, membership, premises and facilities, and the right to access alternative income streams, as well as the decision-making autonomy to provide services that were not state funded. In other words, they could operate in ways that did not need to conform to governmental contract specifications but only to the ‘generic’ legally enforced regulations in their sector.

4.4.7 Summary Position Statement (2)

There is historical evidence, then, that since the 1970s, those voluntary sector organisations that sought and received governmental financial assistance under provider contracts for services, experienced some loss of financial and strategic autonomy as a result, as well as increased state scrutiny of their governance arrangements. They also experienced an increase in the administrative complexity of their operations that impacted on their human resources practices, with more professionally trained salaried employees being taken on to meet these challenges. In addition, owing to the prescriptive nature of state-funded contracts for services, there is some evidence that this diminished their ability to be as flexible and bespoke in the tailoring of their interventions to their client base. But these developments coincided with an expansion in their activities, made possible by the new funding streams, and hence their ability to contribute to the overall delivery of welfare in British society. The additional state funding also contributed to bringing about the modernisation of their administrative and governance arrangements, which enabled them to keep pace with changing legal and societal expectations. And
having to meet government contract specifications made them more result orientated and efficient, conscious of the need to be able to show effective use of public money.

Milbank’s perspective is therefore consistent with the historical evidence in so far as, since the 1970s, some sections of the voluntary sector have experienced some loss of financial and strategic decision-making autonomy to the state, in ways that have reshaped the way they provide welfare services. The question remains, however, whether an alternative approach that entails a disentangling of the state from the voluntary sector and a substantial increase in church provision of welfare (some of it funded by the state) offers a better alternative. Could income steams be developed capable of offsetting the loss of state-provided income that would result? That question will be answered in 6.2.5 as it relates in part to the insights that can be gained from the analysis of the ‘Big Society’ project and its outcomes in chapter five. However, we now need to consider whether the Welfare State was a major cause of the decline in religious observance and affiliation in Britain in the post-war years — a view that underpins much of Milbank’s Blue Socialist antipathy towards it, and, as he sees things, the need to reverse that trend if a post-liberal society is to be advanced in England in the twenty-first century.

4.4.8 “Swimming into the mouth of the Leviathan”. The alleged retarding effect of the British Welfare State on church affiliation and observance

Frank Prochaska’s writings, in which he has argued that the Welfare State undermined religious belief and played a significant part in bringing about the decline in religious observance and affiliation in Britain in the post-war period, have received a mixed

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reception over the years, not least from among Anglican Socialists. Kenneth Leech, for example, was sceptical of Prochaska’s lines of argument in a critical review of *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, stating: “Undoubtedly there has been both an expansion of state activity and a decline in membership of some Churches over the period of time discussed. But, as statisticians would have told the author, close parallelisms or contrasts between curves are notoriously uninformative.”

By contrast, Milbank has consistently championed his work, contending: “Prochaska shows that one reason for the decline of religion in the UK is its perceived ‘irrelevance’ once it has ceased to be involved in the supply of social services and the coordination of economic activity”. As Prochaska’s historical writings are consistent with Milbank’s own critique of the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector, and as Milbank has often adduced his writings in support of his perspective (as has Phillip Blond), a brief interrogation of his key arguments is necessary.

In evidence to the Deakin Commission on the Voluntary Sector in the mid-1990s, Prochaska argued that: “charities were swimming into the mouth of the Leviathan”. He later attributed the decline in observance and affiliation in the Church of England in the post-war period, in significant part to the theology of the state developed by Temple,
something he viewed as being: “more conducive to socialism than to Christianity.” As we have already seen, Temple had argued that the state was a “servant and instrument of God for the preservation of Justice and for the promotion of human welfare.” This is a theology of the state that Prochaska thinks is too collectivist — too socialist. He is thus critical of what he interprets as the Church of England’s endorsement of it via Resolution 19 passed at the Lambeth Conference of 1948:

We believe that the State is under the moral law of God, and is intended by Him to be an instrument for human welfare. We therefore welcome the growing concern and care of the modern State for its citizens, and call upon Church members to accept their own political responsibility and to cooperate with the State and its officers in their work.

For Prochaska, views such as these are indicative of how: “The Anglican hierarchy had turned Jesus into a socialist.” A consequence of this step-change, according to Prochaska, was that it set back parish charity “which had been crucial to spiritual life and neighbourliness in the past.” Yet his article fails to mention the same conference passed Resolution 18:

The Conference affirms it to be the duty of the Church constantly to proclaim the sovereignty of God who is the Father of all and whose law is above all nations; it condemns the concept of the unbridled sovereignty of the nation and such usurpation of power by the state as is opposed to the basic truths of Christianity; further, it denies that the individual exists for the state, but asserts that one of the principal ends of the state is the development of personality, the highest good of the individual.

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387 Prochaska, *The Church of England and the Collapse of Christian Charity*. For a more extended version of this perspective see Prochaska, *Christianity & Social Service in Modern Britain*.
388 Temple, *Citizen and Churchman*, p. 36.
390 Prochaska, *The Church of England and the Collapse*, p. 3.
The Conference, therefore, recognised there are necessary limits for the state to operate within, not least regarding the sovereignty of God. And in Resolution 20 it stated: “In view of a tendency of the state to encroach on the freedom of individuals and voluntary associations, it urges Christians in all lands to guard such freedoms with vigilance.” In 1948 the Anglican Communion was, therefore, in step with the view that Temple, Beveridge, and Attlee had held on the Welfare State, of the need for limits to exist in the role the state performs in society, including in areas that voluntary associations had traditionally excelled in, in a way that Prochaska’s work understates.

A key line of argument Prochaska develops in support of his perspective relates to the decline in the number of women engaged in charitable activities in the Church of England after 1945. For example, we saw at 4.4.3 how membership of the Mother’s Union — at the time a predominately Church of England based charity — had declined by over three quarters in the period between the 1930s and the 2009. Prochaska attributes much of this decline to a reduction in Church of England parish societies that occurred after the war, as well as a reduction in parochial visiting, and connects this trend to the Church of England’s “post-war enthusiasm for the welfare state” and, in a sense, its willingness to hand over to the state aspects of welfare provision that had previously been more the preserve of the Church. Thus he argues: “It struck a body blow to parish charity”, and this “was particularly true for women, who provided the backbone of church membership and voluntary work”. Yet, whilst there is brief reference made in his work to some of the other possible reasons for why a decline in the number of women involved in the Church of England’s charity work occurred in the post-war period, his tendency is

393 The Lambeth Conference Resolutions.
395 Prochaska, The Church of England and the Collapse, p. 3.
to downplay them. For example, the post-war period offered much greater opportunities for women to find paid employment, participate in expanding recreational opportunities, and engage in more accessible life-long learning activities, which would have happened regardless of the approach the Church of England had adopted towards the Welfare State.

An alternative perspective on the decline of the Mother’s Union in the post-war period would place more emphasis on the fact that it has been a socially conservative organisation, that promoted a traditional version of Christianity that was centred around motherhood, the home and the family as being a woman’s priorities, in a post-war age when, during the war, many women had tasted the fruits of working life and the independence it afforded and were reluctant to have the clock turned back. Additionally, the emergence of the feminist movement in the 1960s and the sexual emancipation that the contraceptive pill afforded women after 1961, challenged the ethos of the Mother’s Union and its traditional outlook on such matters.

Furthermore, as Eliza Filby has argued, it would also be incorrect to assume that the Church of England had vacated the charity sector in the post-war period to the extent that Prochaska’s statements might suggest. In the post-war period, the Church Housing Association, for example, established in the 1920s, had, by the 1980s, assumed a major role in the provision of homes for families, the elderly and the homeless. And Church Action on Poverty, a major ecumenical Christian social justice charity founded in 1982 that has focused on campaigning against poverty, and Christians Against Poverty, founded in 1996, which has focused on debt management advice, both have a significant Church of England membership. The Church of England’s Children’s Society also

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397 Filby, “Faith, Charity and Citizenship”, p. 137.
continues to make a significant contribution to the provision of care to children and the disabled, whilst the Church’s involvement in the *Shaftesbury Project on Christian Involvement in Society* that ran from 1973 to 1994 was also considerable, and substantially contributed to the advancement of education of adults and young people in areas such as the interface of Christian faith with the social sciences.  

We also saw at 4.4.2.1 how there were numerous Church–MSC sponsored schemes in the 1980s that focused on reducing unemployment. These are examples of how the post-war state welfare sector and the Church charity sector coexisted, and often worked in tandem and in ways that were complementary.

Another is how the Hospital Chaplaincy Service developed within the NHS, which was substantially made up of Anglican chaplains prior to the 1990s because of the close connections between the state and the Church of England. And, since 1958, the Church of England also retained its influence on the charity sector via its Board for Social Responsibility (later changed to the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council in 1999), which regularly hosted meetings with the NCVO in which it conveyed the views of the sector and offered advice and support. It also produced papers on the work of the sector, which had influence within the sector and the wider political landscape. An example was its *Survey/Mapping Exercise across the English Regions to Measure the Contribution of Faith Groups to Social Action and Culture* undertaken in 2006. This is a significant work that provides, on a region by region basis, statistics  

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400 *Survey/Mapping Exercise across the English Regions to Measure the Contribution of Faith Groups to Social Action and Culture* undertaken in 2006. Available at:
documenting a vibrant Church of England contribution to social action at a local level, as well as considerable evidence of Christian charitableness and social welfare provision. This was consistent with the findings of the *Church Life Profile* of 2001, which found that members of the Church of England contributed 23.2 million hours’ voluntary service each month.\footnote{See N. Spencer, *Doing God: A Future for Faith in the Public Square* (London: Theos, 2006), p. 44.}

Prochaska’s work extends beyond the Church of England in its critique of the retarding impact he argues the Welfare State had on Christian charities in Britain in the post-war period. He argues: “In the belief that the state was fulfilling “the law of Christ”, religious leaders failed to appreciate fully just how much the growth of government welfare would devitalize Christian charity, and, by implication, Christianity itself”.\footnote{Prochaska, *The Church of England and the Collapse*, p. 4.}

Certainly, there is evidence in the early years of the Welfare State under the Attlee administration that the move towards what came to be called the “mixed economy of welfare” was not entirely smooth. Some dislocation — indeed confusion — existed in the voluntary and state sectors as to what would be the new demarcation lines in the newly emerging mixed economy of welfare provision.\footnote{Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 287-289.} Thus H.R. Poole, Secretary of the Liverpool Council of Social Service, wrote in 1960 that it could not “be denied that the few years immediately following the end of the [Second World] war were a period of confusion and uncertainty for many … voluntary organisations.”\footnote{See *The Liverpool Council of Social Services, 1909–1959* (Liverpool: The Liverpool Council for Social Service, 1960), pp. 77-78. Cited in Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p. 297.} Undoubtedly this would have had some impact on the Church providers of welfare, with Prochaska arguing

\footnote{\url{http://www.ihbc.org.uk/recent_papers/docs/RegionalreportsTable.pdf} (accessed on 25 October 2017).}
that this was the primary reason for why the “Church of England consciously ‘abandoned’ regular parochial visiting”\textsuperscript{405} in favour of greater state welfare provision in the immediate aftermath of the war, and why he argues there was a decline in women’s participation in these endeavours at that time and since.\textsuperscript{406} However, as he has noted, this occurred in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War:

The effect of aerial bombardment, which damaged or destroyed 15,000 ecclesiastical buildings in Britain, dealt a serious blow to religious observance and charitable practice. All the denominations suffered, though Methodists, with strongholds in the targeted industrial cities, suffered more than most”.\textsuperscript{407}

With respect to the Church of England, over 1,000 places of worship had been destroyed or badly damaged by Luftwaffe bombing by 1942 (to increase further by 1944),\textsuperscript{408} meaning that some fragmentation of parish life and parochial outreach (including proselytization) was inevitable in the immediate post-war period, and not in any way connected with the Welfare State or the Church of England’s embracing of it.

There is also evidence that supports a view that Prochaska’s work understates the number of Christians who contributed in increasing numbers as volunteers in support of the newly configured state welfare provision. Thus, the 1952 Committee on the Law and Practice Relating to Charitable Trusts (the “Nathan Committee”) reported that “so far from voluntary action being dried up by the expansion of the social services, greater and greater demands are being made upon it. Tens of thousands of voluntary workers have been enlisted to operate the statutory services in a manner in which Parliament has laid


\textsuperscript{406} Prochaska, \textit{The Church of England and the Collapse}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{407} Prochaska, \textit{The Church of England and the Collapse}, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{408} Prochaska, \textit{The Church of England and the Collapse}, p. 1.
down that they should be operated.” That report does not, therefore, support a declinist line of argumentation: that is, that increased state welfare provision led to a decline in volunteering *per se* and by Christians in particular, and thus a decline in Christian charities, with retarding implications for Christian observance and affiliation. What it does suggest, though, is that volunteers were *adapting* to the new welfare landscape in the ways they contributed to it, and it can be reasonably assumed that a fair percentage of these would have been Christians given the large percentage of affiliated Christians in the overall population at that time.

A further example of this adaptation was a greater emphasis being placed by Christians on supporting overseas needs. It can be queried how, for example, Prochaska’s declinist perspective squares with the rise of Christian charities in the post-war period that have focused on international aid. Take Christian Aid, whose voluntary income increased from circa 30 million pounds in 1970 to over 90 million pounds in 2007, and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development saw an increase in its voluntary income from circa 3 million pounds in 1973 to 41 million pounds by 2000. And with respect to religious influence within the wider voluntary sector, an NCVO survey conducted in the 1980s, well after the Welfare State had become an established feature of British life, calculated that over 70 per cent of volunteers considered themselves to be ‘religious persons’ and over half of these were active adherents. And regarding the non-adherents, one can reasonably surmise that although some of the Christians who were

412 Filby, “Faith, Charity and Citizenship”, p. 137.
surveyed may well have stopped attending Church on a regular basis, consistent with the figures showing that from the early 1960s there had been a decline in church attendance of a third and denominational affiliation had decreased by 45 per cent, they were ‘believing without belonging’, and continued to contribute substantially to the expanding voluntary sector provision of welfare documented at 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

Of course, this is not to suggest that everything was optimally aligned between the state and voluntary sector organisations in their delivery of welfare. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report of 2003, “Faith” in Urban Regeneration?, drew attention to difficulties that some faith groups encountered with local authorities and their sometimes antagonistic attitudes towards them, and a later JRF report, Faith as Social Capital, argued “local authorities, primary care trusts, police authorities and other agencies have to develop a more sophisticated understanding of faith communities with much closer relationships, if a latent social capital is to be used effectively.” A subsequent study commissioned by Stephen Lowe, Anglican Bishop for Urban Life and Faith, reported similar difficulties some faith charity groups had encountered with central government departments and local authorities. It was critical of what it considered to be a lack of understanding of the Church’s “huge moral and civic contribution” by the state, which had resulted in it “planning without vision or roots”. It also considered there to

417 Davis, Paulhus & Bradstock, Moral, But No Compass.
418 Davis, Paulhus & Bradstock, Moral, But No Compass, p. 95.
be a need for it to review its commissioning guidance, in a way that would “create a level playing field for faith-based agencies seeking to engage in public service reform, contracting and civic action”. It was undoubtedly the case, then, that at the time of the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010, there remained scope for further strengthening of the working relationships and strategic interface between the state and voluntary sector providers of welfare, including the faith-based voluntary sector. Yet, between 1945 and 2010 there is much historical evidence of Christians continuing to engage in charitable work on a large scale, often focused on providing welfare within and beyond their churches and often working in tandem with the Welfare State, thereby making a major contribution to a ‘Big Society’ that existed in Britain before 2010.

This point is further evidenced by research undertaken by the New Philanthropy Capital consultancy in 2014, which found that of the 188,000 charities registered in the UK, almost 50,000 were faith based and two thirds of these were from the Christian tradition. It also found that in the preceding ten years, the proportion of Christian charities (38 per cent) that had registered with the Charity Commission was higher than that of non-faith ones (24 per cent), indicating a level of vitality among Christian organisations in excess of that in non-faith based ones. The historical evidence cited at 4.4.1–4.4.3, moreover, demonstrates how Christians had ample opportunity to engage in such work, suggesting that the decline in Christian religious observance and affiliation in the post-

419 Davis, Paulhus & Bradstock, Moral, But No Compass, p. 96.
420 For example, on the approach taken by New Labour administrations to cultivate religiously motivated community based voluntary action, see G. Smith, More than a Little Quiet Care: The Extent of the Churches’ Contribution to Community Work in East London in the 1990s (Birmingham: Aston Charity’s Community Involvement Unit, 1998).
war period, and particularly since the early 1960s, both within and beyond the Church of England, is more multi-faceted and intricate than Prochaska’s perspective suggests.

4.4.9 Summary Position Statement (3)

The reasons for the decline in church affiliation and observance in Britain from the early 1960s onwards, are multifaceted and complex. No doubt they will include *inter alia*: (1) the growing dominance that scientific (positivist) research methods and their epistemological underpinnings have attained in the universities since the 1960s (less so since the 1990s in some subjects owing to the postmodern challenge). This has resulted in what has been described as the triumph of scientific method and reasoning in the academy over faith-based perspectives, at a time when access to higher education has increased exponentially;\(^\text{422}\) (2) the sexual ‘revolution’ of the 1960s and the challenges it posed to traditional Church teaching on sexual matters; and (3) the growing disparity between mainline Church of England teaching on issues such as women’s rights and those of LGBTQ citizens with the increasingly liberal views held by large sections of British society on these matters \(^\text{423}\) — these being just three of numerous factors that would need to be included in any appraisal of the causes of this complex social phenomenon. But Milbank’s and Prochaska’s insistence that they were in significant part a result of the Welfare State and the support given to it by the churches, is less than consistent with a growing body of historical evidence that indicates otherwise.

\(^\text{422}\) An interesting study that is broadly in support of this trend is D. Skorton & A. Bear (eds), *The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Higher Education: Branches from the Same Tree* (Washington DC: The National Academies Press, 2018).

\(^\text{423}\) This aspect is covered in A. Brown & L. Woodhead, *That Was The Church That Was* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
We shall further consider the Church of England’s interface with the Welfare State at 5.4, when we examine its post-war positions on welfare. Before that, however, our attention turns to Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision of an alternative post-liberal polity and society, and the role he argues the Church of England should perform within it.

4.5 “The Church is the site of the true society”. The Church of England and the Politics of the Common Good: John Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision of a post-Liberal Alternative Role for the Church of England in the Provision of Welfare in the Twenty-first Century

Central to Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision of a post-liberal society in England in the twenty-first century is the substantially enhanced role he sees for the Church of England within it, not least owing to its established status which he supports: “The Church of England is indispensable to a new politics of the common good beyond the liberalism of both left and right that underpins the global ‘market’ state”.424 Milbank and Pabst do not envisage a post-liberal society as requiring an out-and-out supplanting of the state by the Church. They acknowledge: “At their best, both Church and State can work together for the dignity of the person, human flourishing and the public common good”; but they want to see the Church of England having significantly more influence over the state in the way it conducts its affairs, by emphasising the need for individual virtue and public honour as paramount for transforming public institutions in a way that better embodies these values, and by: “transforming the secular emphasis away from individual self-interest and collective power towards the dignity of the person, human flourishing and the common good”.425

Milbank considers the Temple middle axiom approach towards the state:

“according to which Christianity only contributes vague ideal platitudes and not very specific suggestions about social organisation” 426 as inadequate for this task, being too limiting in the range it affords the Church of England to influence the way the state conducts its affairs. Rather, he wants to see the established Church shaping the new post-liberal politics. It will do this by “leading the debate and brokering a new settlement that makes gift exchange or reciprocity the ultimate principle to govern both the economy and politics”, 427 in a way that “restores the state as also the Church” 428 — thus offering a post-liberal alternative to post-war Keynesianism and neoliberalism.

For Milbank and Pabst, this will entail the Church of England *inter alia*:

“promoting just prices, just wages, and a more corporatist political role for guilds and other professional associations”, 429 thus redressing some of the injustices they believe have characterised capitalism since the Reformation, not least owing to the abandonment by Protestant thinkers of the Catholic doctrine of the Just Price in favour of the ‘free

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426 J. Milbank, a reply by him to a critique of his work by C. Baker, J. Atherton and J. Reader, “A case of ecclesial over-optimism: A response to Milbank’s return to Christendom’s social vision”, *Political Theology Network*, p. 5.
428 Milbank & Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, p. 230. “Restoring the State as also the Church” connects with Milbank’s critique of what he sees as liberal Anglicanism’s inclination to see establishment as “a relic of the past”. By contrast, Milbank sees the need for a strengthening of church establishment as a way of restoring some of the ground it has lost in the political sphere. Thus he argues: “The political role of the established Church is, therefore, neither to sanctify the state nor to supplant the government” (Milbank & Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, p. 232). Rather, Milbank sees the established church in a post-liberal context as making an enhanced contribution to shaping the political direction of English society within a new *body politic* that has been shaped by the corporatist thinking that he and Pabst have set down. He describes this as how: “autonomous and democratic self-governing organisations [the Church being one] …combine in a microcosm the virtuous guidance of ‘the one’ with the assent of ‘the many’ around shared notions of excellence and ethos.” (Milbank & Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, p. 209).
market’ mechanism for determining its level, as discussed at 3.4.1. The strong implication here is for a *de facto* constitutional realignment in England, shaped by their view that:

Anglican establishment sustains the idea that the Church is itself a polity and, indeed, the heart of the English polity, since sacramental coronation alone ultimately confers legitimacy upon a political system and a constitution that remains creatively unwritten.\(^{430}\)

Hence, though Milbank’s writings on his own or with others are less than entirely clear on what this constitutional realignment might mean in practical terms, it is clear it would entail a substantially enhanced role for the Church of England in the decision-making processes that comprise the workings of the state.

Key lines of criticism concerning this vision for the Church of England are likely to be built around the following kinds of questions (this is not an exhaustive list):

1. Does it underestimate the extent of the influence the Church of England has been able to have on the shaping of political affairs in the post-war period via the middle axiom model of engagement?
2. Is being an established Church the best route for influencing the political state and holding it to account?
3. For those with a faith commitment, is this vision likely to command the support of an increasingly diverse, multi-faith/multi-denominationally based society in England in the twenty-first century?
4. Is it likely to command the support of those with no faith?
5. Is it possible, now, for a single nation state to adopt a ‘Just Price’ system via a process of corporatist state/church intervention of the kind Milbank advocates, rather than the market, given that the price of goods is often so internationally defined and market embedded?

Is it antithetical to the notion of democratic accountability, given that those who wield power and influence in the Church of England are not elected, and thus cannot be removed from these positions of power and influence by the electorate?

As this is a study on welfare and the approach of the Church of England to its provision, this cannot be the place to address all of these questions in the depth they require. But, with respect to the notion of democratic accountability — particularly at a local level — in the event that the Church of England were to secure government contracts for the provision of welfare services that are currently being provided by local government, it is difficult to see how this would not result in an overall diminishing of political accountability given that local government councillors are periodically subjected to ballot box scrutiny in a way that church officials are not. In an increasingly secular society, there is an unavoidably high probability that such a scenario is unlikely to command the levels of popular support that it would need to succeed.

We now turn to Milbank’s vision of the role he sees for the Church of England in the provision of welfare.

4.5.1 John Milbank’s vision of the role he sees for the Church of England in the provision of welfare

Milbank (along with Pabst) argues that key to the life of the Church:

is the social and civic action promoted by the majority of churches, above all the Church of England through its unique parochial system — whether more social events such as youth clubs, dinners for the elderly, mum and toddlers groups and coffee mornings or economic services like food-banks, homeless shelters, debt counselling, credit unions and health services.431

These interventions can legitimately be described as welfare services as they all contribute to the recipients’ mental health and wellbeing, and, for some, their physical health and wellbeing, too. They have been provided by the Church of England throughout the post-war period and have been coterminous with the existence of the Welfare State, and have made a significant contribution to civil society, and to what is often referred to as “the mixed economy of welfare provision”.432

In addition to these locally-provided services from within its buildings, the Church of England has also played a much larger role in the provision of welfare, often on a national scale. In the field of education, for example, one in four primary schools and one in six secondary schools in England are Church of England schools, though funded by the state, and approximately one million pupils are educated in more than 4,700 Church of England schools.433 In the field of housing, the Church of England has provided (and continues to provide) a range of properties for rent at modest rates for families living on low means, as well as provision for those who are homeless in the form of temporary shelters.434 In the field of health care, too, it continues to provide the majority of hospital chaplains to the NHS, as well as church representatives on NHS ethics committees and on some NHS Trust Boards as non-executive directors.435 Also, as noted at 4.4.2.1, the Church has contributed to the retraining of thousands of those without work, often working in tandem with state initiatives. These are just a small selection of examples that

432 For example, Eliza Filby documents this well with respect to the 1980s in, “Faith, Charity and Citizenship”.
434 See The Church of England website.
435 There are currently more than 80 Research Ethics Committees in the NHS, one third of whom are lay members, i.e., non-medically qualified. A significant proportion of these have theological backgrounds and include some Anglican bishops.
demonstrate that throughout the post-war period, the Church of England has made, and continues to make, a significant contribution to the provision of welfare. With the exception of the Church’s involvement with schools, which is not universally acknowledged as a positive feature in the English education system, there are few (if any) voices of dissent within or outside it saying this work should not continue.

Milbank’s Blue Socialist vision for the role that the Church of England should perform in the provision of welfare, whilst supportive of a continuation of all of the above, goes way beyond this, however. This is clear from his out-and-out endorsement with Pabst of the report that was produced by Phillip Blond and James Noyes in July 2013 called: *Holistic Mission: Social Action and the Church of England.* At the time of its launch, Milbank stated: “If both the Church of England and government implement the recommendations as set out in the *ResPublica* report, then this could permanently change the way the Church’s social action transforms state welfare and other public services.”

Hence, a brief summary and interrogation of the key arguments advanced by that report follows.

4.5.2 *Holistic Mission: Restoring the Church of England as also the British Welfare State?*

Blond and Noyes argue that the Church of England should actively engage in “competition *between* as well as within public service models” in a way that government facilitates by opening “doors for the church to enter public service delivery” and thus enable it to “enter the market for procuring, delivering and grouping public services in

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holistic provision.” Their report calls for the Cabinet Office to contribute to a Big Society Capital fund to assist organisations, including the Church of England, in being able to carry out these welfare interventions; hence, tax-payers’ money will be needed as part of the overall financing of this vision if it is to come to fruition. It acknowledges this will “require national, regional and local Church administration to adopt the structures needed to make it possible to deliver services in every locality”. It also acknowledges that the new role for the Church of England in the provision of public services will need to be focused on locally-based rather than on nationally-based provision, at least in its initial stages, recognising that the Church of England is not yet equipped for providing these services on a national level, though it does not rule out that option in the medium to long-term.

In a section entitled: “The Church has to make itself fit for purpose” the authors argue: “If the Church is to fulfil its purpose and its potential, it has to substantially upgrade its internal and external structures. It has to adapt to the governance demands of accountability and standards by the state whilst at the same time allowing the localities to innovate and create.” Yet we have seen at 4.4.3 how “adapting to the governance demands of accountability and standards by the state” is precisely what those voluntary sector organisations had to accomplish from the early 1970s onwards, when they agreed to take on government-funded contracts for services. It can be queried, therefore, how the concerns expressed by Milbank and others about the limiting affect this had on their decision-making autonomy and ability to provide “bespoke” welfare solutions, would not

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438 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 4.
439 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 5.
440 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 4.
441 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 32.
442 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 4.
equally apply to the Church of England in this commissioning scenario. Likewise, the concerns expressed about those voluntary sector organisations being compromised in their ability to criticise the government, owing to the fact that it was increasingly their paymaster. And this would be occurring when the Christendomists within the Church of England are seeking to move it away from the middle axiom model of engagement with the state, precisely so as to acquire greater levels of freedom for exercising a critical voice over its decisions.

Other concerns about this approach relate to capacity and resources. As Atherton, Baker and Reader have queried: “How much could we [meaning faith groups such as the Church of England] realistically take on, even if it is legitimate to do so?” In one telling exchange between them and Milbank concerning the latter’s 2011 article in the Church Times, in which he argues for much greater Church engagement in the processes of welfare, medicine, education, etc., they counter: “This analysis is seductive but vague, and out of touch with the real world where many Anglican churches struggle to pay diocesan quotas and recruit church wardens.” Milbank responds by arguing: “If you don’t have this, of course, you won’t be able to pay the church warden [not realising that church wardens do not receive payment for their work].” But it is noticeable that in the article to which the exchange relates, Milbank’s arguments are more theoretically based than empirically supported, which may be one reason why Baker, Atherton and Reader consider them to be out of touch with the real world.

444 J. Milbank, “The Church is the site of the True Society”, Church Times, 14 December, 2011.

A further factor to consider is the extent to which professionalisation of the kinds of welfare services relating to medicine, for example, that the Church of England might seek to compete for in the ‘welfare market’ described by Blond and Noyes, can be accommodated beyond the small number of examples adduced in their report that focus on mental health. For example, they make reference to the need for more church-based “health hubs” of the kind that has been established in a church in Blackburn.\footnote{Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 22.} This initiative seeks to provide through talk-based therapy a more holistic response to meeting the wellbeing needs of those experiencing mental health difficulties. These hubs may well provide some additional ‘holistic’ therapeutic support to patients over and above that which a standard ten minute GP session has been able to achieve, as has been argued by Dr Russ Rook, the founder of the initiative.\footnote{Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission, p. 22.} Yet they represent a modest contribution to mental health care delivery, and thus it can be argued do not provide a basis to suppose that other, more ambitious church-based health care interventions could replace those currently being provided by the state sector.

All clinically-based jobs require trained professionals to undertake them, albeit with auxiliary support. This is both a legal requirement and a social expectation, as well as being essential for insurance for these services to be procured. The Church of England would presumably have to employ people with these professional skills and qualifications to undertake the provision of these health care services. But how likely is it that it would be able to recruit and retain such people, offering commensurate levels of remuneration and pension provision, to that currently being provided within the NHS, for example? How likely is it that the levels of technology required for the provision of many of these...
health care services, as well as the need for appropriately designed and maintained buildings in which this work would be undertaken, could ever be realistically provided by the Church of England? Clearly, size matters when it comes to the provision of welfare; a point that Baker, Atherton and Reader make in their exchange with Milbank, stating: “The British government will spend 40% of its GDP on public expenditure even after the proposed cuts, an essential contribution to wellbeing which the church and voluntary bodies are incapable of satisfying.” Hence, the scope for more church-based health care interventions is likely to remain limited, though not inconsequential.

We begin to see, then, that the Blue Socialist vision that Milbank advocates for the Church of England in the provision of welfare in England is highly problematic: politically, technologically, professionally, financially, and practically. It rests on questionable theoretical and historical underpinnings that are clearly open to challenge on several fronts, some of which have been covered in the above critique. Yet it is this vision which impelled Milbank to endorse the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010, and to seek to get the backing of the Church of England for it. Part Three will explore the implications this had for the Church of England, and for the wider society in which it exists; before then, a number of conclusions stemming from the analysis in chapter four need setting down.

4.6 Conclusions

It has been argued that there is compelling historical evidence that supports a view that

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448 Baker, “A case of ecclesial over-optimism?”
none of the post-war administrations was hostile to the voluntary sector being involved in the provision of welfare. On the contrary, there were numerous examples of creative engagement between the Welfare State and the voluntary sector. This historical evidence runs contrary to Milbank’s view that the Welfare State was at the expense of the intermediary level organisations in British civil society.

This historical evidence also supports a view that a ‘Big Society’ existed in Britain throughout the post-war period; hence, before the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010. This has implications for how we are to interpret that project, and the thinking put forward by the Cameron-led administration in support of it, which we will return to in Part Three.

It has been argued that there is some historical evidence to support a view that those voluntary sector organisations that entered into government contracts for services experienced some loss of financial and strategic autonomy, as well as some diminution of their ability to be as flexible and bespoke in the way they provided welfare interventions to their client base. In this respect, Milbank’s concerns over what he perceives as an increasingly statist level of influence over these voluntary sector organisations in a way that has compromised their flexibility of approach are not without some historical evidential support, though there is some evidence indicating that they may be exaggerated. However, these developments were accompanied by an expansion in their activities made possible by the new funding streams, as well as a modernisation of their administrative and governance arrangements.

It has been argued that the perspective put forward by Prochaska and endorsed by Milbank, that owing to the existence of the British Welfare State and the support it has received from the Churches, charities have been “swimming into the mouth of the
Leviathan” is open to challenge, not least with respect to the historical evidence on which it rests. There are other, arguably more compelling, explanations for some of the events that Prochaska interprets as being supportive of his declinist perspective, as well as a growing body of historical evidence that runs counter to his overall thesis.

It has been argued that throughout the post-war period, the Church of England has provided, and continues to provide, a range of welfare services, sometimes autonomously of the state sector and sometimes in consort with it. With the possible exception of its involvement with schools, there are few dissenting voices who believe it should do otherwise. However, reasons have been given for why it might seek to exercise caution in embracing the vision as set out by Blond and Noyes, *Holistic Mission:* — a vision that Milbank has unequivocally endorsed.

The above provides a historical and theoretical platform for an analysis and appraisal of the response by the Church of England to the ‘Big Society’ project in Part Three, and the influence Milbank’s Blue Socialist perspective on welfare and the Church had on shaping it, as well as the views of others on the ‘Big Society’ project.
PART THREE


Research Goals for Part Three:

(5) To consider John Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on the ‘Big Society’ project, and the influence it had on shaping the Church of England’s response to it, in the context of other perspectives from within Anglican Socialism, and from within the Radical Orthodoxy grouping as regards Phillip Blond’s *Red Tory* analysis.

(6) To analyse and appraise the Church of England’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project, and to consider its future approach to welfare in light of that response. A particular focus shall be on the advice it received in GS1804 from Malcolm Brown, its Director of Mission and Public Affairs, on its handling of that project, and the influences he cites as key to shaping that advice.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE ‘BIG SOCIETY’ PROJECT AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED GS1804

5.1 Introduction

According to the National Audit Office, the financial crisis of 2008 resulted in a government-funded bailout to the British banking sector of £850 billion by the end of 2009.449 It also contributed to an economic recession that officially lasted for six consecutive quarters.450 Hence, whichever political party (or coalition of parties) had assumed office after the General Election in May 2010 would have had major financial challenges to contend with. The election of the Conservative/Liberal Coalition Government resulted in an economic programme to reduce the budget deficit and to bring about financial and economic recovery which put a squeeze on public expenditure, including on state-provided welfare services. This was coterminous with its launching of the ‘Big Society’ project, which was, in part, a response to the economic and social challenges the government faced.

How closely did the debates on the ‘Big Society’ project conducted within the Church of England resemble those that had taken place in the preceding century on the state, the Church and the provision of welfare, between Welfare Statist Anglican

Socialists and English Pluralist Christendom Anglican Socialists? More specifically, what part did John Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking play in shaping the Church of England’s response to the government’s ‘Big Society’ project? Did its response amount to a paradigm shift in its thinking on the Welfare State and its own role in the provision of welfare, when seen in the light of what had gone before? Chapter five has been structured to enable these questions to be answered.

For addressing RG 5 it will consider.

(1) The ‘Big Society’ project and Phillip Blond’s Red Tory influences on shaping it (5.2).
(2) John Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on the ‘Big Society’ project, seen in the context of other perspectives from within Anglican Socialism (5.3).

For addressing RG 6 it will consider.

(3) The Church of England’s post-war positions on welfare for the period 1945 to 2010 (5.4).
(4) The Church of England’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project, with specific reference to the advice it received in GS1804 from Malcolm Brown, its Director of Mission and Public Affairs, and the influences he cites as key to shaping that advice (5.5).
(5) The key outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project (5.6).

This will be followed by conclusions (5.7).

5.2 The ‘Big Society’ Project and Phillip Blond’s Red Tory Influence on Shaping it.

Blond’s theoretical contribution to the ‘Big Society’ project can be located in strands of conservative and socialist tradition, though it is critical of both when they represent, in

See P. Blond, Red Tory: How Left and Right have broken Britain and how we can fix it (London: Faber and Faber, 2010); J. Norman, The Big Society: The Anatomy of the New Politics (Buckingham: The University of Buckingham Press, 2010).
the case of conservatism, *laissez-faire* market individualism, and, in the case of socialism, centralist, top down statism. This is most clearly evident in his book of 2010 aptly called *Red Tory*, which was pivotal on the shaping of this agenda within Tory party circles.\(^{452}\) As we saw at 3.2, Blond is an Anglo-Catholic political theologian and a member of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping. He holds to a Christendom perspective on history and society, and his views on the Welfare State have been influenced by his wide theological reading, particularly from within the Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic traditions, and they are similar to those held by Milbank.

Thus Blond refers approvingly to Christian Distributionists\(^{453}\) such as Hilaire Belloc, author of *The Servile State* (1912), which is a trenchant critique of both capitalism and statist socialism, concluding that both engender master-slave relations as they dispossess the self-sufficient populace of land, ownership, and capital.\(^{454}\) He also refers approvingly to G.K. Chesterton, who, like Belloc, was a member of the Distributionist League, which called for the restoration of property and assets for all. But Blond is not a Distributionist in a ‘purist’, anarchistic sense, of the kind that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, as the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement in America in the 1930s, were to become. Rather, he cites approvingly Disraeli’s one nation Conservatism and Lord


\(^{453}\) Christian Distributionism is a strand of Roman Catholic theology influenced by Catholic Social Teaching on the concept of subsidiarity, though its perspective on that is by no means universally held by all Roman Catholics. Distributionists hold to a view that the means of production, distribution and exchange in a given society should be widely owned and not be concentrated in the hands of the few. Also, the role of the state should be minimal in all human affairs. This perspective has elements in common with anarchism (indeed, some Distributionists have called themselves Christian anarchists, such as Dorothy Day).

Randolph Churchill’s campaign through the Primrose League for what he terms progressive Toryism in the 1880s, as key sources of inspiration. What these writers have in common is a shared belief that the state can act in ways that are stifling to the rich diversity of social, cultural, and economic pluralism necessary for human flourishing.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Blond is also a great admirer of Burke, a thinker who influenced Disraeli a great deal, and who has been described by Jessie Norman, another key influence on the shaping of the ‘Big Society’ project, as “the founding father of the ‘big society’.” For both Norman and Blond, it is Burke who offers a palatable alternative to the way they perceive Hobbes had led to so much that had gone wrong in British politics and society. For it is Burke, they argue, who saw “man” as a social animal, to be understood within a context of trust, culture and tradition, and thus not capable of being understood independently from society, “man’s natural state being civil society itself.” Norman sums up this thinking:

We can thus think of the big society as a deliberate, Burkean counterblast to Hobbes, restoring the three elements that Hobbes omits: a focus on human beings not as economic atoms, but as bundles of capability; a focus on intermediate institutions between the individual and the state; and a focus on society and individual rights as such, rather than as mediated by the state.

Indeed, it is this focus on intermediate institutions between the individual and the state, that Blond sees as the way back from what he describes as state-provided “welfare serfdom”, that is, an economic and cultural dependency on the part of many of the

455 Blond, Red Tory, p. 29.
457 See Norman, The Big Society.
459 Norman, “The Intellectual Origins of the ‘big society’”.
460 Norman, “The Intellectual Origins of the ‘big society’”.
recipients of state provided welfare, that is retarding on an individual and societal level.\textsuperscript{461}

Thus he argues:

\begin{quote}
The great tragedy of the modern British welfare state has been the corrosion of the long-standing social values held by the working class, and thereby the effective erosion of the mutualism these values enshrined. Norms around community, work, familial obligation and civic and economic participation have been replaced by expectation of, and dependency on, state provision. This tragedy has not been particularly ironic, as welfarist state polices have been designed precisely to shift the primary source of social support from the horizontal social safety net of civil society to vertically delivered equivalents provided by the state alone.\textsuperscript{462}
\end{quote}

Blond envisaged the ‘Big Society’ project as, potentially at least, a way of reversing that trend, by placing less reliance on the state as the provider of welfare, and instead rejuvenating horizontal social bonds and the reality of self-regulating communities as he describes them.\textsuperscript{463} In this respect, his thinking in \textit{Red Tory} was aimed at doing two key things: on the one hand, encouraging a political direction on welfare that was challenging both to the post-war ‘Keynesian re-distributionist’ paradigm of the 1945 to the late 1970s, which he argues was characterised by an over-statist approach to welfare provision, and, on the other hand, a political direction that was equally challenging to the \textit{laissez-faire}, market-driven approach of Thatcherism and Blair/Brownism in the years between 1979 and 2010, which, in Blond’s words, had led to a situation in which the “rise of vested interest and the concentration of economic power in the city created an economy based on asset bubbles and debt leverage.”\textsuperscript{464} Indeed, it is this thinking that led Blond to state the following about the ‘Big Society’ project:

\begin{quote}
… it is about addressing state failure via a revival of our civil society through a radical decentralisation of budgets and power to our localities and communities.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{461} P. Blond, “Allow me to suggest George”, \textit{Guardian}, 27 September 2008.
\textsuperscript{462} Blond, \textit{Red Tory}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{463} Blond, \textit{Red Tory}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{464} P. Blond, “The austerity drive must not derail the winning ‘big society’”, \textit{Guardian} 3 October 2010.
Opening up the state to genuine economic participation and cooperative endeavour by citizens through charities, social enterprises and civic groups can create new trust platforms, designing out the audit and compliance bureaucracies that cripple our public services.\textsuperscript{465}

This thinking impressed David Cameron, who, as we saw at 3.2, defined the ‘Big Society’ project as embodying three strands:

(1) The fostering of voluntarism, philanthropy and social action in support of causes;
(2) Public Service Reform;
(3) Empowering individuals, communities and voluntary and charitable organisations to take more control over individual and societal affairs.\textsuperscript{466}

One way of fostering voluntarism, philanthropy and social action in support of causes was to encourage and support a greater role for churches in the provision of welfare (this aspect will be covered in more detail at 5.5).\textsuperscript{467} “Empowering individuals, communities and voluntary and charitable organisations to take more control”, was also a key objective of ‘Big Society’ thinking. One way it proposed for achieving this was to initiate a Community Organising Programme, through providing a year’s public money to train each of 5,000 (later to increase to 6,422) Community Organisers to work in their communities to promote more civic-based community initiatives.\textsuperscript{468} Another was to establish what it called the world’s first social investment bank, Big Society Capital, to be

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{465} Blond, “The austerity drive”.
\textsuperscript{466} See D. Cameron, “Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19\textsuperscript{th} July 2010.”
\end{footnotesize}
initially funded from dormant bank accounts.\textsuperscript{469} A Centre for Social Investment Bonds was also to be created, to encourage private investment in support of social investment initiatives.\textsuperscript{470} A Minister for Civil Society post was also created to help coordinate the Government’s interface with the voluntary sector. The ‘Big Society’ project also established a National Citizen Service, where groups of sixty children were to take part in ‘outward bound’ style courses in the country side to learn team-building skills.\textsuperscript{471} And large scale public service reform was to be achieved on a scale not seen since the inception of the Welfare State in the 1940s. It is this aspect that we now further consider.

\textbf{5.2.1 The ‘Big Society’ project and public service reform}

In one key respect, the role of the market in the ‘Big Society’ project was to be enhanced, that is, in the furtherance of public service reform. In this regard, this project can be seen as a continuation of a trend in British politics that can be traced back to Thatcherism, which laid the foundations for the Blairite ‘new localism’ that followed.\textsuperscript{472} This trend was to create, via legislation, the conditions that would enable competition in the provision of public services and hence a “more mixed economy of welfare” to be brought about.\textsuperscript{473} We saw at 2.4.1 (also, see Appendix Two: 3) how one example of this trend was the Hospital and Community Care Act of 1990, which established the purchaser/provider split in the NHS that enabled a market to be created for the provision of health care services, which

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{469} For more on this, see its web site at: https://www.bigsocietycapital.com/
\textsuperscript{470} For more on this, see the Gov.org at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/centre-for-social-impact-bonds-new-tools-launched (accessed on 17 November, 2017).
\textsuperscript{472} For a summary of “New Localism”, see M. Woolf, “Labour considers ‘new localism’ as the big-banner policy for a third term”, \textit{Independent}, 22 October 2013.
\end{flushleft}
had previously been solely provided by the state. A more contemporary one was the Academies Act of 2010, intended to increase the number of Academy Trusts whereby some schools opted out of local education authority control.\textsuperscript{474} Initiatives such as these were intended to result in a diverse range of providers for what had previously been state-run services, creating more choice and hence less ‘Big Government’ and more ‘Big Society’.

Accordingly, the Localism Act of 2011 made it easier for services to be outsourced to local providers, with a provision that enabled parish councils, local authority employees and voluntary organisations to exercise a “right to challenge” local authorities to contract out services. It also contained the right to bid for assets of value to them, from which they could “deliver exciting new services”.\textsuperscript{475} In this way, greater local empowerment was to be encouraged. This was consistent with what Prime Minister Cameron said in the forerunning consultation paper “Decentralisation and the Localism Bill — An essential guide”: “We will be the first Government in a generation to leave office with much less power in Whitehall than we started with. Why? Because we feel the importance of this in our heads as well as our hearts.”\textsuperscript{476} This sense of importance was partly underpinned by a sense that the state-run model of public services was too bureaucratic and inefficient, with Cameron saying on 6\textsuperscript{th} October, 2010:

\begin{quote}
So this is what radicalism means, no more top-down, bureaucratic-driven public services. We are putting those services in your hands. The old targets and performance indicators that drove the doctors, nurses and public officers mad —
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{476} “Decentralisation and the Localism Bill”, pp. 1-12.
they’re gone. All that bureaucracy that meant nothing ever happened — we are stripping it away.477

Hence, the ‘Big Society’ project, partly via the enacting of the Localism Act of 2011, was meant to address criticisms of the way some considered public services in Britain to have become marred by an over-centralised, over-bureaucratic, over-professionalised, and under-responsive approach to their delivery. Thus, the Act was intended to strengthen more localised, democratic kinds of accountability, by doing the following six things:

(1) Lifting the burden of bureaucracy — by removing the cost and control of unnecessary red tape and regulation;
(2) Empowering communities to do things their way — by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities;
(3) Increasing local control of public finance — so that more of the decisions over how public money is spent and raised can be taken within communities;
(4) Diversifying the supply of public services — by ending public sector monopolies, ensuring a level playing field for all suppliers, giving people more choice and a better standard of service;
(5) Opening up government to public scrutiny — by releasing government information into the public domain;
(6) Strengthening accountability to local people — by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.478

The intended result was to catapult Britain’s public services into a post-bureaucratic age, and restore a lost sense of Victorian civic engagement, voluntarism, philanthropic charitableness, and social action in the process.

It was a vision that Milbank was to embrace, seeing it as consistent with advancing Radical Orthodoxy’s Christendom values and vision. This would be achieved by bringing about a reduced Welfare State sector in favour of more community-based, localised,

voluntarist forms of welfare provision, a key welfare provider being the Church of England. Indeed, he saw the project as a major underpinning of his “Blue Socialism with a Burkean tinge” perspective, and its critique of Temple’s vision for the Welfare State, including its theological underpinning and the adverse impact he believes it has had on local community cohesion and mutualism, as well as on the Church of England’s reduced congregations and increasingly circumscribed role in the provision of welfare in the post-war period (see 4.3–4.4). Hence, we need to examine Milbank’s perspective on the ‘Big Society’ project in relation to other contrasting perspectives.

5.3 John Milbank’s Blue Socialist Thinking on the ‘Big Society’ Project seen in the Context of Other Perspectives from within Anglican Socialism

The launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in the summer of 2010 provoked a major debate within the Church of England on how it should respond. Some saw the project as an out-and-out attack on the Welfare State that the Church of England should largely oppose. Others saw it as a project that provided opportunities for the Church of England to re-engage in aspects of welfare provision that it had regretfully relinquished to the Welfare State, and hence a project that should be enthusiastically embraced. Yet others sought to develop thinking that in some respects fell between these two perspectives. Illustrative of the one ‘extreme’ of this debate was the document published in November 2010 by the radical theological think tank Ekklesia called Common Wealth: Christians for Economic and Social Justice, signed by Anglican Socialists such as Steven Shakespeare and Simon Barrow. The opposite ‘extreme’ was the response to that document by Milbank.

called “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”,\textsuperscript{480} published in December 2010. Illustrative of an approach that fell between these two perspectives was the book written by John Atherton, Christopher Baker and John Reader, \textit{Christianity and the New Social Order}, published in 2011.\textsuperscript{481}

In some ways the \textit{Common Wealth} document can be seen as a qualified (hence not uncritical) defence of the Welfare Statist strand of the Anglican Socialist tradition, though it was signed by some non-Anglicans. The document stated its position as follows:

As Christians, we are convinced that the actions of the current government are an unjustified attack on the poor … the victimisation of people at the margins of society and the corrosion of community … We call on the churches to resist the cuts and stand in solidarity with those targeted.

And with respect to the ‘Big Society’ project it stated: “The Big Society is a Big Lie. It is a smokescreen, another ideological veil. Its pretence of radical change is simply a means of persuading us to live in submission to the great God Capital.” Crucially, it then went on to state what has since been seen as a central criticism of the Church of England’s initially favourable response to the ‘Big Society’ project by some writers:

Of course, there are Christians and Christian organisations who see in the Big Society agenda a recognition of what they are already doing in their social activism, and an opportunity to take it further. However, we believe that the craving for relevance is overriding any more searching critique of what is on offer.

However, the \textit{Common Wealth} document did not rule out some pragmatic compromising with the ‘Big Society’ project by churches, drawing on resources being made available by the Government, to enable short-term assistance to the poor to be provided at a time of austerity, so long as it was not at the expense of embracing its ideology, stating:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{480} Milbank, “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”.
\end{quote}
“there may well be overriding pragmatic reasons why churches should compromise, drawing on resources available in order to make life more tolerable and more human for those they serve. But the critical, cutting edge of Christian witness must never be lost at such times to an accommodation to Big Society ideology.”

The response to the *Common Wealth* document by Milbank was highly critical of most of its key lines of argumentation, and reflected his English Pluralist Christendom kind of Anglican Socialism. It agreed with *Common Wealth* “about the unnecessary pace and regressive social impact of some of the budget cuts — although [it contended] the scale is being somewhat exaggerated”. But it then described the ‘Big Society’ project as “a remarkable experiment in seeking to mutualise government services, to give more power in decision-making to front-line operators and to establish a more direct relationship between users and suppliers of various services.”

Milbank further pointed out that Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party, was “cautiously inclined towards his own leftish version of the Big Society [what became the Blue Labour “Good Society” model that Milbank helped to shape].”

Milbank then proceeded to lavish praise on the tradition of religious philanthropy that had developed in Victorian Britain, which he argued was “often done by the working class for the working class”; and then proceeded to critique the Temple welfare state model of welfare delivery, stating: “Ironically, it was the religious tradition of welfare which itself played a big role, through the influence of William Temple and others, in erecting the welfare state which quite quickly destroyed this [religious Victorian

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482 Ekklesia, *Common Wealth*.
philanthropic] tradition and the moral energies it had nurtured”.486 And for Milbank “it is not little short of incredible that churches should endorse any process of education that neglects the vital truth about our souls or any process of medicine not concerned with the soul as well as the body.”487 He thus argued “the Big Society” presents a huge opportunity for the restoration of ‘the big parish’ in which care for body and soul go once more hand in hand. It is this opportunity that Common Wealth crazily wishes to forego.”488

By contrast, the Atherton, Baker, Reader perspective was not as hostile to the ‘Big Society’ project as the Common Wealth document had been, but neither was it as supportive of its aims as Milbank’s writings were. It was sceptical of the extent to which an increased emphasis on localism in the provision of welfare as advocated by Milbank and Blond et al, could adequately meet the needs of contemporary British society in the way the Welfare State was resourced and equipped to do, particularly in the wake of the financial collapse of 2008. However, it argued for a need to go beyond the approach that, since the Beveridge report of 1942 had been on welfare (and specifically the slaying of the five giants), to one capable of tackling what it describes as wellbeing.489 It concluded with an updated list of middle axioms to those originally established by Temple in his work of 1942. In some respects these broadened the range of areas requiring both state and community action to include:

(1) The flourishing of every child — with a particular focus on the first three years of a child’s life — involving their nurturing in the material and immaterial, including spiritual, experiences of life.

486 Milbank, “The Big Society”, p. 3.
489 Atherton, Baker & Reader, Christianity and the New Social Order, pp. 22-74.
(2) The commitment to education as lifelong learning for all through the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, including embracing initiatives such as the “universities of the third age”.

(3) The fostering of rigorous care for and delight in the environment.

4) The pursuit of greater equality as essential to the pursuit of greater wellbeing (this already being a key underpinning of state welfare institutions such as the NHS).

(5) Developing financial systems to deliver and support greater wellbeing for all, including ethical economics in collaboration with religious traditions.

(6) Recognising the importance of income and work for personal and national wellbeing (something that the Beveridge report had emphasised in its commitment to full employment);

(7) The development of health as personal and communal wholeness for all. In this respect they emphasised the need for greater recognition of a spiritual dimension to health and wellbeing, and argued for: “curative as well as preventative measures, traditional as well as alternative medicines, private and public health and the growing need to focus on mental health.”

Some of this thinking resonates with Milbank’s Blue Socialist insistence on the need for a greater emphasis to be placed on ethical (including spiritual) precepts in finance and the economy; a more holistic and spiritually informed approach to health care provision; the need for ethically underpinned management of the environment; and a greater focus on the common good in the way British politics is conducted. Of course, the increased emphasis that Atherton, Baker and Reader place on the need for wellbeing to be part of the wider welfare remit — including state provision of welfare — could be interpreted by some as fostering an over-encroaching state that could become too intrusive or controlling, thereby undermining the role of the family and civil society — a view that would chime with aspects of Milbank’s scepticism of statist approaches to

490 Atherton, Baker & Reader, Christianity and the New Social Order, pp. 125-129.
welfare. Yet this concern may be mitigated by their advocacy of a Temple inspired and informed pragmatism in the way these goals can and should be achieved.

For Atherton, Baker and Reader, as it had been for Temple, state sector measures can and should be a major (though not exclusive) part of the overall provision of welfare (and what they term wellbeing) where they have been seen to provide, or have the potential to provide, the best route for its delivery, particularly in health and education. But, in line with Temple’s thinking, this need not be at the expense of other, more localised options such as community-based initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases or to improve people’s mental health via more locally organised recreational activities, which can add to the overall level of wellbeing. It was for this reason that they saw some potential in the ‘Big Society’ project for enhancing neighbourliness (and thus wellbeing) via increased state provided financial support to the voluntary sector, and, specifically, the faith-based sector, whilst remaining wary of whether this was “simply a distraction or blind for the real agenda, which is cuts in public services.”

Their perspective can thus be located in the Welfare Statist strand, but with an emphasis on broadening and modernising its thinking for the twenty-first century, with a Temple inspired focus on pragmatic as well as ideological underpinning, and his recognition of how community-based welfare initiatives can and should contribute to the overall drive for social improvement.

These three perspectives on the ‘Big Society’ project, though by no means all-inclusive of opinion within the Church of England on the best ways of responding to it, nevertheless give a sense of the parameters in which the debates were conducted. Much

491 Atherton, Baker & Reader, Christianity and the New Social Order, p. 9.
of the thinking then and since can be seen as variations on these perspectives: the extent
to which the Church should defend the Welfare Statist legacy or the communitarian
critique of it — the latter offering a more voluntarist, community-based provision of
welfare. However, before we analyse the Church of England’s response to the ‘Big
Society’ project, we must briefly examine its positions on welfare for the period 1945 to
2010, so that its response can be considered in historical context.

5.4 The Church of England’s Positions on Welfare: 1945–2010

We saw at 4.4.8 how it can be argued that the Church positioned itself closer to Temple’s
thought on the state via the resolutions passed at the 1948 Lambeth Conference,
particularly Resolution 19. The result was that the Church of England became a champion
of the Welfare State during the period of welfare consensus discussed at 2.2, in effect
calling upon its members “to accept their own political responsibility and to cooperate
with the State and its officers in their work”. When that consensus was challenged by
the Thatcher administration in the early to mid-1980s during a period of economic
turbulence, manufacturing decline, rising unemployment and a squeeze on public sector
funding, it responded with an enquiry that produced the Faith in the City report in
1985. That report was highly critical of the negative effect it believed the economic and
social policies being pursued by the government were having on the poorest members of
British society. It embodied much of Temple’s and Tawney’s thinking in its analysis and
mode of presentation; in addition, it drew on a significant number of accounts from

492 Lambeth Conference of 1948, Resolution 19.
493 Church of England, Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation. The
Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas (London:
recipients of welfare that added to its authenticity. It made 38 recommendations pertaining to the Church of England and 23 to the government and wider society. These latter recommendations included the need:

2. To increase the Rate Support Grant to local government so that it could increase its provision of welfare services.
11. To extend state support for the long-term unemployed.
12. To increase Child Benefit.
16. To expand the public housing programme.494

As these were all measures that would increase the resources required of the Welfare State and the demands placed on it, it can be reliably argued that they amounted to a continuation of Temple’s legacy at a time when government spending on welfare was being squeezed (even though it can be argued they went beyond his thinking on middle axioms). This is a point that was lost on some of the commentators at the time,495 who focused instead on part of a single chapter influenced by Liberation Theology — with its Marxist undertones — that was theologically unrepresentative of the broad thrust of the report and its recommendations. The report called for a renewed sense of partnership between central and local government and between government and the voluntary sector, to be achieved by providing “long-term continuity and funding for recognised voluntary bodies working alongside statutory agencies”.496 This recommendation was fully consistent with Temple’s and Beveridge’s thinking on voluntary sector provision of welfare, and the positive role it could and should perform in its provision, in tandem with,

494 Faith in the City, pp. 364-66.
495 For example, it was condemned by one cabinet minister as “pure Marxist Theology”. See J. Bingham, “Church of England’s pre-election blast revives memories of Faith in the City”, Daily Telegraph, 3 October 2019. For an introduction to Liberation Theology see G. Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).
496 Faith in the City, p. 365.
but not as a substitute for, the Welfare State.

After *Faith in the City*, in 1986 a working party under the Chairmanship of the Social Policy Committee of the Church of England, published *Not Just for the Poor: Christian Perspectives on the Welfare State*. That report was, in large part, written by Ronald Preston, a key champion of the Temple Welfare State legacy in the Church of England and a leading member of the William Temple Foundation until his death in December 2011 (see Appendix One: 2). It provided an analysis of the achievements and shortcomings of the Welfare State, structured around the five giants on which Beveridge had framed his report. It offered a nuanced and balanced assessment of progress since 1945 in slaying them, as well as an analysis of the shortcomings in state-provided welfare. It pointed to:

1. How health care had become far more comprehensive in its coverage.
2. How educational standards had risen with more children leaving school with qualifications.
3. How social security benefits had improved in real terms since 1945 and ensured that people experiencing hardship had some income.
4. How there had been a massive clearance of slum housing and the development of much high quality public sector housing.
5. How the growth in state provided personal social services had considerably assisted in the provision of day care for children, support to elderly people, the disabled and other vulnerable groups in society.

Yet it also identified shortcomings in state-provided welfare, including: Where means-tested benefits could on occasion trap people in poverty.

1. Where the cost of state-provided health care was proving to be more expensive than had originally been envisaged (resulting, for example, in charges being instituted for glasses and dentures and thus a compromise with the free at the point of delivery principle).

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Where there remained a shortage of social housing provision in a context of an acute shortage of private rented accommodation.

Where there were still serious disparities between the achievement of children from professional and managerial families compared to the rest.

Where social workers had not been good at communicating to the outside world on what they did, resulting in inflated expectations and some suspicion in the minds of the British public.\textsuperscript{498}

The report also analysed voluntary sector provision of welfare since 1945 and concluded:

Gradually a partnership between the state and the voluntary sector developed … It was assumed by some in post-war Britain that the enhanced provision of social security, together with the establishment of the NHS and the implementation of the 1944 Education Act, would render the existence of the voluntary organisations superfluous. This withering of voluntary activity did not occur; some activities were maintained and different forms of action grew in response to changing social needs.\textsuperscript{499}

As we saw at 4.4, this view is antithetical to the perspective which Milbank was later to advance, that the post-war Welfare State was “at the expense of intermediary institutions and popular participation” and “fragmented mutual organisation”.\textsuperscript{500} Rather, it is wholly consistent with the thinking of Temple, Attlee and Beveridge, and with much of the historical evidence adduced in chapter four. The 1986 report saw voluntary provision of welfare as complementary to statutory provision by “providing services which might not otherwise exist,”\textsuperscript{501} though the report considered these at times to be rigid and inflexible in their styles of operation.

\textit{Not Just for the Poor} also examined the voluntarist critiques of state-provided welfare that had been developed since the 1960s by Ivan Illich, Roger Hadley, and Stephen Hatch, et al.\textsuperscript{502} (and which in some respects can be seen as precursors to several

\textsuperscript{498} \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, pp. 49-72.
\textsuperscript{499} \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{500} Milbank, “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{501} \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{502} \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, p. 78.
of the criticisms that Milbank later advanced about the Welfare State that were considered in 4.4.1–4.4.7). These have included:

1. An alleged over-professionalisation of decisions leading to a “neglect of people’s capacity for self-help”.
2. An alleged overly bureaucratic “top down” delivery of services.
3. An alleged insufficient level of focus on the client’s perspective when assessing their needs.

Of significance here is that, since the NHS Plan of 2000 and the Wanless Report of 2002, both of which highlighted the need for NHS health care professionals to embrace greater patient empowerment and personalization with patients as partners in care, a considerable amount of work has been done on developing and promoting ‘bottom-up’, person-centered care in the ethos of the NHS, in the interpersonal approach of its health care deliverers, and in its systems of health care delivery. This is an indication that this line of criticism has been acknowledged by key health care professionals as not being without merit. In this respect Not Just for the Poor was prescient in its recognition of the reality that: “We have moved away decisively from being a society which will accept paternalistic services … today’s citizens expect to be able to participate in decisions which affect them”. Yet the introduction of person (sometimes called patient) centered care into the NHS in the early 2000s as an alternative model to task or disease focused

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503 Not Just for the Poor, p. 95.
504 An alternative perspective can be located in the study into professional management in the NHS by P. Hayde, E. Granter, J. Hassard & L. McCann, Deconstructing the Welfare State: Managing Health Care in the Age of Reform (London: Routledge, 2016).
506 Not Just for the Poor, p. 123.
care, which has since received much praise where it has been found to have been consistently applied.\textsuperscript{507} suggests that it was a line of criticism that could be addressed, and, to a significant degree, be accommodated, within one arm of the Welfare State (thus setting an example for others). But due credit must go to writers such as Illich, Hadley, and Hatch, who recognised the need for a more person-centered approach to aspects of welfare provision to that being provided at that time by the state sector, before many others had.

Yet \textit{Not Just for the Poor} concluded that whilst this ‘voluntarist’ critique asked “important questions about power and decision making”, with its emphasis on how “users of services should have a far greater say in what they are offered”, it went on to say:

But it can be argued that the critique does not take into account the fact that organisations and bureaucracies are crucial for welfare in the twentieth century. They may not work perfectly, but they are vital. Furthermore, the analysis can … become a new dogma: small is not necessarily beautiful; small can be experienced as oppressive and limiting.\textsuperscript{508}

\textbf{5.4.1 Summary Position Statement (1)}

\textit{Not Just for the Poor} was emphatic in its insistence that it was “not arguing for the status quo.”\textsuperscript{509} It acknowledged there were weaknesses in the Welfare State that needed to be addressed — the need for less paternalism and greater participation being just one, with a renewed need for greater flexibility and responsiveness in the delivery of state-provided welfare services. However, it was unambiguous in its overall support for the Welfare State, concluding: “We thus affirm much of the vision, if not the detail, of the post-war
settlement, which was fundamentally sound” and further concluded: “Generous provision by society through the state is essential. But it is not enough on its own to produce the kind of society we wish to see. A mixed economy of welfare, built on co-operation between the public, voluntary and private sectors, is to be welcomed”.\textsuperscript{510} Crucial to note here is the word co-operation. It did not envisage or advocate a mixed economy of welfare based on competition for the provision of welfare services by way of a tendering/commissioning process of the kind the ‘Big Society’ project was to introduce via the provisions of the Localism Act of 2011.

In the period between the publication of \textit{Faith in the City} in 1985 and the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010, ‘the Church of England’s approach to welfare can be seen as broadly being within the paradigm of thinking that \textit{Faith in the City} and \textit{Not Just for the Poor} had scoped out. \textit{Unemployment and the Future of Work} (1997)\textsuperscript{511} — a study undertaken by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland but with significant Church of England input — can, in some respects, be seen as a sequel to \textit{Faith in the City} in that it adopted a similar research methodology, with much evidence being gathered from all over the country by a group of researchers on the plight of the unemployed. It was prescient, for example, in the way it drew attention to the dangers of Work Capability Assessments for the unemployed, forcing people into the labour markets who may struggle to secure suitable employment and arguing against the view that any offers of work “made to the unemployed should be compulsory”.\textsuperscript{512} Subsequent public concern over Work Capability Assessments for the unemployed is what resulted in the

\textsuperscript{510} \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{512} \textit{Unemployment and the Future of Work}, p. 132.
government terminating prematurely the contract of the provider of these assessments (ATOS) in 2014, though they continue to be undertaken by a different provider.\textsuperscript{513}

*Unemployment and the Future of Work* further argued in favour of in-work benefits, such as Family Credit and Council Tax Benefit, seeing them as “an important gain,” although it acknowledged that: “One effect of in work benefits is to reduce the wages offered for relatively unskilled jobs.”\textsuperscript{514} This was something that had not been envisaged by Beveridge or Temple and is precisely the kind of extension of the Welfare State’s remit and its consequences about which Milbank has been so critical.\textsuperscript{515} *Faithful Cities*,\textsuperscript{516} a report published in 2006 by the Church’s Commission on Urban Life and Faith, focused on inner city life and the need for the Church to focus resources on tackling racism, poverty, social exclusion, and the growing divide between the rich and poor in English inner cities. Its research base was more modest than it had been for *Faith in The City* and *Unemployment and the Future of Work* and it had far less impact. As we saw at 4.4.8, the Church of England’s Board for Social Responsibility, established in 1958 and replaced by the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council in 1999, continued to offer advice to successive governments on numerous aspects of welfare. These included how the functioning of the Welfare State could be improved. It also helped coordinate the Church’s myriad of voluntary interventions in social welfare. However, it was only with the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project, that the Church of England was confronted with a

\textsuperscript{514} *Unemployment and the Future of Work*, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{515} Milbank & Pabst, “Post-liberal politics and the alternative of mutualising social security”, p. 92.
radical alternative agenda. Hence, it is its response to that new welfare agenda that we now consider.

5.5 The Church of England’s Response to the ‘Big Society’ Project, with Specific Reference to the Advice it received in GS1804 in late 2010 from Malcolm Brown, its Director of Mission and Public Affairs, and the Influences he cites as Key to the Shaping of that Advice

In a speech delivered to charity groups in South London in July 2010, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, gave the ‘Big Society’ project “two and a half cheers”; he stopped short of giving it three cheers, stating: "We need reassuring that the Big Society isn't just an alibi for cuts, and a way back to Government just washing its hands."517 At the same time, he said that the project could represent a “watershed moment” in British politics if it was pursued with imagination. Hence, although his speech was by no means an unqualified endorsement of the ‘Big Society’ project, it can be seen as broadly supportive of its stated aims. The Archbishop liked the idea that the project saw “the local as important” and “somehow built around thickly textured communities”.518 Milbank’s view of the speech was that “five-sixths support is really quite a lot, and probably gets it about right.”519

The Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Church of England then produced an advisory paper in September 2010, written by its Director, Malcolm Brown, who later described himself as the person who “was responsible for the Church of England’s central

517 Heidi Blake, “Dr. Rowan Williams: Two and a half cheers for the Big Society”, Daily Telegraph, 24 July 2010.
518 Heidi Blake, “Dr. Rowan Williams”.
responses to the government’s ‘Big Society’ proposals”.\textsuperscript{520} This key official document was called: “The Big Society” and the Church of England (GS1804).\textsuperscript{521} It stated: “The Coalition has set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare. The potential of voluntarism to replace some state welfare provision may make The Big Society financially attractive.”\textsuperscript{522} Hence, at that time, Brown was clear in his advice to the Church of England that: “dramatic cuts in public spending, not least in social welfare” was the financial context in which the ‘Big Society’ project had been shaped, following the financial crash two years earlier. Indeed, in the same document he pointed out: “David Cameron has indicated that he regards the development of stronger social structures as compensating for a permanent and very large reduction in public spending”. However, Brown went on to state: “Yet, despite such caveats, many agree that the ideas behind The Big Society are necessary in a civilised society and that the erosion of community values and the intermediate institutions has gone so far that the basic social structures need rebuilding.”\textsuperscript{523} He further argued:

The churches are not being asked to sign up to, or approve, The Big Society as a single policy programme. However, there is potential for us to use the political narrative of The Big Society to shift the relationships between the state, the individual and intermediate institutions in ways which reflect a Christian understanding of society and reinforce the church’s place in a healthy social order.\textsuperscript{524}

This quote is revealing in that it suggests that Brown, at that time, believed that the existing relationships between the state, the individual and the intermediate institutions

\textsuperscript{521} M. Brown, “The Big Society” and the Church of England, General Synod Paper GS1804, September 2010. This is available in Appendix Three.
\textsuperscript{522} GS1804, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{523} GS1804, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{524} GS1804, p. 5.
did not adequately “reflect” a Christian understanding of society, or “reinforce” the Church’s place within it. As we saw in chapters three and four, this is the essence of Milbank’s Blue Socialist critique of Temple’s Welfare Statist legacy, and, indeed, of Milbank’s and Blond’s Christendom critique of that whole line of the Anglican Socialist tradition. GS1804 thus proposed a partnership between the Church of England and the new Coalition Government on delivering key aspects of the ‘Big Society’ project, claiming: “We know of no other current partnership proposals of comparable size and scope.”

That partnership was, in part, to take the form of the Near Neighbours initiative, that provided an illustration of what else might be possible.

### 5.5.1 The Near Neighbours initiative

The Near Neighbours initiative was a project intended to better promote and improve community relations, particularly in multi-faith areas. It would do this by distributing state funding to parishes for local initiatives to increase the: “intensity of local cross-community relationships. These were to be through small scale activities generated locally and administered through the local church”.

It is for this reason that Brown has since said “Near Neighbours was not addressed to welfare issues. Near Neighbours was addressed to interfaith relations”. In a Church of England proposal document of 15 October 2010, the Near Neighbours project was described as an initiative with “a real potential to connect our existing vocation with the concepts of a Big Society.”

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525 GS1804, p. 10.
527 Brown’s reply to question 21 in Appendix Four.
The programme represents a real shift away from governmental programmes to faith community programmes; away from centralised and top down approaches to locally rooted approaches … the approach being proposed will open new ways for government and faith communities generally to relate to each other.  

In GS1804 Brown had made it clear that “significant sums of public money would be involved.” This would be state provided money received into the Church Urban Fund (an initial grant of five million pounds was later provided, with two other grants to follow). Although Brown insisted the Near Neighbours initiative was “not about the church stepping into the welfare gap left by a retreating state”, later in the same document he stated that if the Near Neighbours initiative proved to be successful, there may be “further opportunities for similar church/government partnership under The Big Society agenda. Some of these may involve the church in direct service delivery”.

When later questioned on this, Brown did not give specific examples of the kind of direct service delivery he had been thinking of, but instead alluded to how a number of bishops had seen the Lutheran Churches in Scandinavia and Germany as “essentially, an arm of the civil service, and they got envious”. He was, then, at least in part, trying to incorporate their expectations into what he had written. He further stated: “the potential of our buildings to be community hubs and accessible to many, could be enhanced if there was less government suspicion about using public money to build shared resources through faith communities”. These ideas resonated with those that were being put

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530 GS1804, p. 11.
532 Brown’s reply to question 20.
533 GS1804, p. 11.
534 Brown’s reply to question 23.
535 GS1804, p. 12.
forward by Milbank in support of his view that “The Big Society depends on the Big Parish”, as well as those being put forward by Blond in *Red Tory*.\(^{536}\) We begin to see, then, how GS1804 was, in part, the catalyst for the Near Neighbours project, as well as for other aspects of the Church’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project, that we now analyse.

### 5.5.2 GS1804 and the General Synod of November 2010

GS1804 was broadly supportive of the ‘Big Society’ initiative, fully recognising it would be rolled out in the context of significant reductions to public expenditure, with implications for the funding of state-provided welfare. The paper concluded by stating: “The Big Society is, in principle, natural territory for the Church of England … What we now see is a government moving to build social policy around such local commitments.”\(^{537}\) It went on to state: “The Big Society may come to represent a radical and ambitious shift in the way society and government are conceived: one in which the church has more room to be itself … The church has an interest in seeing the best elements of the Big Society thinking succeed.”\(^{538}\) It was well received by General Synod, as confirmed by the *Report of the Proceedings*.\(^{539}\)

In the opening remarks from the Bishop of Leicester, the Rt Revd Timothy Stevens declared: “We have a responsibility to stand in critical solidarity with people in power. That remains acutely important at a time of such dramatic and rapid economic and social change.”\(^{540}\) This statement is similar to a point that Brown was later to make in

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\(^{536}\) Blond, *Red Tory*, pp. 80-81.  
\(^{537}\) GS1804, p. 13.  
\(^{538}\) GS1804, p. 14.  
conversation with the present writer, alluding to how the vocation of an established church may be: “to recognise the intense burden of responsibility that people in authority carry.” This indicates a perceived need for the established church to be seen to be in solidarity (albeit not uncritical solidarity) with the government of the day at a time of crisis, such as in the aftermath of a financial crash. However, Bishop Stevens went on to state: “It is, of course, too early to say what the consequences of the Government’s programme will be, but not too early for us as a Church to be put on warning of our need to be watchful and attentive, especially to the unintended consequences for the most vulnerable.” Uncritical solidarity with the people in power was not, therefore, being advocated.

Bishop Stevens was also keen to point out the limits to state welfare and the ideological approach underpinning it:

The State can overreach itself when it forgets that people find identity and belonging in smaller communities, localities, workplaces, trade unions, educational establishments and churches. If people are to find their full human identity in such communities, the State must know its limits. In that sense, I suggest, the Big Society need not be about the State abandoning its responsibilities but about recognizing that good government requires that there are real limits to its remit, whether in times of austerity or of prosperity.

His opening remarks were, therefore, broadly supportive of the ‘Big Society’ initiative, seeing it as an opportunity for strengthening the intermediate organisations in British civil society whilst not wanting the state to abandon its welfare responsibilities, but recognising there are “limits” to what state welfare provision can achieve. The debate

541 Brown’s reply to question 30.
that followed broadly reflected that line of thinking. Archbishop Rowan Williams welcomed GS1804:

I welcome the document before us. I welcome very profoundly the language that is around about the Big Society. In recent weeks, I have occasionally been asked whether I am at all cynical about the Big Society in relation to its contemporaneity with the cost-cutting exercise. The answer is that I am not. What I am is not cynical but opportunistic. Whether or not the Big Society is indeed an absolutely innocent creation of pure political vision or whether it has some elements in it of expediency, never mind: it has given us an extraordinary opportunity for raising in public questions about character and virtue, questions about generosity and justice, and of course a whole set of quite uncomfortable questions addressed to ourselves about our willingness to step up to the plate and respond.544

Several other speakers echoed this positive response to GS1804, with the Bishop of Blackburn (the Rt Revd Nicholas Reade) saying: “In a way, it is all win-win: a new culture of volunteerism; opening up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies; the decentralization agenda — ‘Nothing is real until it is local’ and all that.”545 There were some words of caution spoken, however, from the Revd Mark Beach (Coventry): “What I fear is that, as the tide of central Government funding retreats, many in the community and voluntary sector will be left high and dry on the beach.”546 Yet, despite these reservations, he was of the view: “If the Big Society is about enabling local people to fulfil their aspirations, I am all for it. If what is achieved is a real shift of power away from Whitehall, which reduces red tape and allows people to get on with it, then all well and good.”547

The debate also contained some historical reflection on the Welfare State and the Church’s approach to it, with Mr Gavin Oldham (Oxford) arguing that the position

544 Report of Proceedings, p. 28
545 Report of Proceedings, p. 33
546 Report of Proceedings, p. 33
adopted on the Welfare State by the Lambeth Conference of 1948 may have been too unguarded:

> With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that this provision of State welfare has become more and more secular; a job rather than a vocation. Now, for the first time in 60 years, there is a Government that positively wants voluntary organizations with a vocation to work in partnership with it. It wants this to be a reality at the local level, and appears to be well-tuned to the risks and challenges of such partnerships, both for the Government and the voluntary organizations themselves.\(^{548}\)

At the conclusion of the debate, a resolution was thus passed endorsing GS1804 as a way forward for the Church of England on its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project.\(^{549}\)

**5.5.3 Summary Position Statement (2)**

The Synod’s support for GS1804 can be seen as representing a paradigm shift in the way the Church responded to a government that was making major cuts to public expenditure, including welfare expenditure. Whereas *Faith in the City* had been highly critical of government cuts to public expenditure — including welfare, and the impact they were having, GS1804 was broadly in support of the ‘Big Society’ project, although, as previously noted, it acknowledged that the Coalition Government had “set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare”.\(^{550}\) And whereas *Not Just for the Poor* had welcomed the post-war mixed economy of welfare, built on *co-operation* between the public, voluntary and private sectors, GS1804 was broadly supportive of a project that advocated a mixed (market) economy of welfare based around *competition* via the provisions of what became the Localism Act of 2011. Indeed, it went so far as to suggest that by way of this new church/government partnership, the Church of England

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\(^{550}\) GS1804, p. 2.
could become involved more in “direct service delivery”. This view was wholly consistent with Milbank’s support for the ‘Big Society’ project, not least his insistence that it provided an opportunity for the Church to “operate as the fulcrum for the growth of civil society”.\textsuperscript{551}

Given the importance of GS1804 to the shaping of the Church of England’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project in late 2010, 2011 and early 2012, it is necessary to explore the reasons underpinning Brown’s advice to the Church. In what follows I will draw heavily on the transcript of the recorded interview I conducted with him at Church House, Westminster, on 22 May 2018 (see Appendix Four).

\textbf{5.5.4 The influences that shaped Malcolm Brown’s advice to the Church of England in GS1804 on the handling of the ‘Big Society’ project}

A former director of the William Temple Foundation, Brown states: “Temple’s work had been very important in my formation even before I knew his name, because it was the way we were brought up in the 1970s.”\textsuperscript{552} However, he later states: “But my own journey, from being a kind of William Temple left leaning Christian socialist, moved when I started reading MacIntyre in the early 1980s.”\textsuperscript{553} Alasdair MacIntyre, in his work of 1981, \textit{After Virtue},\textsuperscript{554} had been very critical of modernity, particularly the moral structures that had emerged from Renaissance science and the Enlightenment, which he attributed in significant part to its abandonment of Aristotelianism, and much of the Ancient and Medieval (Thomist) teleological understanding of ethics, that focused on an account of good and moral persons based on virtue ethics. \textit{After Virtue} is a critique of modernity and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{551} Milbank, “The Big Society”, p. 2.  \\
\textsuperscript{552} Brown’s reply to question 1.  \\
\textsuperscript{553} Brown’s reply to question 6.  \\
\end{flushright}
its political offshoot — capitalism, with its liberal ideological underpinning and what MacIntyre sees as its bureaucratic state structures, written by a convert to Roman Catholicism. He also advocates more of a localist, communitarian approach to social organisation in preference to a centralist, statist one. Brown states that:

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\text{I was trying to take MacIntyre seriously … At the same time I was coming out of a tradition that I didn’t want to abandon. So that’s why I developed the idea of traditions in dialogue with each other. I was using MacIntyre’s idea of an epistemological crisis which Maurice Glassman also picks up, on how traditions grow and develop. So, I was trying to get a sort of synthesis of the Temple tradition with MacIntyre … I wanted to build a bridge. And that was a personal journey.}^{555}
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What Brown means by traditions in dialogue with each other becomes clearer in the following statement he gave in response to being asked whether he had been influenced by the Figgis, Demant, Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy Christendom strand of Anglican social thinking:

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\text{My lineage is Temple, Preston, Atherton …. Most people had gone soft by the end for John [Atherton] because, for him, the Demant/Christendom tradition was soft. It was unrealistic, it was about a separatist Church. It would lead to Hauerwas if you see what I mean. However, my doctorate, }\text{After the Market,} \text{was an attempt at holding the two traditions together as having something interesting to say, provided one tradition is used as a corrective to the other.}^{556}
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Thus Brown was keen to emphasise that the Temple, Preston, Atherton tradition can work with the Figgis, Demant, Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy Christendom tradition:

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\text{as correctives to each other but not as a synthesizing thing. That when you are in one tradition you have to look over your shoulder and say — maybe they have got something here, so it is not a synthesis. It’s what MacIntyre calls an epistemological crisis, when you realise that the tradition is not up to carrying the questions that are being asked of it — what you get is a new, enlarged tradition.}^{557}
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\[^{555}\text{Brown’s reply to question 8.}\]
\[^{556}\text{Brown’s reply to question 12.}\]
\[^{557}\text{Brown’s reply to question 13.}\]
Brown then proceeds to connect this thinking to his interpretation of what being Anglican is all about and, indeed, to what is required of him in his role:

First of all, I am Anglican. The Anglican Church is not a synthesis of reformed and catholic — it is the two acting as correctives to each other … My political theology here is an Anglican one … You have to work with them. They are not reconcilable. Do bear in mind that’s my approach to the traditions of Hauerwas, Milbank, and Temple and so on”.

It is clear from these quotations that Brown’s idea of holding “traditions in dialogue with each other” is crucial to an understanding of his thinking since the mid-1980s, and to the shaping of GS1804. A challenge arises out of this thinking, however. How could Brown accommodate these differing strands of thought in GS1804 in a way that was ideologically and theologically coherent, if, as has been argued in this thesis, they are antithetical to each other in so many ways? The following quote from him is revealing in this regard:

I don’t think they are as antithetical as all that. There is a beautiful piece in Nicholas Lash in one of his essays on Theology and Social Theory — it’s about Milbank’s pacifism — where he says Milbank calls the Church to exist on the other side of the cross, as it were, to embody the kingdom. What this neglects is that the Church is located on both sides of the cross, including the side of the cross where we have to engage in what Lash calls a kind of politics in the service of power. In other words, you have to get your hands dirty. Milbank’s theology, for Lash, is too ethereal and squeaky clean. It’s on the other side of the cross and forgets that the classic Christian vocabulary is now and not yet.

This reveals the full extent of Brown’s pragmatic, managerial instincts. We see that Brown is keen for the Church of England to be “located on both sides of the cross” and

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558 Brown’s reply to question 14.
559 He confirms this in his reply to question 14: “This was certainly behind my thinking and I am fascinated it comes through in the paper, if it does.”
560 Brown’s reply to question 16.
561 Later in the meeting he describes his job as being “a manager— a bureaucrat even.” See Brown’s reply to question 32.
“to get its hands dirty”. Thus he states: “Milbank is quite right that the state is a modern construct, and the Church is where the kingdom of God is, etc. But if we believe in the kingdom of God coming on earth, it must come to some extent in human structures. Not just in ‘the other side of the cross’ structures.\textsuperscript{562} Therefore, for Brown, the Church of England should positively engage, albeit within certain parameters, with Labour, Tory, or coalition governments in the delivery of their welfare agendas where it can contribute in a way that advances, as he puts it: “an Anglican ecclesiology, working out as a political theology”.\textsuperscript{563} Thus he argues:

My thinking on getting behind the Big Society was (a) if they are talking about the Church, we might as well get something out of it, if there is anything to be had, and there wasn’t; (b) here’s a chance to align the Church of England in a way that says we do sometimes support the Tories, because the story emerging was that we are a load of pinkos who never support the Conservative governments ... if a government is committed to a Big Society in a Figgis intermediate institutions model, then that should be something that governs policy across the board.\textsuperscript{564}

It is evident in this quote that Brown, when drafting GS1804, was highly sensitive to the Church of England being seen as “a load of pinkos who never support the Conservative governments.” Thus he states: “My thinking was to move the Church of England from the sterile right/left \textit{Guardian/Daily Mail} argument and try and cut through in the way Rowan Williams used to by framing the question differently.”\textsuperscript{565} This can therefore be seen as one reason for his attraction to the Blue Labour/Red Tory political phenomenon. As he puts it: “the mere titles were about crossover,”\textsuperscript{566} and “Blue Labour/Red Tory are corrective traditions.”\textsuperscript{567} He later confirms that his drafting of the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter

\textsuperscript{562} Brown’s reply to question 30.
\textsuperscript{563} Brown’s reply to question 26.
\textsuperscript{564} Brown’s reply to question 29.
\textsuperscript{565} Brown’s reply to question 25.
\textsuperscript{566} Brown’s reply to question 25.
\textsuperscript{567} Brown’s reply to question 26.
that was published to coincide with the General Election campaign of 2015 called *Who is my Neighbour?*, “was an attempt to move them into that territory”\textsuperscript{568} and that it was “almost pure Blue Labour/Red Tory.”\textsuperscript{569} This is consistent with his article in the *Church Times*: “It was clear that the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter reflected the political movements known as Red Tory and Blue Labour. Both drew explicitly, though differently, on Christian conceptions of society, and share explicitly theological antecedents.”\textsuperscript{570} This view, of course, accords with the thrust of the current thesis, that Radical Orthodoxy’s Christendom perspective has been a significant theoretical underpinning for these political movements.

Brown sees all this as part of a paradigm shift in the way the Church of England seeks to engage with governments on welfare matters. This is evident in his statement: “Thus we no longer do reports like *Faith in the City, Not Just for the Poor* or *Unemployment and the Future of Work* because the message has gone out that they are either embarrassing or they fall flat, and we haven’t got the money anyway. There is a shift of method and model between 1997 and 2010. We don’t do it anymore like that.”\textsuperscript{571} Significantly this is fully consistent with the view expressed by Milbank (4.3) that to maximize its potential as regards welfare provision, the Church of England needs “a shift in direction away from the Temple legacy of long reports telling the Government what to do … to a more authentic radicalism in which the Church gets involved in all kinds of processes of welfare”.\textsuperscript{572} Symptomatic of this paradigm shift is Brown’s insistence that

\textsuperscript{568} Brown’s reply to question 25.
\textsuperscript{569} Brown’s reply to question 24.
\textsuperscript{570} M. Brown, “Society needs us to be Anglican, not sectarian”, *Church Times*, 11 May 2018.
\textsuperscript{571} Brown’s reply to question 6.
\textsuperscript{572} Milbank, “What a Christian View of Society say about Poverty”, p. 5.
the ‘Big Society’ project “was, to some extent, describing where the Church was already on this”.\textsuperscript{573} Brown is of the view that it was necessary for the Church of England to have moved away from its post-war default position of defending the Temple welfare state legacy and, by implication, the Welfare Statist strand of Anglican Socialism out of which it had emerged. It was that strand which, in many ways, had been reflected in reports like \textit{Faith in the City, Not Just for the Poor} and \textit{Unemployment and the Future of Work}. As he puts it:

What we want and what we need is for all our political parties to be pursing policies that are at least comfortable to the Christian ethic. There will be right and left versions of that … In the Big Society you had the first inkling (that came to very little), of a return to a one nation Toryism that had a lot in common with the Church of England’s understanding of how an organic society works.\textsuperscript{574}

Brown was thus keen for the Church of England to embrace the essentials of the ‘Big Society’ project in late 2010, fully recognising that this was a paradigm shift in its approach to welfare. But, crucially, it was also because Brown thought that the Church’s default position of defending the Temple approach, was based on an inaccurate understanding of it — one that we now interrogate.

\textbf{5.5.5 Malcom Brown’s interpretation of William Beveridge’s report of 1948 on “Voluntary Action” in relation to the Attlee Government’s implementation of his work of 1942 on “Social Insurance and Allied Services”}

In defending the paradigm shift discussed at 5.5.4, Brown argues that the Church of England’s support for the post-war Welfare State settlement insufficiently recognised the difference between the over-statist Attlee delivery vehicle (as he interprets it), and Temple’s and Beveridge’s recognition of the need for a vibrant intermediate level of

\textsuperscript{573} Brown’s reply to question 17.
\textsuperscript{574} Brown’s reply to question 29.
welfare delivery in British civil society as complementary to the Welfare State sector. As he argues: “You had an essentially state-centralised model of welfare delivery, and the Church of England, until relatively recently, had an instinctive warmth for the Temple/Beveridge legacy without really understanding it: it conflated it with Attlee and subsequent government’s enactments which isn’t the same thing.” The historical accuracy of this assertion is open to challenge.

We saw at 4.4.8, for example, how the 1948 Lambeth Conference was well aware of the dangers of an overcentralised model of welfare delivery in the resolutions that it passed. Thus it condemned “the concept of the unbridled sovereignty of the nation and such usurpation of power by the state as is opposed to the basic truths of Christianity”. It was also critical of a “tendency of the state to encroach on the freedom of individuals and voluntary associations”. These statements are clear historical evidence of how the bishops in 1948 recognised the dangers of an over-encroaching state. Yet they balanced this with a recognition of the potential of a state to deliver welfare to the poor and disadvantaged on a scale not seen before. Indeed, it was this recognition that in large part helped produce Resolution 19: “We therefore welcome the growing concern and care of the modern State for its citizens, and call upon Church members to accept their own political responsibility and to cooperate with the State and its officers in their work.”

We also saw at 5.4 how Not Just for the Poor, which Brown acknowledges “for a long time, was our position paper on welfare”, concluded by stating: “Generous

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575 Brown’s reply to question 3.
576 Resolution 18.
577 Resolution 20.
578 Cited by Prochaska, The Church of England and the Collapse of Christian Charity, p. 3.
579 Brown’s reply to question 5.
provision by society through the state is essential. But it is not enough on its own to produce the kind of society we wish to see.” Instead it advocated a mixed economy of welfare, built on *co-operation* between the public, voluntary and private sectors. Brown’s interpretation of how, until fairly recently, he considers the Church of England’s post-war instinctive warmth for the Temple/Beveridge legacy was “without really understanding it”, conflating it too closely with what he considers to be Attlee’s ‘over statist’ delivery vehicle, is less than consistent with this historical evidence.

Indeed, the same can be argued of his interpretation of the extent of the differences between Beveridge’s thinking on welfare provision, and the enactment by the Attlee administration of his report of 1942. As Brown argues: “The Attlee Government made it essentially practical politics but lost the element of what you might call the Big Society or strong intermediate institutions aspect.”

Certainly, as we saw at 2.2. and 4.4.1.1, there were strongly held differences between Beveridge and Attlee on the role the friendly societies might have played in the post-war provision of welfare. Yet, with the exception of the friendly societies, which went into rapid decline after the Welfare State was established, voluntary organisations continued to make valuable contributions to the post-war delivery of welfare, some of which have been documented in 4.4–4.5. And, as previously noted, many of them expanded, not least the trade union movement up until 1979 which, in some respects, took over the role of the friendly societies in providing financial support to their members at times of strike action, for example. Others partly took the place of the friendly societies as newly formed welfare charities. Hence, there is a danger of these differences that Brown alludes to between the Attlee Government’s

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580 *Not Just for the Poor*, p. 134.
581 Brown’s reply to question 5.
enactment of the Welfare State and Beveridge’s views on voluntarism and, specifically, the demise of the friendly societies, becoming exaggerated in their historical importance in at least three respects: (1) as an interpretation of Beveridge’s wider thoughts on welfare per se; (2) as an interpretation of his thoughts on Attlee’s delivery vehicle for slaying the five giants, and (3) on their historical importance to the shaping of events on the ground at that time and since.

James McKay interprets Beveridge’s report of 1948 as a fairly accurate reflection of his thinking in 1948, though not necessarily of his thinking in 1942, which was less developed on voluntarism than it later became. McKay argues: “it presents an image of voluntary action as socially pioneering, with its relationship to the state as part-alternative, part-counterweight and part-complement”.582 This interpretation chimes with Beveridge’s statement of 1948:

Voluntary action is needed to do the things which the State should not do, in the giving of advice, or in organising the use of leisure. It is needed to do the things which the State is most unlikely to do. It is needed to pioneer ahead of the state and make experiments. It is needed to get services rendered which cannot be got by paying for them.583

There is nothing in this quote that is suggestive of a need for the state not to be doing the things that the Attlee administration had enabled it to do, or, for that matter, that Temple had thought a welfare state should be doing. In Voluntary Action, Beveridge did not see voluntary provision of welfare as a substitute for state welfare provision. Rather, he saw it as an essential complement to it. They were both necessary for human happiness:

Encouragement of Voluntary Action for the improvement of society and use of voluntary agencies by public authorities for public purposes is no less desirable for

582 J. McKay, “Voluntary politics: the sector’s political function from Beveridge to Deakin”, in Oppenheimer & Deakin (eds), Beveridge and Voluntary Action, p. 81.
583 Beveridge, Voluntary Action, pp. 301-2.
the future than it has been for the past. The reasons for it have not been diminished and will not be destroyed by the growing activities of the State.\textsuperscript{584}

He therefore called for greater \textit{cooperation} between public authorities and voluntary agencies and continuance and extension of public grants to voluntary agencies. But, crucially, he aligned his thinking with that of Beatrice and Sydney Webb,\textsuperscript{585} who he accurately described as “two of the most effective advocates in history of the extension of the activities of the State”,\textsuperscript{586} pointing out that they, too, were of the view that “there was a need for Voluntary Action for public purposes and in urging continued cooperation between public authorities and voluntary agencies.”\textsuperscript{587}

The special point which they make, that voluntary agencies should not undertake the distribution of relief, is in accord with all that has happened since these words were written. Voluntary agencies have in fact largely ceased to be concerned with meeting basic needs for food, clothing or fuel and will be concerned with such things even less in the future, through the extension of social security. In accord with the argument of the Webbs, they will be needed even more than in the past, for exploring as specialists the new avenues for social service which will open when want is abolished.\textsuperscript{588}

Thus Beveridge did not see the Welfare State as a vehicle for diminishing the need for voluntary agencies, but as a way of opening up new avenues for them, when, via the Welfare State, want is abolished.

This sentiment is accurately reflected in the wording contained in \textit{Not Just for the Poor}: “Generous provision of services by society through the state is essential. But it is

\textsuperscript{584} Beveridge, \textit{Voluntary Action}, p. 306.
\textsuperscript{585} He cites \textit{The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission of 1906–1909} that was, in significant part, written by the Webbs. This became a key statement of Fabian thinking on welfare, and the roles the state and the voluntary sectors might perform in the provision of welfare in a democratic socialist society. This thinking is what, in significant part, shaped the approach taken by the leadership of the Labour Party in the post-war years.
\textsuperscript{586} Beveridge, \textit{Voluntary Action}, p. 308.
\textsuperscript{587} Beveridge, \textit{Voluntary Action}, p. 308.
\textsuperscript{588} Beveridge, \textit{Voluntary Action}, p. 308.
not enough”, instead calling for a mixed economy of welfare “built on co-operation between public, voluntary and private sectors”. Moreover, when one considers the wide range of examples of voluntary welfare provision that the Church of England has engaged in since 1945, some of which are set out in 4.4–4.5 it is hard to square this with Brown’s view that the Church had “forgotten a bit of the tradition that had once won them over. That is, the richness of Beveridge’s vision in *Voluntary Action*.” Perhaps it is Brown who has forgotten a bit of the tradition that had once won him over?

However, Brown’s thinking on Beveridge has been influenced by Milbank and Blond, and that influence now needs to be analysed.

5.5.6 *John Milbank’s and Phillip Blond’s views on the need for a minimalist state and the influence they have had on Malcom Brown’s thinking*

It can be credibly argued that Milbank’s and Blond’s perspectives on the Welfare State have more in common with (though are not identical to) the minimalist perspective on the state that Temple and Beveridge rejected in favour of a Welfare State, and that has since been described by Brown as follows:

Looking at the late 1920s and early 1930s when Temple was doing a lot of his work with the Oxford Conference and things like that, you are looking at a hugely *laissez faire* Conservative approach which led to the depression, countered by totalitarianisms in Spain, Germany, Russia, Italy and so on. So, for Temple, these were two models: the minimalist state as we now call it, and the power state of Mussolini and Hitler, for which the Christian couldn’t give any allegiance to at all.

Milbank and Blond, whilst rejecting a *laissez faire* (neoliberal) approach to economics as discussed in 3.2 and 3.5, nevertheless embrace much of what can be described as a

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589 *Not Just for the Poor*, p.134.
590 Brown’s reply to question 5.
591 Brown’s reply to question 1.
minimalist perspective on the state. Indeed, it can credibly be argued that their perspective has more in common with Fredrick Von Hayek’s thinking on the minimalist state, than it does with Temple’s or Beveridge’s’ perspective on the Welfare State. This cannot yet be said of Brown’s, though the following statement by him about his intellectual journey is strongly suggestive that this is the path on which he is headed:

So, if we believe the state has a role, that the state is justified by seeking to maximize the welfare of the citizen, it doesn’t follow that the Beveridge settlement is the only mechanism by which you can do that. Maximising the wellbeing of the citizen might be done by devolving powers into the smallest units, you know, the villages, the towns, the streets. This might be a totally different way of saying how you deal with welfare because … Beveridge looked at the five giants’ evils and, well, they are still around.592

This indicates why Brown framed GS1804 in the way he did. Clearly, Brown acknowledges that the state has a role to play in the provision of welfare in the way Temple and Beveridge had advocated; yet he is attracted by a level of devolved welfare delivery that has much in common with the English Pluralist Christendom strand of Anglican Socialism, and thus to the perspective on welfare held by Milbank. Brown explained to me that:

for over forty years now [that is, since Thatcherism], we have had governments with a very different understanding of the role of the state, and so we have had to trim ours to some extent. I think this has on the whole been good, and the trimming has been largely away from the centralised state model of delivering welfare that the Beveridge report of 1942 embodied.

Brown is thus of the view that since Thatcherism “the rationale for the state as the Welfare State has cut little ice. We have to work with the reality on the ground. And this

592 Brown’s reply to question 30.
is the Church’s classic dilemma: between what it thinks as being theologically sound and what it has to do to make a difference on the ground”.

It is clear from the interview with Dr Brown that, with the collapse of the Welfare State consensus and the rise of Thatcherism as discussed at 2.4, he thinks that the Church of England, though initially inclined to resist that trend (e.g. in reports such as *Faith in the City,* and *Not Just for the Poor*), has since moved to a point where it has adapted its thinking on welfare to accommodate it. The Church has felt a need to remain politically relevant in what is seen by some supporters of Red Tory/Blue Labour politics, as an acknowledgment of the extent to which the collapse of the Welfare State consensus has taken hold in modern British society. Thus, with the election in 2010 of the Coalition administration in the context of a major financial crisis, Brown’s advice in GS1804 was, in part, shaped by a desire for the Church to be willing to work (and, indeed, to be seen to be willing to work) with and not against the grain of the Coalition Government’s welfare agenda: that is, as Brown puts it, to: “find a language that engaged with them, so that we were not simply the opposition in waiting.” The ‘Big Society’ project spoke that language; hence Brown’s view was that: “we have got something we can build on here.”

Crucially, the ‘Big Society’ project was also something that could be theologically aligned with the Church of England’s journey away from what Brown describes as “the Christian realism of Niebuhr and Temple”, to something incorporating aspects of what he describes as the “starry eyed romanticism” of Milbank’s theological contributions; as

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593 Brown’s reply to question 3.
594 Brown’s reply to question 6.
Brown puts it: “what you have got, actually, are two things — they are both necessary.”

When pushed to further elaborate on this point, Brown’s response was as follows:

> You have to work with the reality of what can be done on the ground as well as what is theologically sound. Milbank has also gone on this journey. He has taken that challenge on board and all credit to him. He is now trying to deal in something that is do-able and not just highfalutin romanticism, and he is doing a pretty good job of that.

And Brown takes a similar view of Phillip Blond’s thinking. Blond is also “a fellow traveller in some respects because Phillip crystalised in *Red Tory* the sort of ideas we were working on here … with a tradition which is moving on from Temple but … still drawing on Christian realism to some extent.”

### 5.5.7 Summary Position Statement (3)

Brown, in GS1804, had been impressed by Milbank’s and Blond’s critique of the Temple/Beveridge welfare state model, and the need, as they have argued, to move towards a more minimalist state: to “a Big Society in a Figgis intermediate institutions model”. Brown readily acknowledges the positive contribution he thinks they have made to these lines of criticism of the post-war Welfare State settlement, and the influence this thinking has had on him as a valuable corrective tradition to what he interprets as the Temple/Beveridge over-statist model of welfare delivery, and the Christian realist theology underpinning it. Yet, crucially, for Brown, the Temple/Beveridge welfare state model also acts as a corrective tradition to Milbank’s and Blond’s alternative communitarian model of welfare delivery when it becomes unrealistically ambitious, as well as to the romantic and unrealistic excesses (as he sees

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595 Brown’s reply to question 9.
596 Brown’s reply to question 10.
597 Brown’s reply to question 11.
598 Brown’s reply to question 29.
them) of Milbank’s and Blond’s Radically Orthodox theo-political perspectives that underpin it.\textsuperscript{599} He is therefore unimpressed by the report produced by Blond and Noyes in 2013, \textit{Holistic Mission}: “It is an example of how communitarians risk retreating into nostalgic utopianism when direct experience of the institutions they discuss is deficient”.\textsuperscript{600} Consequently, Brown ensured he “forgot all about \textit{Holistic Mission}.”\textsuperscript{601} Yet there is a further aspect to consider regarding GS1804 that is relevant to this analysis: namely, whether it had implications for the Church’s positioning on the theology of the state.

\textit{5.5.8 Malcolm Brown’s advice to the Church of England’s in relation to its post-war positioning on the theology of the state}

To what extent did Brown’s advice in GS1804, reflect a change in the Church’s theological positioning on the state? The following two quotations are pertinent: “There is no official theology of the state. Temple’s views were never the official line of the Church of England, but a lot of Anglicans, after his death in particular, sought inspiration from them”. Brown elaborates on this:

Could there ever be one coherent theology of the state in the Church of England given that we are a coalition church — a coalition of parties who have very different theological foundations? … I am saying, as Anglicans, we don’t look for a final settlement in these things. What we look for is — something that works for now. But we recognise its provisionality. There is always the authenticity of another theology over the horizon just saying, when we have got it right, by definition, we have got it wrong. And so that is part of the Anglican settlement since the Reformation, and certainly since the civil war … So I think the idea of an Anglican theology of the state is not coherent … at any one time there will be a dominant model, and it will be provisional.\textsuperscript{602}

\textsuperscript{599} Brown’s reply to question 28.
\textsuperscript{601} Brown’s reply to question 28.
\textsuperscript{602} Brown’s reply to question 30.
So, Brown is of the view that the different theological perspectives on the state held by those in the Church of England, given that it is a “coalition of parties”, can never provide “one coherent theology of the state.” Yet he also thinks that a “dominant” theological model of thinking on the state will exist in the Church “at any one time”, though it will be “provisional”. He thinks that Temple’s theological perspective on the state occupied that position in the period before Thatcherism, and this is partly reflected in Resolution 19 passed at the Lambeth Conference of 1948, which he thinks “reflected the mood of the times”. 603 Yet he is of the view that, since Thatcherism, the Church has had to balance: “being theologically sound” with how it can “make a difference on the ground”. Consequently, it has had to trim its understanding of the role of the state, at least “to some extent”. 604 Therefore, in GS1804, Brown’s stance was, on the one hand, to be pragmatic and realpolitik in his focus and to find something “that works for now”, 605 and, on the other hand, to be theologically coherent. The Christendom challenge to Temple’s theology of the state was a key influence on him via his familiarity with Milbank’s work, as well as that of the wider Radical Orthodoxy grouping, not least Blond’s and Pabst’s thinking, as he acknowledges. Their thinking on the theology of the state was also more synergistic with the post-Thatcherite critique of the Temple/Beveridge Welfare State legacy and hence the collapse of the post-war Welfare State consensus. But, crucially, in GS1804 Brown was not seeking to achieve a coherent synthesis of Temple’s and Milbank’s respective theologies of the state. Rather, he was seeking to reflect the need for holding these differing theologies of the state in dialogue with each other and thus as correctives to each other. A question that still has to be asked and answered, however, is

603 Brown’s reply to question 2.
604 Brown’s reply to question 3.
605 Brown’s reply to question 30.
whether Brown’s quintessentially Anglican perspective on the theology of the state — that is, one that does not constitute a single “coherent theology of the state” 606 — is theologically adequate. This is particularly apposite with respect to its understanding of the Christian concept of the common good, for example, and how that might best be served apropos the criticality of the role that the state currently performs in the provision of welfare, and is likely to perform in the decades to follow. As Brown stated in 2015:

“There is no consensus within the Church, at present, about where the proper boundary lies between the public, private and voluntary provision in the shared task of building up the common good.”607 That question on the theology of the state can only adequately be addressed after some consideration has been given to the outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project at 5.6, as these directly impinge on it. It will therefore be revisited in 6.2.1 when conclusions are reached on the lines of argumentation. Before then, however, it is necessary to see how Brown’s thinking on the ‘Big Society’ project changed in the period between his advice in GS1804, and since.

5.5.9 Malcolm Brown’s perspective on the ‘Big Society’ project as seen by him in retrospect

At 5.5 we noted how Brown’s advice in GS1804 on the ‘Big Society’ project was broadly supportive of its aims and objectives. Yet, three years later, Brown, as well as the wider leadership within the Church of England, came to hold a different opinion on it. In a paper published by Brown in 2014, his assessment of the ‘Big Society’ project had become far less favourable:

Three years on, we have seen very little of the Big Society. Instead, the voluntary sector is facing a pincer-like squeeze between declining income from giving

606 Brown’s reply to question 30.
(normal during a prolonged recession) and considerable cuts to government funding. There is very little to show for the Church’s strong support for a new settlement between the state and local voluntary action.\footnote{M. Brown, “The Church of England and Welfare Today”, in N. Spencer (ed.) The Future of Welfare, p. 55.}

Brown’s critical assessment of the outcomes of the project had been preceded in June 2012 by Rowan Williams asserting that the ‘Big Society’ comes across as “aspirational waffle”, and that it was “designed to conceal a deeply damaging withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities to the most vulnerable.”\footnote{T. Helm & J. Coman, “Rowan Williams pours scorn on David Cameron’s ‘big society’”, Guardian, 24 June 2012.} Brown’s critical assessment of its outcomes made a similar point:

A Church Urban Fund survey of around 900 churches at the end of 2011 found that more than one in four had a foodbank ... The contribution of Christians to hundreds of social action projects which alleviate poverty in many ways is considerable … It is clear that without action by churches, the plight of many people would be insupportable. This action, part of our witness to the love of Christ and the pursuit of the common good of all, is generously given — but those most involved know that it is not filling the gap left by the cuts to welfare provision.\footnote{Brown, “The Church of England and Welfare Today”, p. 59.}

Brown is clear that the voluntary sector, though capable of mitigating and alleviating aspects of the contraction in state-provided welfare, was nevertheless incapable of:

“filling the gap left by the cuts to welfare provision”. His assessment of the impact the ‘Big Society’ project had on the charities and voluntary sector was equally damning:

Other funding cuts are severely hampering the work of numerous charities and volunteer schemes. Programmes of social care are under immense pressure as a result of local authority cuts. The gap between need ‘on the ground’ and the capacity of voluntary action to respond is considerable — and widening.

Brown concluded by reasserting the Church of England’s support for the Welfare State:

But the church’s commitment to a welfare state is not mere nostalgia. It is a theological judgement about what the state should be and should do for its
citizens. Where the poor and vulnerable carry a disproportionate share of the burden created by the financial crisis, something is wrong.\footnote{Brown, “The Church of England and Welfare Today”, p. 59.}

This is in line with the perspective on the Welfare State that \textit{Faith in the City} and \textit{Not Just for the Poor}, had held. What had brought about this change in Brown’s perspective on the ‘Big Society’ project? Clearly, some of it relates to the outcomes he describes above. Hence, in 5.6 we will focus on some of the project’s key performance indicators and, secondly, on the impact the project had on the Church of England.

\subsection*{5.6 The Key Outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ Project}

By far and away the most comprehensive audit of the ‘Big Society’ project was published in January 2015 by Civil Exchange, a think tank that defines its purpose as strengthening civil society’s connection to government. It was the last of three such audits it had carried out on the ‘Big Society’ initiative.\footnote{See C. Slocock (ed.), \textit{Whose Society? The Final Big Society Audit}, (London: Civil Exchange in Partnership with DHA Communications, 2015), p. 6. Available at: http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Whose-Society?-The-Final-Big-Society-Audit_final.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2017).} Working in conjunction with DHA, a policy and communications agency specialising in social change, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, \textit{Whose Society? The Final Big Society Audit} was the result of a comprehensive information gathering exercise and an opinion survey. Its overall conclusion was:

\begin{quote}
Despite some genuinely positive initiatives, the Big Society has failed to deliver against its original goals. Attempts to create more social action, to empower communities and to open up public services, with some positive exceptions, have not worked. The Big Society has not reached those who need it most. We are more divided than before.\footnote{Slocock (ed.), \textit{Whose Society?}, p. 4.}
\end{quote}
Key findings were reported under four headings as summarised below.\textsuperscript{614}

(1) \textit{Community Empowerment}

There had been a significant decline in (a) the number of people who felt they could influence decisions about their local area, (b) in people’s sense of belonging, and (c) in neighbourliness. There had also been an increase in racial intolerance. Far from being strengthened, key parts of the voluntary sector were struggling, with reduced income to meet demand and threats to the independent voluntary sector having increased. It did, however, find that more information was available, and the number of Police and Crime Commissioners was steadily expanding. But trust and faith in the political system remained low.

(2) \textit{Opening up Public Services}

The voluntary sector had lost £1.3 billion in state funding in real terms in 2011–12 compared to the previous year, with smaller organisations and services to disadvantaged people primarily affected. Public Services had become less, not more accountable, especially as a result of increasing contracting out. The voluntary sector’s sense of partnership with government had weakened. There had been a failure to mobilise the private sector for the common good. Social investment remained in its infancy and levels of corporate giving had not increased to replace shrinking state funding for the voluntary sector. Choice in public services had opened up under successive governments but was still limited and was working less well for disadvantaged groups. Despite Government commitments to co-design, consultation with the sector had become truncated, with the

\textsuperscript{614} Slocock (ed.), \textit{Whose Society?}, pp. 8-12.
policy and campaigning voice of the sector under attack.

(3) **Social Action**

There were more young people volunteering but the overall trend for volunteering was broadly flat. Individual giving had increased over the last year, though it was not back to pre-recession levels. Numbers of Community Organisers were increasing, but there remained doubts about the effectiveness of the initiative.

(4) **The Big Society Gap**

For the least affluent, cuts in public services had impacted the most. Disabled people had been particularly hit hard by cuts in public services and welfare payments, and had experienced problems with contracted out public services. They were also affected by the loss of income to voluntary sector groups in the field of social services and employment. The young were worryingly disengaged politically, but were socially engaged. Volunteering rates amongst the young had increased dramatically. However, services to both younger and older people had been reduced as a result of cuts.

Overall, the findings of this comprehensive audit of the ‘Big Society’ project against its stated performance indicators were negative, and broadly correspond with other work that has been produced.\footnote{See, for example, C. Elliott, *What Ever Happened to the Big Society?* February 2013. Available at: https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CPD_OP25_Whatever-happened-to-the-Big-Society_Cameron-Elliott.pdf (accessed on 30 April 2018).} The consequences for the Church of England were considerable.

5.6.1 **The outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project for the Church of England**

In 2014 a biennial national church and social action survey reported that 114.8 million volunteer hours were being spent on church social action, an increase of 54.4 per cent
from 2010. Consistent with this trend, the Blond and Noyes report of 2013 found that: “levels of social action are considerably higher amongst Church attendees than the general public.” And in 2014 a Church Urban Fund survey reported a 45 per cent increase, since 2011, in the number of clergy in the Church of England who considered: “engaging with the poor and marginalised in the local area to be a vital activity for a healthy church”. It also reported that one third of Church of England churches were involved in food banks in 2011, with the number increasing to two thirds by 2014. Hence, there is evidence that indicates there was a sizeable increase in the levels of Church of England participation in social action/poverty alleviation activities in the period since the launch of the ‘Big Society’ project. Yet this was at a time when decreases occurred in Christian affiliation in the UK, as evidenced by a study that found that Anglican Church membership in the UK declined by eight per cent between 2010 and 2015. This trend, though constituting historical evidence relating to a period of only five years, and hence requiring caution when interpreting its significance for the long

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616 See National Church and Social Action Survey 2014 (Executive Summary). Available at: https://jubilee-plus.org/research/inc-modal.php?item_id=6 (accessed on 23 April 2018).

617 Blond & Noyes, Holistic Mission.

618 Cited in Wells, Rook & Barclay, For Good, p. 28.

619 The increase in the number of food banks was not a stated objective of the ‘Big Society’ project. There is some evidence that it related in part to benefit sanctions changes brought in by the Coalition Government in 2010, however. The Guardian’s Social Policy Editor, reported that: “The Trussell Trust figures show the biggest proportion, 44%, of food bank referrals last year – marginally lower than the previous year – were triggered by people pitched into crisis because their benefit payments had been delayed, or stopped altogether as a result of the strict Job Centre sanctions regime.” P. Butler, “Food Bank use tops million mark over the last year”, Guardian, 22 April 2015.

619 Cited in Wells, Rook & Barclay, For Good, p. 28.

term, nevertheless runs contrary to the argument advanced by Milbank (see 4.3) — that increased levels of social action activities within the Church of England would lead to increased levels of Church affiliation. Of course, the possibility that the decline may have been steeper had it not been for this increase in social action activities cannot be ruled out.

Some of this increased social action related to the rollout of the Near Neighbours initiative discussed at 5.5.1. Since April 2011, the initiative has provided a range of community-based projects, particularly in the Midlands and northern English towns, which have contributed to the delivery of its two main goals: (1) to develop positive relationships in multi-faith areas, and (2) “to encourage people of different faiths or no faith to come together for initiatives that improve their local neighbourhood.”

According to its Impact Report, Near Neighbours has funded 1,433 projects across England, disbursing over £4,724,000. Over one million people are estimated to have benefitted from its small grants. Eighty nine per cent of projects have brought people together from at least three faith groups or those of no faith. Ninety eight per cent of project leads have agreed that participants felt more connected in their local community and 95 per cent of projects leads have agreed that there is a greater sense of togetherness or community spirit. Over 430 young people have taken part in the Catalyst leadership programme, which equips them with the skills and confidence to take on leadership roles, develop local social action, and transform their own communities. And, impressively, National Partners also have organised over 650 events in local areas, which have brought

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621 See the Near Neighbours website: https://www.cuf.org.uk/about-us-near-neighbours for more on this.
together over 37,000 people. Based on this impact assessment, the state financial support provided to the Near Neighbours initiative and the contribution it has since made to enhancing interfaith community engagement and neighbourliness in England, demonstrate it has brought about a significant set of social achievements. Yet, seen in the context of the negative outcomes the Civil Exchange’s audit found on the Big Society’s impact on British society, not least on the voluntary sector, there is a question the Church of England must now confront. On the back of its desire to be “politically relevant” and also to acquire financial support for the Near Neighbours initiative as part of its overall response to the ‘Big Society’ project, was the qualified support given to it in 2010, 2011 and the early part of 2012, a theo-political misjudgement when taking into account the outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project? This question will now be considered.

5.6.2 Malcolm Brown’s retrospective defence of his advice in GS1804

Brown does not think it was a theo-political misjudgement, and offers a defence of the initial support the Church of England gave to the ‘Big Society’ project:

At best it was a project that fell into the ground. Yet, whilst it was live, we had the chance to say we could be part of redefining the Tory party … In the Big Society you had the first inkling (that came to very little), of a return to a one nation Toryism that had a lot in common with the Church of England’s understanding of how an organic society works. So, if we could have leveraged the Big Society issue into a complete rebranding of the Tory Party, what an achievement that would have been. If it had been a serious government proposition, we would have gone on working with it. Not just in order to deliver things at ground level, but to, first of all, assert in public discourse, that those small acts of neighbourliness that go on in communities are valuable and not just invisible and overlooked. This is about us. It’s about a development in government that could have been quite a significant win-win for Christian ethics, and, actually, the future of the Conservative party.  

623 Brown’s reply to question 29.
Yet how realistic was it that the Church of England could have been involved in redefining the Tory party in the way that Brown describes? The evidence that was available to him at the time casts doubt on the feasibility of such an aspiration. For we have already seen that Brown was clear in GS1804 that: “The Coalition has set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare.”  

One way it was going to achieve that goal was to reduce its financial support to Local Government, and a significant proportion of the 1.3 billion pounds of state disinvestment in voluntary services that occurred in 2011/12 to that of the previous year, stemmed from this. Why was this not foreseeable to Brown in the way it was for those who signed the *Common Wealth* document in 2010, for example? Was it because, as they argued “we believe that the craving for relevance is overriding any more searching critique of what is on offer”? The following statement from Brown is pertinent in this regard:

> Whereas in the *Faith in the City* years, we were broadly seen as being the unofficial opposition to Thatcherism. This did no good to people like Runcie. Now, thirty years on, we have got far less legitimacy … What we were looking for, and this was not theology or political theory but *realpolitik*, was what can we say that shows that Conservatives were not the enemy of the Church of England — that there were some policies on which the Church of England and the Conservative Government can align themselves. Along comes the Big Society.

Brown’s advice in GS1804 can, in part, thus be attributed to “the craving for relevance” to which the *Common Wealth* document alludes, that is, a pragmatic desire for the Church of England to demonstrate that the “Conservatives were not the enemy of the Church” at a time when the Church had “far less legitimacy”. But it would be erroneous

624 GS1804, p. 2
626 Ekklesia, *Common Wealth*.
627 Brown’s reply to question 6.
to suppose that this pragmatic imperative is the only explanation, or even the overriding one, for his advice at that time. At least as important was Brown’s own intellectual journey away from what had once been a staunch defence of the Temple Welfare Statist legacy — a defence that had in part been nurtured by John Atherton, his PhD supervisor — to what had become a belief in the virtue of holding intellectual traditions in dialogue, as correctives to one another when shaping church policy on welfare.

In this respect, as we have seen, MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* was important in shaping Brown’s change of direction. It laid the intellectual foundations for being able to engage with Radical Orthodoxy thinkers, including Milbank, Blond and Pabst, as their relevance within the Church of England and wider political circles gathered pace in the period since the publication of Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory* in 1990, which set things in motion. This was particularly so for the period encompassing the financial crash of 2008 and the subsequent rise of the Red Tory/Blue Labour political phenomenon. As Brown put it in an essay on Anglican Social Theology published in 2017:

> Many years ago I dismissed Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy for having nothing to say about the economic realities which drove contemporary politics. I was wrong — both in falling for the old line that “it’s the economy, stupid” and for missing the potential of Radical Orthodoxy, which I dismissed as ‘mere’ romanticism, for making romanticism a catalyst for changing the way things are perceived. The Red Tory/Blue Labour movements are probably the closest that Anglican Social Theology (in partnership with Catholic Social Teaching) has got to influencing political ideologies for many decades. And the House of Bishops, through commissioning and endorsing the Pastoral Letter of 2015 [which, as we have seen, was, in large part, written by Brown], have placed themselves in a pole position to help shape those movements by making the theological and ecclesiological connections explicit.\(^{628}\)

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\(^{628}\) M. Brown, “Anglican Social Theology: Today and Tomorrow”, in S. Spencer (ed.), *Theology Reforming Society*, p. 139.
This is indicative of the extent to which the Christendom revival launched by Milbank in 1990, has since permeated into sections of the Church of England to a point where major policy formulation on welfare is increasingly being influenced by its advocates. Building on themes in the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter of 2015, Brown’s document of May 2016, *Thinking Afresh about Welfare: The Enemy Isolation*, is a case in point. In it he argues for the need for an additional sixth giant to be slain, this being “The Enemy Isolation”, which he defines as Loneliness, Estrangement and Friendlessness — in some ways resembling the thrust of the Atherton, Baker and Reader manifesto of 2011. Crucially, Brown goes on to argue for: “Openness to renegotiating the state/voluntary boundary — and willingness to step up to the plate where the virtues of voluntary action are clear,” this being the essence of Milbank’s and Blond’s critique of what they perceive as the Church’s previous over adherence by default to the post-war Temple/Beveridge welfare state settlement.

However, before we reach conclusions to chapter five, the extent to which the evangelical voice on welfare influenced Brown’s advice on the ‘Big Society’ project is briefly considered.

### 5.6.4 The Evangelical Voice

As this is a study in Anglican Socialism and welfare, with a particular focus on the influences that shaped GS1804, the evangelical voice has not featured as it comes from another tradition. It is noticeable, from the interview with Brown, that he does not refer

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630 Atherton, Baker & Reader, *Christianity and the New Social Order*.

631 Brown, *Thinking Afresh*, p. 16.
to the evangelical tradition as being a key influence on the shaping of his advice in GS1804, though he does make reference to Lord Wei, an evangelical peer who proposed the Big Society Bank and who was appointed minister for the Big Society. In GS1804 Brown states: “Lord Wei’s social model is strongly shaped by American thinking.” He also refers to the American-based evangelical thinker, Luke Bretherton, describing his perspective as “in line with the judgement that there is much potential in The Big Society for the Church to work with, but that a residual element of scepticism remains in order”.

In the interview Brown also mentions Stanley Hauerwas, an American evangelical Anglican (former Methodist). However, he is cautious of Hauerwas’ thinking on welfare, which he describes as an approach “which is to diss everybody who disagrees with him”. Though far more sympathetic to capitalism than Milbank is, Hauerwas shares his sense of how charitable provision by the churches has been, and must remain, a key priority for them in contemporary capitalist contexts, in preference to an overly statist approach. This is a view shared by the evangelical theologian Oliver O’Donovan, who has much in common with Milbank’s thinking on how the West, since the rise of modernism and the Reformation, has taken an anti-sacred bias that has weakened its moral underpinnings.

632 GS1804, p. 4.
634 Brown’s reply to question 12.
More recently Samuel Wells, an English evangelical writer and former junior colleague of Hauerwas who is currently Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, has also focused increasingly on welfare and the Church in his writings. He has done much to popularise the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. This seeks to take a ‘bottom-up’ approach to welfare provision, prioritising community assets and emphasising the strengths of community-based interventions, though recognising that the state must retain a vital role in the provision of welfare. Although he sees the role of the Church as being: “To hold the state to account in addressing the five great evils since the state is undoubtedly best placed to address them”, at the same time, he thinks the Church has a vital role in creating “cross-generational community” and cherishing “people for what they are, not what they are not.” In some respects his thinking can be seen as a bridge between Milbank’s out-and-out statist scepticism and Archbishop John Sentamu’s unequivocal evangelical defence of Temple’s Welfare Statist legacy. Yet, despite these and other evangelical post-war contributions to the debates around welfare, there is much truth in Jonathan Chaplin’s view (himself an evangelical writer) that: “Evangelicals have, to put it mildly, a much stronger history of social activism than of social theology.” By social theology he means: “a coherent and enduring body of theological reflection that goes beyond occasional or ad hoc justifications for particular stances or practices and offers a larger, integrated theological vision of a flourishing social order”.

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637 See, for example, Wells, Rook & Barclay, *For Good.*
640 For example, D. Sheppard, *Bias to the Poor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983).
642 Chaplin, “Evangelical Contributions”, p. 104.
This contrasts with the contributions to debates on welfare and the Church that have come out of the Anglican Socialist tradition, and may partly reflect what Chaplin describes as a tendency in the evangelical movement “towards anti-intellectualism.”

Yet Brown notes how Blond’s thinking was partly shaped by his connections with evangelical circles: “this idea of taking over the Welfare State was big in evangelical circles, the HTB [Holy Trinity Brompton] style empire building churches.” It may be that the evangelical voice on welfare and the Church will become louder and, arguably, more coherent, in the years to come. Certainly, since the appointment of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury in March 2013 — himself a former congregant of Holy Trinity Brompton — the HTB movement has been on the rise in the Church of England. Evidence of this is how it has increasingly facilitated church planting and the rejuvenation of so called “failing” churches, with its emphasis on charismatic worship and the use of contemporary music in its services.

It is likely to be a grouping that will have more influence on shaping the Church’s strategic interface with the state in the future.

Some conclusions stemming from the analysis in chapter five can now be drawn.

5.7 Conclusions

It has been argued that much of the thinking on welfare in the Church of England since the financial crash of 2008 can be located in the themes and perspectives on the Church, state, and welfare that have been developed by writers from within two strands of the

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643 Chaplin, “Evangelical Contributions”, p. 111.
644 Brown’s reply to question 27.
645 See M. Davies, “Southampton Church will change its spots to attract a student congregation”. Church Times, 18 May 2018.
Anglican Socialist tradition: namely, the Welfare Statist strand and the English Pluralist Christendom strand. A case in point was its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project.

It has been demonstrated that the Church of England’s post-war positioning on welfare underwent a paradigm shift in 2010, from what had previously been a default tendency to operate within and defend the Temple Welfare Statist approach, to one more receptive to defending the communitarian critique of it. This had been spearheaded in significant part by writers from within the Radical Orthodoxy grouping, particularly Milbank (Blue Labour) and his intellectual protégée, Blond (Red Tory).

It has been argued that this paradigm shift — as expressed in official policy — can, in significant part, be attributed to the official advice the Church received on the handling of the ‘Big Society’ project from Malcolm Brown, and his attempt to hold corrective traditions in dialogue. Brown’s thinking has been critiqued as inconsistent with the historical record with respect to the Church of England’s engagement with the Temple Welfare Statist legacy, and Beveridge’s report *Voluntary Action*.

In addition, it has been suggested the key outcomes of the ‘Big Society’ project, not least the contraction in state support for the voluntary sector that occurred via George Osborne’s budget of August 2010, were foreseeable to Brown and, via GS1804, to the Church of England, based *inter alia* on things that David Cameron had made explicit at or around that time. Evidence of this is in GS1804: “The Coalition has set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare.” This *had* been foreseeable to those who had signed the *Common Wealth* document, and some of the explanation for the Church of England’s response can be explained by their view that: “the craving for

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646 GS1804, p. 2.
relevance was overriding any more searching critique of what was on offer”. However, Brown’s advice can also be explained in significant part by his growing affinity for Blue Labour/Red Tory thinking.

Finally, it has been noted that the rise in the levels of social action in the Church that were witnessed between 2010 and 2015, did not lead to a corresponding increase in affiliation in the Church of England, contrary to Milbank’s argumentation, though any extrapolation of this historical outcome to suggest a likely long term trend, must be treated with due caution.

Also, it has been questioned whether the Church of England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project has implications for its positioning on the theology of the state; a point that we come back to in 6.2.1.
CHAPTER SIX

JOHN MILBANK AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND’S FUTURE APPROACH TO WELFARE

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research question asked at the beginning is revisited: What approach should the Church of England take to welfare, in light of the tradition of Anglican Socialist thinking, with specific reference to the influential Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank? In answering that question some conclusions are reached to the lines of argument that have been developed in the foregoing chapters. Each line of argument is preceded by a sub-heading and is based on the findings of the research. Taken together they indicate what the Church of England’s approach to welfare might be. Conclusions to the thesis as a whole follow this chapter.

6.2 Conclusions to the Lines of Argument

There is much in this thesis that supports a view that the Anglican Socialist tradition is a useful lens to look through when attempting to answer the research question. We have seen how Temple and Tawney had considerable influence on shaping the British post-war Welfare State settlement (1.1–2.7), as well as post-war thinking within the Church of England on welfare (5–4). And, since the late 1960s via the works of ‘non statist’ Anglican Socialists such as Nicholls (2.6) and, since 1990, the works of Milbank (3.1–3.6), we have seen how there has been a resurgence of interest in the English Pluralist
Christendom strand of Anglican Socialism. This is particularly so with respect to its critique of the Temple Welfare Statist legacy, both from within the Church of England and further afield. The Blue Labour/Red Tory political phenomenon partly reflects this, as does the rise of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping as one key strand of theological underpinning for it. Crucially, we have also seen that the Welfare Statist strand and the English Pluralist Christendom strand have contrasting theologies of the state (1.4) that have helped shape their advocates’ thinking on welfare, to which we now return.

6.2.1 The differing theologies of the state

We have seen that whereas for Temple the state had a “spiritual function” and was a “servant and instrument of God” (1.4) for exponents of Christendom theology, such as Milbank, it is more often seen as a secular product of the modernist challenge to Christendom that the Protestant Reformation represented — thus it is the Church, not the state, that is “the kingdom of God in embryo”, and hence the place where spiritual functionality resides (3.3). These may well be irreconcilable theologies of the state, as argued by Malcolm Brown, and therefore incapable of being synthesised into a coherent whole. As Brown puts it: “Could there ever be one coherent theology of the state in the Church of England given that we are a coalition church”. Yet, as was argued at 5.5.8, it can be queried whether the current positioning on this within the Church of England is theologically adequate. This concern connects to a point Brown makes in an article — that there is no consensus within the Church, at present, “about where the proper boundary lies between public, private and voluntary provision in the shared task of building up the common good.” It may not be possible (or even desirable) to achieve

647 Brown’s reply to question 30.
such a consensus in the Anglican Church, but, as Brown argued with respect to the theology of the state in the interview with him, at any one time “there will be a dominant model, and it will be provisional.”

We saw in 4.4.8 and 5.4 that, in the period between the end of World War Two and the financial crash of 2008, the dominant model of thinking was Temple’s, reflected in resolutions passed by the 1948 Lambeth Conference. Crucially, it is also reflected in the theo-political responses that the Church of England made in defence of the Welfare State when it came under challenge by Thatcher’s administration in the 1980s, at a time of major financial pressure for that government. These theo-political responses reflected the dominance that Temple’s theology of the state had in the Church at that time, and official reports such as *Faith in the City* and *Not Just for the Poor* bear this out. As we saw at 5.4, both were heavily indebted to the Temple/Tawney approach. This research suggests, however, that since 2010 the dominant model in the Church of England has shifted closer to the Christendom model advocated by Milbank et al, as evidenced by the Church’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project (see 5.5). Clarity from the Church of England on the model by which it is currently operating by would be helpful in shaping its future approach to welfare. Also, when reflecting on the Church’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project and the lessons to be learned, it would be of assistance to know what that “dominant” future model of thinking is likely to be in the Church of England, at least in the short to medium-term, as it will no doubt help shape the Church’s remodelling of its approach to welfare. Crucially, the Church’s leadership should bear the following in mind when deliberating on this: Milbank’s (and Radical Orthodoxy’s) Christendom theology vis-à-vis the state, is a minority perspective both within Anglo-Catholicism and

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649 Brown’s reply to question 30.
Roman Catholicism. With respect to the latter, for example, it can be argued it is unrepresentative of Catholic Social Teaching on Church and state, which, in the post-war period, the Roman Catholic Church’s leadership has seen as being compatible with the emergence of Welfare States in countries such as those in Western Europe and elsewhere. It has, nevertheless, acknowledged that an over-statist approach can have dangers with respect to individuals’ human rights and freedoms being encroached on, which need to be avoided. Consequently, it has seen its thinking on the doctrine of subsidiarity as necessary for putting limits on government encroachment into people’s lives, whilst being wholly supportive of the need for government to act when local communities cannot solve problems on their own. Milbank’s interpretation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity is thus open to challenge when he states: “the doctrine of subsidiarity remains corporatist, since it seeks to devolve central sovereign powers to groups that are economically vocational and voluntary, as well as to local political formations.”

Certainly, in John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus*, a document often adduced by those who seek to interpret Catholic Social Teaching in a way that appears to be antithetical to welfare states, the Pope cautioned against the excesses of a “social assistance state”, and was rightly critical of aspects of welfare state provision when “they are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients”. However, in the same encyclical the Pope described the need for the state to defend the weakest and ensure in every case the “necessary minimum support for the unemployed worker”, as one example of how this should be achieved. Mainstream

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650 See Pius XI, *Quadragesimo*, 1931.
Roman Catholic thinking on welfare does not hold that the doctrine of subsidiarity is antithetical to either the concept or actuality of a Welfare State. However, it considers it is necessary to ensure that an over-statist approach to welfare provision is avoided, thus welcoming the contribution that non-state organisations can and should make to the provision of welfare, by working cooperatively and in partnership with state and private sector welfare providers. The importance of recognising this for the leadership of the Church of England when considering Milbank’s Christendom thinking on the Church, state and welfare, is for it to be mindful that it is often seen by mainstream Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics as being romantically mediaevalist, both in its theology of the state and in its ‘restorationist’ theo-political aspirations, and should therefore be treated with the caution that merits.\(^{653}\)

### 6.2.2 The importance of historical analysis

Much of the research in this thesis is historically based and evidenced. This reflects my epistemological bias as to the merits of this research methodology when analysing political and theo-political events. From this standpoint, it is crucial that any rethinking on the Church of England’s approach to welfare, is underpinned by sound historical analysis of the events that have precipitated such a rethink. In this thesis we have seen in the reports and academic works adduced in chapter four — works that were in the public domain and thus available to the Church of England — how there is compelling historical


evidence that there was a ‘Big Society’ in Britain before the ‘Big Society’ project was launched in the summer of 2010 (4.1‒4.4). This casts doubt on claims to the contrary by the Coalition Government and its ‘Big Society’ advocates such as Milbank and Blond. Rather, this lends some support to the perspective advanced at the time by the signatories to the Common Wealth document: that the ‘Big Society’ project was a “Big Lie”, “a smokescreen”, “another ideological veil,” and a front for making major cuts to state-provided welfare at a time of severe pressure on the public finances (see 5.3). In any case, the historical evidence should have been sufficient to have enabled greater foresight in the Church of England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project at the time the events unfolded.

6.2.3 Decreasing levels of church affiliation

As the Church of England is rightly concerned about decreasing levels of affiliation, it is understandably keen to enhance its relevance in wider society. Yet we saw at 5.6.1, between 2010 and 2015 it experienced an increase in its social activity levels at a time when Anglican Church membership in the UK decreased by eight per cent. This is an indication of how the reasons for the decline in church affiliation are complex and multi-faceted, as was argued at 4.4.8. So, any remodelling of its approach to welfare needs to bear this in mind. This shall be especially apposite when assessing the viability and desirability of church-based initiatives that seek to replace state-provided welfare services. These should be assessed on the likely impact they will have for the recipients of welfare, rather than the impact they may have on church affiliation. They also need to reflect a realistic assessment of the Church’s capacity to deliver welfare: one that is based on accurate information and informed prioritisation criteria. Therefore, when remodelling its approach to welfare for the twenty-first century, and paying due regard to lessons that
it can learn from its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, a key aspect the Church of England will need to revisit are its priorities for welfare in the wider theo-political context. Prioritisation is vital as it relates to the finite availability of resources. This pertains not just to the capacity to do things but also the capacity to understand and comment — and to do that with authority despite diminished numbers. Brown was correct in his assessment of how wildly over-optimistic and unrealistic Blond’s and Noyes’ vision for the Church of England’s role in the provision of welfare was in their report *Holistic Mission* (discussed at 4.5.2). But it reinforces the need for the Church of England to be realistic about what its capacity to deliver welfare is likely to be, before making any commitments. A capacity assessment of its current resources is needed — financial, physical, and human — so that a realistic sense of its ability to deliver welfare provision in the short to medium term can be gauged and prioritised, as well as the scale and specificity of its interventions and any risks associated with their delivery.

**6.2.4 The failure of the ‘Big Society’ project**

No doubt the failure of the ‘Big Society’ project to deliver on most of its stated objectives, and the reality that it compounded several of them (5.6), relates in part to its implementation. Recognising the demise of the ‘Big Society’ project in the autumn of 2012, Blond wrote in an article in the *Guardian*:

> The PM has given up something for nothing, ceding all his strategic and visionary thinking to George Osborne’s tactical and failing approach to the deficit. A new conservatism has been strangled at birth; a failure to rethink the party’s economic offer means that old economics have killed new politics.

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^654^ See P. Blond, “David Cameron has lost his chance to redefine the Tories”, *Guardian*, 3 October 2012. George Osborne was the Chancellor of the Exchequer at that time.
He can thus argue that the project was never given a fair wind, and hence its failure cannot be seen as undermining the credibility of the project’s theoretical underpinning. However, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with that assessment, it does not remove its supporters from taking some responsibility for that failure, including those from within the Church of England. For the reality was that Milbank’s and Blond’s influence on Brown’s thinking, for example, and hence on the Church of England’s handling of the project, meant that the Church’s ability to critique and challenge the 1.3 billion pounds of cuts in state provision to the voluntary sector in 2011/12 was significantly compromised, largely because of its stated support for the project at that time (5.5–5.6.3).

6.2.5 The viability of an alternative approach that entails a disentangling of the state from the voluntary sector

It was argued in 4.4 that Milbank’s Blue Socialist perspective is consistent with the historical evidence in so far as, since the 1970s, some sections of the voluntary sector have experienced some loss of financial and strategic decision-making autonomy to the state, in ways that have reshaped the way they provide welfare services. The question remains, however, whether an alternative approach that entails a disentangling of the state from the voluntary sector and a substantial increase in Church provision of welfare (some of it funded by the state) as advocated by Milbank and Blond, offers a better alternative, including income streams sufficiently capable of offsetting the loss of state provided income that would result. Relevant to answering that question are the findings of Whose Society? Final Big Society Audit discussed at 5.6, which reveal that levels of corporate giving had not increased to replace shrinking state funding for the voluntary sector, and that although individual giving had increased, it was not back to pre-recession levels. The
result was that many voluntary organisations were facing closure, not being able to find alternative sources of income.

This had been predicted by Patrick Butler, the Guardian’s editor for society, health and education in July 2010, when he wrote “thousands of small community-based charities expected to help deliver David Cameron's ‘big society’ idea are facing potentially devastating cuts, leaving some under threat of closure, and putting services to some of Britain’s poorest and most vulnerable people at risk.”655 It occurred at a time when changes to welfare benefits, particularly to the unemployed, including the imposition of a harsher system of benefit sanctions, were introduced. These changes were not a stated policy objective of the ‘Big Society’ project, and came out of a different government department. But they compounded the effects that cuts in the voluntary sector providers of welfare were having on the most vulnerable in society. This outcome was partly ameliorated by the increase in social action and welfare provision in the churches, including the increase in church-based foodbanks. Thus we saw at 5.5.9 how Brown, three years into the ‘Big Society’ project, had concluded that action by the churches had been crucial in responding to the plight many people were in, but: “those most involved know that it is not filling the gap left by the cuts to welfare provision.”656

It is for reasons such as these that the effects of the cuts to state provision for voluntary services that the Whose Society? The Final Big Society Audit evidenced as being a direct result of the rollout of the ‘Big Society’ project (5.6), should not be underestimated; nor should the significant but inadequate level of alleviation of their consequences by the Church of England be overestimated. Size matters when it comes to

welfare provision, as Baker, Atherton and Reader recognised in their riposte to Milbank recounted at 4.5.2, when they pointed out that the British government will spend: “40% of its GDP on public expenditure even after the proposed cuts,” an essential contribution to wellbeing “which the church and voluntary bodies are incapable of satisfying.” It is difficult to envisage this situation substantially changing in the future, not least based on historical trend analysis embracing the period of the rollout of the ‘Big Society’ project. Even with further additional state funding, the Church of England’s capacity to deliver welfare on a scale anywhere remotely close to that provided by the state sector is unrealistic, as well as highly problematical for the reasons discussed at 4.5.2. In some respects, but not all, the same can be said of the wider voluntary sector providers of welfare.

Prior to the setting up of the Welfare State, one can point to numerous historical examples of how voluntary based or charity provision of welfare, not least that provided by the Church sector, played a vital part in alleviating the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. Prochaska’s works are strong on this aspect of British social history. Yet it was only with the coming of the Welfare State in the 1940s that the scale of welfare that was necessary to tackle the five giants identified by Beveridge (see 2.2), was made possible. Brown may well be right in his view that, in a sense, “they are still around.” To suppose that they will ever be entirely ‘slayed’ would stretch the imagination beyond what is sensible. Nevertheless, in comparison to the scale of welfare deficiency prior to the coming of the Welfare State, massive progress has since been made towards slaying them. This is particularly apparent in the field of education and health, and on a scale that

658 Brown’s reply to question 30.
has broadly been commensurate to the task. By 1952, this trend was already evident to Tawney, who was able to include in his epilogue to *Equality* a list of major improvements across a range of performance indicators that were directly attributable to the Welfare State (see 2.3). Advocates of a more communitarian based model of welfare delivery such as Milbank and Blond, promoting *competition* with state sector providers with a view to diminishing their size and resources, rather than based on working in *cooperation* with them, have yet to make out a convincing, evidence-based case that this alternative model can deliver welfare on a scale commensurate to the task in hand.

This is not, of course, to in any way suggest that the Welfare State should be immune from a need for dynamic and sometimes substantial changes to the way it defines and delivers welfare, so as to try to keep pace with society’s constantly changing welfare needs and expectations. And it is not to suggest that the voluntary sector should not continue to play a vital and integral contribution to the delivery of welfare provision in Britain, working in cooperation with the state and private sector providers as envisaged by Temple, Beveridge and the authors of *Not Just for the Poor*. But it is to suggest they cannot become substitutes for state welfare providers, unless there are sound, professionally informed and publically accountable justifications for that, reached on a case by case analysis.

Temple always envisaged a need for the state and intermediate sectors to coexist and mutually thrive in a Welfare State context, as has been argued and evidenced in 1.4. There is compelling historical evidence to support a view that they did coexist and mutually thrive in the period from 1945 to the financial crash of 2008 (see 4.4). In the post-war period it has been English Pluralist Christendom writers such as Demant, Reckitt and Milbank who have sought to paint a different picture, often based more on
sophisticated ideological and theological argumentation than on sound historical analysis.\textsuperscript{659} The rise of the Radical Orthodoxy grouping — providing a key theological underpinning for the Red Tory/Blue Labour political phenomenon — has lent weight to their cause. And we have seen in the evidence provided by Brown in (5.5), the extent to which Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy can now exercise influence on the Church of England’s positioning on welfare, as one corrective tradition to the Temple Welfare Statist legacy.

6.2.6 Milbank’s approach to the writing of history

Yet, when one looks closely at the historical evidence underpinning much of Milbank’s theo-political outlook, whether it be \textit{inter alia} in respect of the early modern period and the reasons for the rise of capitalism, or nineteenth-century British labour history, both of which were considered in 3.4–3.8, we begin to see how open to challenge his perspectives on history are. We saw at 3.10 how Milbank’s perspective on historical source criticism stems from his openly acknowledged affinity with romantic thinking, as evidenced by his statement: “a romantic view of history is more realistic than a cynical one.”\textsuperscript{660} This \textit{a priori} commitment to writing history from a romantic perspective, Milbank sees as a necessary corrective to what he argues are the distortions inherent in liberalism and its “cynical” accounts of history. These have been derived in significant part from the application of positivist research methods that place a primacy on \textit{a posteriori} reasoning. It is Milbank’s postmodernist scepticism of positivist research methods and their epistemological underpinnings, which partly accounts for his unorthodox attitude to the

\textsuperscript{659} This cannot be said of David Nicholls with respect to historical analysis.
\textsuperscript{660} Milbank, “Blue Labour, One Nation”, p. 6.
conventions of historical source criticism that have been developed over the last one hundred and eighty years or so. Thus he argues:

The positivism which defines religion at, beyond, or across the boundaries of the ‘social fact’, is always subverted by a more radical positivism which recognises the peculiarity and specificity of religious practice and logic, and, in consequence, the impossibility of any serious attempt at either scientific explanation or humanist interpretation. 661

This outlook has resulted in a problematic and questionable approach to the writing of history from Milbank, that overemphasises ideas as being the shaper of historical events, and is often based on the use of novel categorisations that fit with his theological and theo-political presuppositions — theology, for Milbank, being “the queen of the sciences”662 — and, as we have seen in 3.4–3.10, these are open to considerable challenge when tested against the historical evidence.

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661 Milbank, Theology & Social Theory, p. 144.
662 See Milbank, Theology & Social Theory, p. 382. A key strand of Milbank’s thought is that Christian theology must regain its medieval status as being “queen of the sciences”, as his outlook is singularly ontologically theological and Catholically Christocentric. His work Theology & Social Theory, in some respects, can be seen as an attempt to achieve this within the academy. It is a trenchant critique of modernist, positivist research methods of enquiry that social scientists and others have often used, and the epistemological claims to truth that have been made on the back of their use. The body of thought that is commonly referred to as historical source criticism has been heavily influenced by positivist thinking, not least by the emphasis it places on primary sources (empiricism) as the basis for historical criticism via the primacy it places on a posteriori knowledge. L. Rank’s seminal work The Theory and Practice of History (1836), (London: Routledge, 2010) exemplifies this approach, and can be seen as the starting point in the development of modern historical source criticism. G.J. Garraghan’s highly influential book A Guide to Historical Method (New York: Declan X. McMullan, 1946) is also heavily indebted to positivist theory. Although there are some contemporary historians who have been influenced by postmodernist critiques of positivist historical method, and thus are more sceptical of some of the epistemological claims to historical truth that have been made by their advocates (see, for example, M. Bentley, “History, Truth and Changing Perspectives”, The Social Affairs Unit, August, 2006. Available at: http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/001046.php [accessed on 18 July 2018]), they nevertheless continue to adhere to what are essentially positivist (empiricist) methods in their evidencing of what they write about history. Milbank’s postmodernist scepticism of positivist research methods is more incredulous, however, and is reflected
It is one reason for why this thesis has used historical source criticism as an approach to addressing the research question. And it is why the Church of England should be cautious when seeking to engage with — let alone accommodate — Milbank’s views on history, not least those on the British Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector providers of welfare that were analysed and critiqued in 4.4.

6.2.7 Getting the Church’s voice heard on welfare

However, Milbank is right to draw attention to weaknesses in the Welfare State that need to be remedied. Thus we saw at 5.4.1 how *Unemployment and the Future of Work* was broadly in support of in-work state benefits,\(^{663}\) which fails to reflect a concern voiced by some, that such benefits can supplement inadequate and possibly unjust remuneration practices by low-paying employers at the expense of the taxpayer. This was something not envisaged by either Beveridge or Temple as a function of the Welfare State, and is precisely the kind of extension of its remit that Gordon Brown’s New Labour administration did much to advance, and of which Milbank has rightly been so critical.\(^{664}\)

So, in any rethinking of its approach to welfare, the Church of England should ensure that it continues to have a strong voice in areas where it feels the state may be getting things wrong, as well as on options for how it might better get them right. Milbank’s and Pabst’s ambitious but problematic vision for how this could be achieved merits rigorous, critical examination by the Church of England. This could be part of a wider review of its...

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in his words: “the impossibility of any serious attempt at either scientific explanation or humanist interpretation” of what he describes as “religious practice and logic”. It is one reason for why his thinking on “Socialism of the Gift”, for example, as an interpretation of commodity exchange in Catholic mediaeval society is highly theoretically based, and this is reflected in the sources it draws on which often tend to be more theoretically than empirically supported — see his article “Socialism of the Gift: Socialism by Grace”.

\(^{663}\) *Unemployment and the Future of Work*, p. 139.

\(^{664}\) Milbank & Pabst, “Post-liberal politics and the alternative”, p. 92.
strategic interface with the state, taking into account the lessons that it can learn from its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, and the need for clarification on its positioning vis-à-vis the theology of the state.

It would also need to consider what is likely to be the optimal way for the Church of England to get its voice heard on welfare, at least in the short-to-medium term. Malcolm Brown’s statement that the Church of England does not do reports like *Faith in the City* anymore is relevant to answering that question.\(^{665}\) The danger with this “shift of method and model”, however, is that the Church of England could become too reactive (hence insufficiently pro-active) in shaping the welfare agenda. To avoid this it needs to reassess the extent to which it needs to engage in research projects and initiatives on welfare provision. It may be that reports in the style of *Faith in the City* are no longer optimal or even affordable. If this is the case, other opportunities need to be identified for the Church of England to influence the analytical, academic and political debates concerning welfare provision, perhaps working in consort with other churches, charities, think tanks and university departments currently engaged in research on welfare, on the best ways of delivering it. Encouragingly, the Archbishop’s *Commission on Housing, Church and Community* announced in April 2019, may be an example of this approach being put into practice.\(^{666}\)

The Church of England should also reconsider how best it can communicate its purpose as regards welfare provision, making best use of social media resources, but also shaping more and reacting less to perceived stereotypes such as the Church of England “is

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\(^{665}\) Brown’s reply to question 6.

\(^{666}\) For more on this, see Church of England, *Housing, Church & Community*, 2019. Available at: [https://www.churchofengland.org/ABChousing](https://www.churchofengland.org/ABChousing) (accessed on 10 June 2019).
a load of ‘pink’ communist types.”  

3 Faith in the City, for example, was, in some respects, flawed, being, as Brown described it in 2017: “theologically deficient, flirting, as many of us did, with Liberation Theology with insufficient appreciation that urban England and its people were more than a little different from El Salvadorian base communities.” Nevertheless, it was a heavyweight analytical challenge to the Conservative Government’s handling of the welfare agenda at that time, which resonated with many in the UK, and certainly did not go unnoticed in high political circles. The recommendations were supported by a considerable amount of evidence-based research which had been amassed by the authors talking to people ‘on the ground’, and which were well presented and communicated via a skillful handling by the Church of the media at that time. Contrast that approach with the statement that Brown offered about the Church’s initial handling of the ‘Big Society’ project: “What we were looking for, and this was not theology or political theory but realpolitik, was what we can say that shows that Conservatives were not the enemy of the Church of England.” The danger is that tactical considerations — the perceived need for political acceptance and ongoing legitimacy, admittedly as part of a wider theoretical reconsideration of its post-war positioning on welfare — might now be becoming too prominent a theo-political imperative, and may on occasion be taking precedence over theologically underpinned proactive analysis in the Church of England in its handling of its interface with government on welfare matters. The reasons for this, at least in part, might be located in the words Brown uses to preface his comment, contextualizing it back to the time of the Faith in the City report, stating: “Now, thirty five years on, we have got far less

667 Brown’s reply to question 21.
legitimacy. The question of the Bishops in the Lords, for example, was barely an issue in 1985. It is now a very lively issue all of the time. So the Church’s political platform is wobbly”.

6.2.8 Reprioritising equality as a Christian goal

We have seen in 2.3 and 3.8 how, since the publication of Tawney’s seminal work on the subject, equality has been a key intellectual feature of the Welfare Statist strand of Anglican Socialist thought, though it has to be balanced with a need for liberty and fraternity which will place limits on the extent to which it can be realised. An example of its application in the Welfare State is that access to health services provided by the NHS to British nationals is based singly on clinical need. Yet equality is antithetical to the thinking of Burke, who, as we saw at 3.8, is a key intellectual influence on Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking. It is also noticeable that equality does not feature much in Blue Labour thinking, and Milbank does not appear to place much importance on equality as a theo-political aspiration. Yet, for many Christians, equality, albeit constrained in its achievability, is an important imperative relating to the concept of the common good (and certainly to a Catholic sense of it). It raises the question how far a society based on a notion of the common good can accommodate levels of inequality in the levels of access to the political, economic, social, educational, intellectual, and cultural aspects of life that are necessary for human flourishing. Enhancing equality in society should therefore be a goal for the Church of England in its handling of welfare, however difficult it is to put into effect.

669 See Brown’s reply to question 6.
6.2.9 The Church of England’s future approach to welfare

It is for reasons such as these, as well as the research findings in this thesis relating to
them, that the answer to the question posed at 1.7 — namely, should the Church of
England’s approach to welfare be one characterised primarily around a defence of the
Welfare State and consistent with the thinking of Temple as it had been up to 2010, or
should it be one characterised by a move towards a more communitarian, voluntarist,
Christendom model, with the Church of England playing a greater role in the provision of
welfare alongside a smaller Welfare State as argued by Milbank? — is that it should be
much more of the former than the latter.
CONCLUSION

1. A Summary of the Salient Points reached in Chapter Six

So, as a result of the research, there is a need for the Church of England in its approach to welfare:

   (a) To revisit the historical record of the Welfare State vis-à-vis the voluntary sector (4.1–4.6), and to learn lessons from its handling of the ‘Big Society’ project (5.1–5.7).

   (b) To shape its approach to welfare around a defence of the Welfare State, consistent with the emphasis Temple (1.4), and Tawney (2.3) placed on equality as a value underpinning the Welfare State, whilst retaining the freedom to be critical of it where evidence suggests such criticism is merited (5.4.1).

   (c) To continue to play a vital and integral contribution to the delivery of welfare provision in Britain (5.6.1), working in cooperation with the state and private sector providers as envisaged by Temple, Beveridge and the authors of Not Just for the Poor (5.4).

   (d) To identify and clarify the current dominant model of its theology of the state, and what any future model is likely to be because of its relevance to shaping its approach to welfare (5.5.7). It should therefore undertake a review of its theological and practical interface with the state, including a rigorous, critical examination of Milbank’s and Pabst’s vision for it. (4.5).
(e) To undertake a realistic and prioritised assessment of its capacity to deliver welfare — one that is based on accurate information and informed prioritisation criteria (4.5.2).

(f) To ensure it continues to have a strong voice in areas where it feels the welfare state may be getting things wrong (5.5.3), as well as on options for how it might better get them right.

(g) To reassess the extent to which it should engage in research projects and initiatives on welfare provision with others, and how best it can communicate its purpose (5.5.3).

(h) To exercise caution when seeking to engage with — let alone accommodate — Milbank’s views on history (3.10), and, specifically, on the history of the Welfare State vis-à-vis voluntarism (4.1–4.6), and to be more sceptical of the broad thrust of his Blue Socialist vision for its role in the provision of welfare, as well as his views on the role the Welfare State should perform in British society in the coming years (3.9).

2. **How the Research has enabled the Research Question to be answered**

The research provides analytical underpinning for these eight points, in answering the research question on the approach the Church of England should take to welfare in light of the tradition of Anglican Socialist thinking, with specific reference to the influential Blue Socialist thinking of John Milbank.

The use of historical source criticism as the primary research methodology for this study in contemporary Contextual Theology, has enabled these conclusions to be drawn in a way that is supported by a considerable amount of historical evidence. Much of the critique of Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on welfare is historically based, as is the
way the Church of England handled the ‘Big Society’ project, drawing on an analysis of
historical sources such as (1) GS1804, (2) the Report of Proceedings 2010: General
Synod, November Group of Sessions, and (3) the oral history account from Malcolm
Brown of his input into these events. This is an under-used research methodology for
analysing contemporary questions in Contextual Theology, and I hope this study provides
an example of how and why it could be used more often.

3. **The significance of the research as an original contribution to thought within the
field of Contextual Theology**

The significance of the research as an original contribution to thought within the field of
Contextual Theology is threefold. First, it is the first analysis and critique that has been
undertaken of John Milbank’s Blue Socialist thinking on welfare vis-à-vis its influence
within the Church of England. Second, it provides an original analysis of the Church of
England’s handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, seen in historical and theoretical context.
This will hopefully make a contribution to its reflective learning from these events, and
thus the shaping of the Church’s approach to welfare via submission of a copy of the
thesis to Malcolm Brown. Third, it makes a more modest but nevertheless original
contribution to a wider debate that is currently taking place within the Church of England.
This concerns the feasibility of it being able to manage such a diverse range of
theological tradition and perspective that now exists, in a way that will allow for coherent
policy formulation to occur. Holding corrective traditions in dialogue in a way that Brown
sees as being quintessentially Anglican, can sometimes result in theological incoherence
and theo-political misjudgements, and this study is suggestive of both with respect to its
handling of the ‘Big Society’ project (5.5–5.6).
4. **Scope for Further Research**

This study has not had space to examine the impact the rise of professionalism and managerialism has had on the British state sector providers of welfare. Milbank sees these as the cause of an impersonal, universalist approach. This is a view that is contested by other writers. In reviewing the contribution the Church of England might make to welfare provision, there is a need for some contemporary theological reflection on the nature of work *per se*, especially in a rapidly changing and highly technologically-based context such as, for example, the NHS in the twenty-first century. This is not a new idea for the Anglican Church. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 passed a resolution stating: “The Conference calls the Church to think out afresh the Christian gospel of work in terms relevant to modern working conditions.” Arguably, it is a resolution that is as relevant now as it was when it was passed, and when the nature of work was revisited by the Church of England in 1997 in its contribution to *Unemployment and the Future of Work*. 

Research towards a contemporary model of thinking on the theology of the state that can command wide acceptance in the Church of England is also needed to support the review suggested at 1 (d) above. And there is a need for research into the impact the rise of the evangelical HTB movement is having on the Church of England, and how, and to what extent, it might influence welfare policy in the coming years (see 5.6.3). Any

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such research will have to acknowledge the deep-seated influence of Anglican Socialism on the ways that the Church of England approaches welfare.

5. **Back to the Future**

There can be little doubt, as the research has demonstrated, that the Church of England needs to keep reflecting theologically and practically on its role vis-à-vis the state and the provision of welfare. Consequently, it needs to take into account policy developments on welfare in the Labour Party that emerge in the aftermath of its electoral defeat in December 2019, as well as those brought forward by the Boris Johnson led administration. Blue Labour thinking on welfare remains an intellectual force in the Labour Party, though the term is less often used to describe it. Red Tory thinking on welfare in the Conservative Party is less evident than it once was. The thrust of this thesis, based on the evidence examined, is that the Church of England should reassess its connections with the Blue Labour/Red Tory political phenomenon, and return to a position of defending the Temple Welfare Statist legacy. However, in doing that it must remain cognisant of the need for ongoing modernisation of that legacy, to meet the ever-changing welfare needs and expectations of twenty-first century English society. This study evidences why the continuing legacy of Welfare Statist Anglican Socialism should remain a key theological component in any debates it has with other perspectives in the years ahead.
APPENDIX ONE

WILLIAM TEMPLE AND MIDDLE AXIOMS

1. The Thinking of William Temple on Middle Axioms

William Temple’s thinking on middle axioms is less than entirely clear as he eschews the language and, arguably, does not distinguish clearly enough between principles, aims, objectives, and strategies. However, he identifies six objectives at the end of Christianity and Social Order that can be seen as middle axioms. Stephen Spencer, a leading British expert on Temple, describes the six objectives in this way: “These points are examples of ‘middle axioms’, which are broad practical objectives that show how abstract theory impinges on practical problems and issues.” These six objectives are set down in full below.

1. Every child should find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity, so that it may grow up as a member of that basic community in a happy fellowship unspoilt by underfeeding or overcrowding, by dirty and drab surroundings or by mechanical monotony of environment.
2. Every child should have the opportunity of an education till years of maturity, so planned as to allow for his [sic] peculiar aptitudes and make possible their full development. This education should throughout be inspired by faith in God and find its focus in worship.
3. Every citizen should be secure in possession of such income as will enable him [sic] to maintain a home and bring up children in such conditions as are described in paragraph 1. above.
4. Every citizen should have a voice in the conduct of the business or industry which is carried on by means of his [sic] labour, and the satisfaction of knowing that his [sic] labour is directed to the well-being of the community.
5. Every citizen should have sufficient daily leisure, with two days of rest in seven, and, if an employee, an annual holiday with pay, to enable him [sic] to enjoy a full personal life with such interests and activities as his [sic] talents may direct.
6. Every citizen should have assured liberty in the forms of freedom of worship, of speech, of assembly, and of association for special purposes.

In the Appendix to Christianity and Social Order Temple then takes a further step beyond the objectives/middle axioms when he sets down what he calls: “A Suggested Programme” that identifies “ways” for “the realisation of our six-fold aim [i.e. objectives, i.e., middle axioms].” He suggests the following eight elements of a programme to fulfil the six general objectives. These eight elements are summarised below.

1. Decent housing should be built near where workers worked.
2. Family allowances should be paid to mothers for each child after the first two.
3. Wages should be sufficient for a family of four.
4. Milk and a good meal a day should be provided at school.

5. Education should be the primary occupation of everyone up to the age of 18.
6. The state should eradicate unemployment through public works, as and when it arises.
7. Labour should be represented on the directorates through the Unions.
8. Every citizen should have two days rest in seven, and an annual holiday with pay.\(^{674}\)

Clearly, these are written in a more prescriptive, ‘policy specific’ style that goes beyond Temple’s positioning on middle axioms. Temple makes clear that he considered them as being what he “personally”, as an individual Christian, believed to be necessary, and offered them “as suggestions for criticism rather than for adoption” and, indeed, begged the readers to consider them in that spirit. This reflects an important understanding by him that middle axioms do not remain fixed and require translation into policy; they represent a living, breathing, changing tradition that, inevitably from time to time, will require updating or reformulating.

Stephen Spencer argues: “It is a great credit to Temple’s realism and judgement that many of these recommendations were implemented by post-Second World War Governments,”\(^{675}\) this being one reason why they remain important as a feature in the history of the British Welfare State.

2. The Thinking of Ronald Preston on Middle Axioms

Ronald Preston, a leading post-war Anglican authority on middle axiom thinking, also saw them as provisional and requiring continuous reworking according to context.\(^{676}\) Preston, though disliking of the term ‘middle axioms’, defended this thinking throughout his life,\(^{677}\) seeing it as integral to the functioning of an established church. In fact the term ‘middle way’ (a classic Anglican kind of formulation) perhaps characterises his approach more accurately, which is the title of an important collection of his writings.\(^{678}\) In this book he talks about a “rough and ready process”\(^{679}\) by which church bodies establish a “fairly wide consensus”\(^{680}\) by operating at a “middle level between generalities which are not specific enough to have precise content and detailed policies on which the evidence is likely to be uncertain”,\(^{681}\) because of the “ambiguous nature”\(^{682}\) of most issues. Before his death in 2001, Preston was a leading member of the William Temple Foundation,
established in 1944 in Temple’s memory, and Temple’s and Preston’s thinking on middle axioms has largely held sway in the Church of England throughout the post-war period. John Atherton, a great admirer of Preston’s thinking and also a member of WTF until his death in 2016, was also of the view that middle axioms were transient, and this is reflected in his collaborative work with Chris Baker and John Reader of 2011, in which a list of newly formulated middle axioms relating to a rapidly changing welfare landscape is set down. In line with Temple’s and Preston’s thinking, the list is prefaced with the words: “Seven guidelines for today: on having a sense of direction for attaining greater wellbeing for all”.

3. Criticisms of Middle Axiom Thinking

There have been several post-war thinkers in the Church of England who have been critical of this form of thinking, some of whose concerns are discussed in the main body of this thesis: e.g. David Nicholls and John Milbank. For example, Alan Suggate offers a succinct but helpful discussion of ‘middle axioms’ in his article on William Temple in a collection of essays that appeared in 2014. Suggate notes two particular criticisms of Temple’s approach: (1) “in the framing of middle axioms” there is a danger of “a comfortable accommodation of Christianity to the powers that be”; and (2) the method is “too abstract and deductive” in his view. Suggate acknowledges, however, that “Temple recommend-ed a dialectical movement between one’s understanding of the faith and one’s experiencing of living in the world. Principles are guides to action, but are themselves tested, clarified, and, if necessary revised in the light of experience of living.” Certainly Temple saw ‘middle axioms’ as guides to action — hence not as ideas in the abstract. Indeed, it was the focus he placed on the need for their application, set within a well-argued accompanying contextual analysis, which ensured that his study of 1942 was taken seriously by ‘the powers that be’, both within and beyond the Church of England. More recently, John Hughes offers an interesting summary of Temple’s intellectual legacy (including his thinking on middle axioms) and the challenges it has faced since the early 1980s, stemming in particular from the writings of MacIntyre, Hauerwas, O’Donovan, and Milbank. He describes these thinkers as sharing a common purpose, which is to offer critiques of enlightenment liberalism out of which Temple’s thinking on middle axioms had emerged, and locates this trend as being within a wider postmodern intellectual turn. The upshot of this new paradigm of thinking is that it has, once again, raised important questions about the extent to which the Church should ‘interfere’ in the political affairs of the state, and the most appropriate ways of ‘interfering’ when it decides that it should.

4. **Milbank’s and Pabst’s challenge to Middle Axiom Thinking**

Milbank’s and Pabst’s vision for a more interventionist role for the established Church — establishment being something that they support⁶⁸⁸ — as part of a move towards a post-liberal polity and society, challenges middle axiom thinking, though it is a vision that their work of 2016, *The Politics of Virtue*, is less than wholly clear about. For example, they argue: “For the Church, the key challenge is to make establishment work much better in terms of legislation and policies insofar as state decisions have contributed to the de-Christianisation of the nation”.⁶⁸⁹ Yet they say surprisingly little about the precise mechanisms/approach that the Church of England might wish to deploy as regards the state when undertaking this role.

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APPENDIX TWO

KEY ELEMENTS OF BEVERIDGE’S REPORT OF 1942 AND KEY PIECES OF POST-WAR LEGISLATION

1. Key Elements of Beveridge’s Report of 1942: Social Insurance and Allied Services

Beveridge defined seven needs to be covered by the Scheme:

- Childhood (by way of state provided family allowances);
- Old age (by way of state pensions);
- Disability (by way of state disability and injury benefits);
- Unemployment (by way of state unemployment benefit);
- Funeral expenses (to be met by a state funeral grant);
- Loss of gainful occupation other than employment, e.g. bankruptcy, fire, theft (to be met by a state grant);
- Marriage needs of a woman, e.g. widowhood, maternity, separation (to be met by a state widow’s pension and state grants for the other categories).

Beveridge was clear that no satisfactory scheme of social security could be devised except on the following three assumptions:

- Children’s allowances for children up to the age of 15 or in full-time education up to the age of 16;
- Comprehensive health and re-habilitation services for prevention and cure of disease and restoration of capacity for work;
- Maintenance of employment, that is to say avoidance of mass unemployment.

2. Key Pieces of Legislation enacted by the Attlee Administration (1945–1951)

The Family Allowance Act (1945), the National Insurance Industrial Injuries Act (1946), the National Insurance Act (1946) and the National Assistance Act (1948), considerably extended the range of social security provision in line with key recommendations of the Beveridge Report. The National Health Service Acts of 1946, 1947 and 1948 paved the way for a National Health Service to be established in all parts of the United Kingdom. In July 1948, this was brought about, with cradle-to-grave healthcare coverage free at the

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point of delivery and for all. The Education Act of 1944 was largely implemented by the Attlee Government, and provided for a raised school leaving age of 15 and a reformed system of secondary education. The National Assistance Act of 1948 established a National Assistance Board to assume national responsibility for those in need who had previously been dealt with by the local Public Assistance Committees. And the New Towns Act of 1946 led to a substantial expansion of housing provision via the creation of 14 new towns across Britain, followed by the Housing Act of 1949 that enabled local authorities to acquire houses for renovation and improvement with a subsidy from the Exchequer.  


Under the premiership of Mrs Thatcher, much of the post-war Attlee administration’s legacy was systematically undermined. State control over significant aspects of the economy was reduced via a series of privatizations of state assets (e.g. gas, water, electricity, and steel). Further changes were made via the Social Security Act of 1986 which included changes to the Social Fund (money for use in emergencies for claimants which now became a loan rather than a grant). In addition, local authority control over housing was weakened by legislation that allowed council tenants to buy council houses, and the move to providing social housing via Housing Associations. Local authority control over education was also reduced by allowing schools to opt out of state control and become grant maintained. And, in 1990, the Hospital and Community Care Act created in the NHS an internal market via the so-called purchaser/provider split. In this scheme of things, Health Authorities came to purchase services from health providers, so as to introduce an element of competition into the service with a view to achieving improvements as a result. Some hospitals were encouraged to become self-governing, though still in the NHS, but with more autonomy as regards directives from the Department of Health. GP fund holders were also established that enabled these to purchase services directly for their patients albeit primarily from within the NHS. The sum of these changes to the NHS were not to alter the state provision of healthcare free at the point of delivery. But they did begin a process of marketisation within the NHS that was later to be further developed under various administrations: John Major (1990–1997), the Tony Blair administration (1997–2007), and the Gordon Brown administration (2007–2010).  


Under the premiership of both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown there was the same stress on performance indicators that there had been under Major’s administration, as well as major private-sector involvement in large new-build projects funded by private firms under what was, essentially, a mortgage arrangement, that came to be called the *Private Finance Initiative* that had been begun by the Conservatives under Major. Continuity of policy with the previous Tory administrations was also evident with respect to education policy, and, in certain respects, was even more radical in its departure from the post-war ‘statist’ solutions. Under Gordon Brown’s premiership, 450 more city Academies of the kind that had previously been established under Blair, were created to enlarge the already significant number of schools that had opted out of local authority control, with funding of new buildings through PFI initiatives (several of these being faith schools). Pensions were also reformed under Labour. In 2005 the pension commission set up to review pensions announced that the retirement age would eventually have to increase to 68, arguing that, with the rising number of elderly living longer, the costs of the previous system were too burdensome on the remaining working population. And more Housing Association properties were built and more council houses were sold off under Labour. 695

695 For more on the Blair and Brown Governments’ policy direction and key pieces of legislation, see F. Faucher-King & P. Le Gales, *The New Labour Experiment: Change under Blair and Brown* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), and D. Coates & P. Lawler (eds), *New Labour in Power* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
APPENDIX THREE

GS1804: “THE BIG SOCIETY” AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND 696

The Big Society — Background

1. “The Big Society” emerged as a theme in Conservative Party thinking prior to the General Election. It implied a clear renunciation of the statement that “there is no such thing as society” and was seen as part of the project to reposition the party as more compassionate and aware of human needs and desires. It was not universally welcomed within the party, nor, apparently, did campaigners find that it resonated amongst voters on the doorstep.

2. During the campaign, David Cameron explained that he believed that there is such a thing as society: but it is not the same as the State. The Big Society was seen as a foundation for policies which reduced the extent — and the cost — of direct state involvement in social and welfare activities.

3. The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition is now putting considerable energy into developing The Big Society in policy terms and there have been a number of major speeches, not least by the Prime Minister, which are starting to give content to the general theme.

4. In a speech on 19 July 2010, the Prime Minister set out three main strands of the Big Society agenda:
   - Social Action — the government will foster and support a new culture of voluntarism and philanthropy
   - Public service reform — getting rid of the centralised bureaucracy and in its place giving professionals much more freedom, opening up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies so we get more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need
   - Community empowerment — creating communities with neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them.

5. Within modern Conservatism, the intellectual and conceptual energy behind The Big Society has come from thinkers such as Jesse Norman (now MP for Hereford) and the Director of the ResPublica think tank, Phillip Blond, himself a theologian of the Radical Orthodoxy school.2 A number of Ministers have been drawing on ideas like these since well before the General Election.

6. Although The Big Society clearly taps into a particular strand of Conservative thinking, it is not intrinsically alien to certain traditions within the Labour Party or Liberalism. Labour can trace an important part of its history in working class self-

696 In a preliminary discussion with Malcolm Brown prior to the recorded interview commencing, he pointed out that GS1804 was an official, advisory document intended to provide focus for the discussion to be held on the ‘Big Society’ project at the General Synod in November 2010. This Appendix provides the full document debated by General Synod.
help movements, co-operatives and local action. Ed Miliband has already spoken of his aspiration to build “The Good Society”. He appears to be drawing on a similar tradition of the civic virtues whilst avoiding the overtly anti-state rhetoric of the Conservatives.3

7. Historically, the Liberal Party has also given a strong emphasis to localism. Potentially, the principles of The Big Society are capable of being “owned” across a wide political spectrum, although their adoption as the policy of the coalition government may, in practice, limit their cross party appeal. If Blond’s arguments are accepted, The Big Society may also have demonstrable roots in Christian theology.

The Big Society and the Economic Crisis

8. Whichever party or parties had won the election this year, the agenda would have been dominated by the economic crisis. The Coalition has set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare. The potential of voluntarism to replace some state welfare provision may make The Big Society financially attractive.

9. For a number of Coalition members, the intrinsic goods of The Big Society are fundamental, regardless of the state of the economy. Nevertheless, the economic crisis may constrain and confuse its implementation. A clear articulation of how The Big Society can be realized in a time of austerity has yet to emerge.

10. There is a widespread fear, especially within the voluntary sector and those working with the most vulnerable people, that The Big Society is an attempt to shift responsibility for welfare and social cohesion from the State to the voluntary and charitable sectors. Whilst there are many who contend that existing welfare provision has fostered too much dependency, it remains that simply withdrawing welfare does not tackle the dependency problem without other, potentially expensive, measures to address behavioural patterns and economic opportunities.

11. Some fear that, whatever the relationship between The Big Society agenda and budgetary austerity, the programme of cuts will prevent the voluntary sector from responding adequately whilst simultaneously creating greater social need and distress.

12. The Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010 has been described by the Institute of Fiscal Studies as, overall, regressive in that poorer people will be hit more sharply by public spending cuts than richer groups (with the exception of the very richest). Communities, especially northern cities, whose post-industrial regeneration depended heavily on public spending, are likely suffer more than areas with more mixed economies. Overall, poverty, unemployment and social exclusion seem likely to increase rapidly. There are many doubts whether the hoped-for resurgence in private sector activity will be sufficient to offset the impact of public expenditure cuts. The rather tentative concept of The Big Society faces an immense, and growing, challenge.

13. Yet, despite such caveats, many agree that the ideas behind The Big Society are necessary in a civilized society and that the erosion of community values and intermediate institutions has gone so far that basic social structures need rebuilding. Such structures are essential partners to the state in any political economy. Some blame the depredations of an inadequately regulated market
The Government’s evolving agenda

14. The Big Society currently appears to be a work in progress. The Prime Minister has staked a good deal of his personal capital on its success. The appointment of Lord Wei as a working peer with responsibilities for coordinating The Big Society agenda across government departments is another sign of the importance the government is placing on the matter.

15. Nevertheless, some contributions by Ministers to the debate suggest that The Big Society is not understood in the same way by all. David Cameron has indicated that he regards the development of stronger social structures as compensating for a permanent and very large reduction in public spending. Lord Wei emphasises the release of local potential rather than making budget savings.

16. Some policies announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review for example, the proposal to end lifetime tenure for council house tenants and the cuts in Housing Benefit which will push claimants out of some high cost areas — are hard to square with the idea of building stable communities. In education, the new government’s plans for Academies leave little room for local communities to be involved in their governance.

17. Some of these diverse viewpoints may be compatible, but not all are obviously so. Although every government department is being asked to look at the implications of The Big Society for their work, not all are as securely “on board” as others.

18. Concrete policies to deliver aspects of The Big Society are only slowly emerging and many will be dependent on the detailed outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Some are small ventures in partnership with others (The Near Neighbours programme, outlined below, is in the vanguard here). Lord Wei is proposing a Big Society Bank which will be funded in part from dormant bank accounts, and which will help provide working capital for community ventures. Four “pilot areas” identified in July 2010 are likely to be the first recipients of funding from The Big Society Bank.4

19. In March, the Prime Minister launched the Big Society Network as a “campaign for social change”. The Network is conceived as independent of government (although the extent of its independence is disputed within the charitable sector) and aims to mobilise existing organisations to push forward the Big Society agenda. Its “flagship” project is called “Your Square Mile”, designed to encourage people to engage with issues in their immediate geographical locality.

20. The substantive content of these initiatives is still emerging. Overall, the rhetoric shows real commitment to change the terms of the debate about society and government – but policy detail seems thin at present.

The Bishop of Leicester’s debate

21. On 16 June 2010, the Bishop of Leicester initiated a debate in the House of Lords focussing on The Big Society thinking. During the debate, Lord Wei made his maiden speech and Bs. Warsi summed up for the government. Her speech referred
to a wide variety of social policy options, and gave the impression that The Big Society may be seen as a kind of “brand” under which disparate policies could be brought together. This confirms the impression that the government is trying to generate a “narrative” about the nature of society in order to underpin specific policies which, themselves, may or may not conform to a single political or social model. This has been borne out by later conversations and encounters.

Bs. Warsi and Lord Wei at the College of Bishops

22. On 15 September 2010, both Bs. Warsi and Lord Wei addressed the College of Bishops on the subject of the Big Society. Some early policy directions emerged, but it was also interesting to compare the rather different social models which informed the two presentations.

23. Bs. Warsi stressed the role of religion as a force for good in society. Her aim is to restore religious life to an honoured place in the life of the nation and the thinking of government. She was alert to the ways in which the Church of England understands itself to be embedded in English life.

24. Lord Wei looked more to a kind of postmodern social model in which local communities are empowered through the new opportunities offered by technology. He envisaged the internet as a democratising force in which myriad ideas competed for attention and in which the best ideas would always triumph. This is not a universally-held analysis of the impact of IT on political and democratic life.

25. Lord Wei’s social model is strongly shaped by American thinking, including the work of Saul Alinsky which has influenced Barack Obama. His understanding of religion in society also appears to reflect American, rather than European models. This is not to suggest that Britain cannot learn from America, only that religious life in the two contexts is manifested very differently and that social policy does not always translate directly if underlying social institutions differ radically.

26. Neither speaker made any connection between the strength of social bonds and the workings of the wider economy. The impact of aggressive competitiveness in business and the workplace, the impact of growing material inequality, and the crushing effects of large-scale unemployment do not figure, as yet, in the public depiction of The Big Society.

Preliminary assessments

27. If the impressions given by these encounters are correct, two things follow. First, there may be tensions ahead within the coalition (and within the Conservative Party) — first, between those who see The Big Society as an article of political faith and those for whom it is merely expedient in the current economic climate and, secondly, between those committed to localism but whose social models differ considerably.

28. Secondly, the churches are not being asked to sign up to, or approve, The Big Society as a single policy programme. However, there is potential for us to use the political narrative of The Big Society to shift the relationships between the state, the individual and intermediate institutions in ways which reflect a Christian understanding of society and reinforce the church’s place in a healthy social order.
Aspects of the Government’s agenda, epitomised in Bs.Warsi’s speeches, appear to be moving in this direction, but the overall trajectory is less clear.

29. Whilst some government ministers have expressed strong support for the Church of England’s social role, one test of their seriousness about localism is whether they promote the flourishing of communities and bodies which may disagree with, or actively oppose, some aspects of central policy. For example, do mutual organisations like Trade Unions have a place in The Big Society? The jury is still out: but some such understanding of plurality is necessary if the church is to be true to its prophetic calling as well as serving the common good.9

30. Many have observed that the rhetoric of devolving power to regions and local communities, deployed by governments of different political persuasions, has almost always foundered on an overwhelming trend towards greater centralisation. If The Big Society can turn around this trend it will have succeeded indeed – but the historical odds are against it.

The Big Society – Shifting the Social Model

31. There are a number of practical opportunities, opened up by The Big Society agenda, which may involve or benefit the churches. At least as important, however, is the way that some aspects of Big Society thinking have the potential to shift perceptions of the relationship between the State, communities, and the individual.

32. To illustrate this, it is worth reflecting on some aspects of social legislation under the previous administration and, at times, evident in the policies of successive governments since 1979.

33. In a number of instances, social legislation was conceived in ways which:
   • failed to take into account the way in which understandings of society, and of difference, are often grounded in historic traditions (not least the Christian faith) and that there are more ways than one of conceiving plurality.
   • devalued the importance of conscience in favour of a single, governmental, interpretation of how social relationships should be understood.
   • were grounded, not in actual people’s lives so much as in an abstract conception of “the individual”, understood to exist outside tradition or community, and thus attempted to legislate against hypothetical problems rather than actual mischief.

34. In short, governments have often assumed an atomised society in which it is the state’s job to mediate between competing individuals from a position of assumed neutrality. This view pays insufficient attention to the way in which persons are formed in communities, starting with the family and including schools, local settlements, churches and religious communities, and a plethora of voluntary associations. If communities and institutions are to help form moral individuals, they themselves need building up.

35. Moreover, the legacy of terrorist attacks by militant Islamist groups was too often met by an attitude which problematised all religion. Language was used in ways which suggested that all faiths were conceived as essentially the same kind of phenomenon; all were regarded as subrational, and the task of government was to contain, and mediate between, religious groups whose place in the public sphere
was not generally conceded. Whilst this attitude was, to an extent, moderated by a more positive stance toward (e.g.) “faith schools”, the general thrust of policy and rhetoric was not “religiously literate”.

36. A historic fear, dating back to the 16th and 17th century wars of religion, was stirred by 9/11 and 7/7 in ways which excited classic liberalism’s self-image as the only defender of reason and civility against superstition. Critiques of classic liberalism, commonplace among political philosophers for over thirty years, had not yet entered the lexicon of government. This was exacerbated by a widespread inability (ideological or political) to separate aspects of militant Islam, which did indeed constitute a threat to liberal ideals, from Islam itself. Some of the rhetoric around the “Prevent” programme illustrated this quite starkly.

Key questions

37. The question now arises: does The Big Society represent a break with this entrenched politico-social model in ways which are closer to the church’s social vision and in ways which might reflect religious bodies’ own sense of their place in a vibrant and diverse society?

38. The evidence so far is mixed. On the one hand, we have supportive statements such as that by Eric Pickles who has said that, “Religion is often seen as part of the problem. The new government sees it as part of the solution; the days of the State trying to suppress Christianity and other faiths are over”.[10] On the other, the mainstream view among LibDems (and perhaps among some Tories) continues to reflect the social model characterised above which is suspicious of religion in the public square.

39. A third position, present in all parties, values the churches – but only in social roles which may or may not reflect Christian theological priorities, and sees religion as a means to achieve political ends rather than an end in itself.

40. As noted below, staff of MPA, with the backing of the Archbishops, have been in discussion with Ministers about practical partnerships for building social cohesion. This is an opportunity to strengthen the aspects of the Big Society narrative which will enable the church’s ministry and mission to flourish in the long term.

41. The Big Society agenda has not yet secured these advances, but there is much to play for and the Church of England should continue to press its case on many fronts.

The Big Society as a theological motif

42. The theologian Luke Bretherton suggests, “It seems that what policymakers dream of when they dream of an active citizenry cannot be separated in practice from what religious groups do.”[11] There is a natural congruence between the impulses behind The Big Society and the way the churches understand themselves and their discipleship.

43. Phillip Blond identifies an established strand of Christian social thought within which his own work on Big Society themes is located. It runs backward from John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy, through V.A. Demant and the Christendom movement, to J.N. Figgis and others.[12] Like Figgis, Jesse Norman takes up the
Bretherton argues that there are three “ideal types” which can be appealed to in the debate about citizenship. The first sees the citizen as voter. Here, citizenship is a matter of individuals aggregating their preferences through the ballot box. The pursuit of shared goods in community barely features.

The second type sees the citizen as volunteer. This model lies behind many initiatives to strengthen social bonds whilst reducing the scale of state action – including much of the rhetoric around The Big Society. But, Bretherton argues, the focus on volunteering tends to separate the virtues of community from the world of paid work and ignores the contradictory imperatives of the market economy which demands flexible, footloose, workers, uncommitted to anything but economic gain.

Finally, Bretherton makes the case for the citizen as vow-keeper – focussing on the priority of relationships and faithful commitment to others. He shows how this understanding is not only grounded in Christian theology but is reflected in many grass roots movements, especially those which have “a symbiotic relationship with popular religion”.13

Bretherton’s conclusion is that “people of faith need to avoid co-option into being either voting blocks or service providers and be true to their own best insights by upholding a vision of the citizen as vow-keeper.” This is in line with the judgement that there is much potential in The Big Society for the church to work with, but that a residual element of scepticism remains in order. As the Archbishop of Canterbury put it, “Two and a half cheers for the Big Society”.14

The strength of The Big Society idea for the church lies in the extent to which it reflects a Christian understanding of being human. A Christian anthropology locates each person within a rich network of relationships and recognises the perpetual tension between our dependency on others and our autonomy. This reflects the nature of God’s relationship with human beings who remain dependent upon His grace for all good things whilst retaining the freedom to reject his love. As in so many of Jesus’ parables, God makes Himself known to us in the person of the other – and it is when we ourselves recognise our dependence on others that we understand a little of God’s love for us.

This kind of recognition needs strong social bonds which help ensure that those around us become neighbours and not merely others. It stresses the importance of doing things which serve the good of all rather than relating to structures, institutions and services merely as an autonomous consumer interested only in personal benefit. Neighbourliness is the first condition for treating others (and being treated ourselves) as ends and not means.

The church is, in many ways, a paradigm community, holding fast to the virtues of neighbourliness and fellowship because these reflect the relational nature of God as Trinity and the Kingdom in which all relationships are modelled on God’s unconditional love. But the empirical church in the world will often struggle to embody the virtues of community if the surrounding culture belittles and marginalises such virtues. The church not only models community to the world but needs there to be strong communal bonds in the wider society so that Christians have the chance to extend discipleship into the whole of their lives.
51. A Christian vision of the good society aims to generate the kind of strong social bonds that also appear among the objectives of the Big Society project. It will be important for us to stress that, for Christians, such bonds are the prerequisite of any viable human society and are not to be valued merely for economic, expedient or utilitarian reasons.

**Practical partnerships between Church and State within The Big Society**

52. Prior to the General Election, staff from MPA spent time getting to know key Shadow Cabinet members and prominent thinkers in the Conservative and LibDem parties. CUF also built up numerous political contacts and relationships, and is well-established within the wider voluntary sector.

53. These discussions considered the potential for creative church/state partnerships, not only for delivering social welfare programmes but as a way of enabling a richer and more cohesive society to develop. Central to any such project was the move from treating all religion as essentially problematic and illegitimate within the public sphere, to a view of religion as an important motivation for good citizens and strong social bonds.

54. In particular, we stressed the ways in which the popular image of “faith communities” fails to reflect the realities of the Church of England. We emphasised the Church of England’s foundational commitment to the common good of all the people, expressed through our presence in every parish of the land and manifested in the way we use our buildings, our schools and our ministry to serve the people as a whole. We highlighted the work of the Presence and Engagement programme as an example of extensive commitment to the work of neighbourliness and the Church’s prominent role in inter religious dialogue.

55. Following the election, the desire to work in partnership with the Church of England has been taken up strongly by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles) along with his Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark and Under Secretary, Andrew Stunnell (LibDem) and with enthusiastic support from Bs. Warsi.

56. Our response to the Big Society policies has been to try to embody what the Bishop of London, in his speech during the debate on 15 June, called the church’s “Big Offer”. Because we believe the Church of England to hold great potential for building cohesive communities, especially in areas of social stress, we sought ways to give concrete expression to that conviction, working with the grain of the coalition’s thinking but staying firmly within the Church’s understanding of its vocational, existing structures and partnerships. On these grounds, we proposed a substantial development of many aspects of existing work.

57. This proposal appears to be one of the first-fruits of the government’s Big Society initiative. We know of no other current partnership proposals of comparable size and scope. In this, the Church of England is in the vanguard. However, the proposal does not exhaust the potential of The Big Society in relation to the Church of England by any means.
Near Neighbours — Faithful Interaction

58. The proposition under discussion is for DCLG to fund a significant expansion of the church’s existing set of activities based on the Presence and Engagement and related programmes, learning from, and extending, the kind of work that P&E has piloted in the past five years to encourage new initiatives. The provisional title for the project is Near Neighbours — Faithful Interaction. An outline description, reflecting the current state of discussions, is attached as an Annexe to this report.

59. The intention is to direct funding into four main areas — eastern London, the ‘M62 corridor’ urban areas, Leicester and east Birmingham and to work through a range of existing Christian, or Christian and other faith, partnerships. These areas correspond to the focal work of the Presence and Engagement programme.

60. As significant sums of public money would be involved, a proper system of accountable and focussed management is required. The proposals envisage that the funding will be received by the Church Urban Fund to make clear its separation from any internal Church of England finances and to provide the confidence that CUF’s track record brings. A subsidiary charitable company of CUF with trustees appointed by CUF and the Archbishops’ Council, will be responsible for implementation.

61. The premise of the project, shared on both sides of the table, is that (as Eric Pickles has intimated) it is mistaken to see religion as a prime source of community divisions and a problem for government to solve: on the contrary, faith communities and religious groups have potential to promote community cohesion at the level of personal human relationships. In particular, the Church of England, present in every community and committed to the good of all, is uniquely placed to promote positive relationships, particularly but not only among those of different religions, and to lead on shared ventures in pursuit of the common good.

62. The aim of Near Neighbours, in colloquial terms, is to “enable ‘Mr and Mrs Smith, Mr and Mrs Patel and Mr and Mrs Hussain’, living in the same local neighbourhood, to relate more positively to each other and to release energies for the benefit of the wider local community.” It is predicated on the idea that good relationships between people of different faiths cannot be brokered from a position of assumed neutrality —one must be “religiously literate” and this literacy stems from commitment.

63. Near Neighbours is a chance for the church to do more of what it alone can do. It is not about the church stepping into the welfare gaps left by a retreating State.

64. A brief statement about the Near Neighbours proposals, agreed with the Department of Communities and Local Government and including a quotation from the Secretary of State, was placed on the Church of England (MPA) and CUF websites at the beginning of August.

65. The proposals went forward as part of DCLG’s bid to the Treasury in the government’s Comprehensive Spending Review. The Spending Review reported on 20 October 2010 and DCLG is now examining the implications for its budget and programmes. We expect to hear during November whether Near Neighbours can go ahead. This report had to be prepared for Synod before the outcome was known.
Further potential in The Big Society

66. If Near Neighbours proves to be successful in its delivery and impact, there may be further opportunities for similar church/government partnerships under The Big Society agenda. Some of these may involve the church in direct service delivery; others may be opportunities to strengthen community bonds in different ways. Bretherton’s distinction between “the citizen as volunteer” and “the citizen as vow-keeper” may be worth holding in mind as an indicator of how far a partnership proposal mirrors the church’s sense of its proper calling.

Schools and education

67. The unique commitment of the Church of England to education through church schools is an obvious example of how The Big Society may enable our work to develop for the common good. Recent years have seen public ambivalence towards “faith schools”. On the one hand, parents seem to want their children to experience the kind of ethically committed education which our schools embody. On the other, the suspicion of religion in the public square, already mentioned, has been manifest in the misrepresentation of church schools as divisive and sectarian in nature.

68. The Big Society offers a good opportunity to emphasise that Church of England schools are part of our commitment to serve the Common Good and not a smokescreen for sectarianism. The Big Society suggests that the government recognises that a flourishing society needs moral citizens formed in local communities and institutions, and needs its children to be educated in communities which embody virtues specific to particular traditions and not constrained by ideological relativism. Church schools, then, are clearly part of the solution and not the problem.

Church buildings

69. Similarly, the potential of our buildings to be community hubs and accessible to many, could be enhanced if there was less government suspicion about using public money to build shared resources through faith communities. The many examples of church buildings taking on important social functions, including rural post office facilities and community meeting places, show the way forward. There is much unlocked potential in church buildings (including, but not confined to, places of worship) which could be released with relatively small expenditure on upgraded facilities etc. once the reluctance to see religious groups as anything but exclusive sectarian associations has been overcome.

Widening the Big Society debate

70. The government’s outreach to churches is not restricted to the Church of England. Overtures by the Conservative Party to the independent evangelical and Pentecostal sectors (including the black-led churches), and to non-denominational Christian social action projects, have been very effective and many such groups are enthusiastic about The Big Society. This is further evidence of the trend
towards new alliances among Christians, based on “horizontal” distinctions around issues and beliefs rather than the established “vertical” divisions between denominations. It may also indicate a more American-style understanding of religion in society and scepticism about the potential of established churches.

71. Many government departments and related bodies are exploring what The Big Society may mean for them. For example, MPA recently responded to a consultation set up at short notice by the Commission for Rural Communities on The Big Society and rural areas. Our submission emphasised the major, often unique, contribution of the Church of England to rural life. Further such consultations may be expected.

72. We should expect approaches to the church on Big Society themes to come from many directions and at different levels – national, regional and local. Work may be needed to help parishes and dioceses to access the right levels of support and good practice to enable them to respond effectively and creatively to overtures which seek to involve the church in building strong communities and institutions.

The Church’s Prophetic Voice

73. There is always a tension between Christian engagement with others in work for the common good and the Christian calling to hold up the mirror of God’s demands to the powerful in critical solidarity. At a time when the government’s austerity measures are sure to have an impact on the most hard-pressed communities and on vulnerable people, it is vital that the church should not be co-opted into such close partnerships with government that its ability to speak truth to power is compromised.

74. Against that legitimate fear, it can be argued that some of the church’s most effective critiques of government policies down the years have stemmed from congregations and clergy who have taken action — often in partnership with others, including government agencies — to address social ills and pursue the common good. Their critique of policies has been grounded in practical experience and they have earned a right to be heard. The “prophetic voice” need not always be that of the strident outsider.

75. Nonetheless, the line between working together and being co-opted is a fine one requiring constant vigilance. In the case of The Big Society, it will be important to ask, of any proposal: How far does this enable the church to be authentically itself, witnessing to Christ and pursuing the good of all?

Some Conclusions

76. The Big Society is, in principle, natural territory for the Church of England. In parishes all over the country, the church is already creating and sustaining a “Big Society”. What we now see is a government moving to build social policy around such local commitments. However, it is not yet clear exactly how the government will embody the theme across its policies.

77. In Near Neighbours, we have made an “earnest of intent” to work with the government in the pursuit of social cohesion. It will be up to us to ensure that the reasons for our participation, the terms of our involvement and the sticking points
beyond which cooperation is impossible, are clear and help to inform any future relationships under the banner of The Big Society.

78. In other areas of church life, including the developing use and maintenance of our buildings and our unique investment in education through church schools, The Big Society offers real potential for “shifting the dominant narrative” of people, community and society in ways which will enable the church to live out its vocation more openly and constructively. There will also be many opportunities at local level for the church to engage with statutory and other bodies to develop new programmes and initiatives which enhance the common good and sustain local communities. The church needs to be prepared, at diocesan and parish level, as well as nationally, to respond constructively but wisely to a new phase in the relationship between government, church and community.

79. The Big Society may come to represent a radical and ambitious shift in the way society and government are conceived: one in which the church has more room to be itself. Whether this shift away from individualism is achievable, given the power of wider economic and cultural factors, is another question, but this does not invalidate the aspiration. Politicians who are pursuing The Big Society are playing for high stakes. The church has an interest in seeing the best elements of The Big Society thinking succeed.

Revd Dr Malcolm Brown
Director, Mission and Public Affairs
September 2010

Notes

1. From the Conservative Party webpage, accessed 5 August 2010.

2. Norman’s thinking can be found in his book, Compassionate Conservatism which can be downloaded from his website (Accessed 5 August 2010).


4. The four pilot areas are: Liverpool, the Eden Valley (Cumbria), Sutton, and Windsor and Maidenhead.

5. The full text of the debate, including speeches from the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Bishop of London and the Bishops of Leicester, Chester and Salisbury, can be found at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/100616000.htm#10061677000453
6. The text of Bs Warsi’s speech can be found here:  


9. Some in the Conservative Party may be mindful of the period in the 1980s when the Church of England was sometimes perceived as the most effective critic of the then Conservative government’s social policies. (See: Henry Clark, The Church Under Thatcher, London: SPCK, 1993). It is possible that the present government, also committed to large reductions in public spending and welfare provision, is keen to get the church on board before the social consequences become intolerable. This analysis may have some validity, but our engagement with Ministers to date suggests that their view of the church is more a matter of political commitment than an expedient alliance. We shall see.


13. Bretherton means the awkward but alliterative term “vow-keeper” to emphasise how commitment to others and to strong social bonds means doing things which are time-consuming and not necessarily personally gainful (such as attending lengthy committee meetings, or even corporate worship) because they are beneficial to the common good rather than delivering one’s own wants.


APPENDIX FOUR

INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM BROWN

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH THE REVD DR MALCOLM
BROWN HELD ON 22 MAY 2018 AT CHURCH HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON

Question 1

Would you like to set out some of the background to your advice to the Church of
England on its handling of the Big Society project?

I used to be Director of the William Temple Foundation. Temple’s work had been very
important in my formation even before I knew his name, because it was the way we were
brought up in the 1970s. One of the things that has occupied me relatively recently, and
this comes out in a recent Scott Holland lecture that I gave, is why does the Church of
England have this almost instinctive but incoherent affection for the Beveridge Welfare
State settlement? I say the Church of England, and of course that is a hugely contested
term; it doesn’t mean every member of the Church of England agrees with everything, but
we had a meeting of the bishops yesterday, and that was raised then, apropos the two
child limit we had just submitted a paper on. One bishop said: In what sense is this the
view of the Church of England? That’s a whole other question about methodology, and
we have to remind the bishops and others every five minutes. There is very little
corporate memory in the Church of England about how we got here.

But going back, my interest has been for a long time why this sense that the
Welfare State as conceived by Beveridge is somehow adopted as a mascot in the Church
of England. And I think it is deeper than Temple saying — here is the kingdom of heaven
in one act of parliament, or whatever he said. He said that the Beveridge report, when it
was enacted, was the kingdom of God — heaven — all of our Christian ethics in one act
of parliament. It was actually one of the less sensible things that he said. But I come back
to the conclusion I said in the Scott Holland lectures and in the Church Times last week.
It was because Temple didn’t actually coin but adopted the term Welfare State. He
adopted it before Beveridge had produced his report in 1942. It was about a Christian
theology of the state. That is: the Christian can only ever give provisional allegiance to
the state, and there are some versions of the state that the Christian cannot even give
provisional allegiance to. Looking at the late 1920s and early 1930s when Temple was
doing a lot of his work with the Oxford Conference and things like that, you are looking
at a hugely laissez faire Conservative approach which led to the depression, countered by
totalitarianisms in Spain, Germany, Russia, Italy and so on. So, for Temple, these were
two models: the minimal state as we now call it, and the power state of Mussolini and
Hitler, for which the Christian couldn’t give any allegiance to at all.

The model of the state he advocated, subject to the reality that we always have a
higher allegiance to the kingdom of God, was a state that Christians can support — one
that Temple referred to as the Welfare State. It is the state justifying itself by its
contribution to the welfare of the citizens. Hence, allegiance is justified in that it enhances
the welfare of the citizen, which is not true of either the minimal state or the power state. The minimal state and the power state are far from dead as concepts, however.

Then, when Beveridge came up with his report (and his Act) and Temple supports it, you are looking at something quite profound. Here is a model of the state that the Church can put its shoulder behind. Then, after thirty years or so of the Welfare State in that model, despite all of its problems, Thatcher tears up the template.

**Question 2**

Do you think the Resolution 19 passed at the 1948 Lambeth Conference that stated: “We believe that the State is under the moral law of God and is intended by Him to be an instrument for human welfare,” is evidence that it had embraced William Temple’s theology of the state, as set out in his work of 1941, *Citizen and Churchman*?

Yes, I think that is right. I think that reflected the mood of the time. I would go on to say that it didn’t take very long for the Church of England to forget the depth of that argument, and simply to have a kind of reflex action, of “we like the Welfare State” without actually understanding why, and so that became identified with party politics in a way that I think Temple wouldn’t have done.

**Question 3**

Has it since been replaced by a better theology of the state?

I don’t think it has been replaced by a better theology of the state. What has happened is that our theology of the state has had to accommodate the fact that for over forty years now, we have had governments with a very different understanding of the role of the state, and so we have had to trim ours to some extent. I think this has on the whole been good, and the trimming has been largely away from the centralised state model of delivering welfare that the Beveridge report of 1942 embodied — taking much more on board but without knowing that it had done it, Beveridge’s second report on “Voluntary Action” of 1948. When you put those two reports together you have something extremely nuanced and subtle. “Voluntary Action” was forgotten, almost as soon as it was published, I think. You had an essentially state-centralised model of welfare delivery, and the Church of England, until relatively recently, had an instinctive warmth for the Temple/Beveridge legacy without really understanding it; it conflated it with the Attlee and subsequent government’s enactments which isn’t the same thing. But because we have had to go through forty years of Thatcherism, essentially, naturally the rationale for the state as the Welfare State has cut very little ice. We have had to work with the reality on the ground. And this is the Church’s classic dilemma: between what it thinks as being theologically sound and what it has to do to make a difference on the ground.

**Question 4**

Do you think William Temple’s thinking on the state embraced a full enough understanding of the need for a strong intermediate level in society?

Well, there you have got to interpolate. What we have to go on is two key books by Temple: *Christianity and Social Order* which everybody knows, and *Citizen and Churchman* which is a bit more academic but not much. One of the problems relating to
this is that when Temple was dead, his key champion in the Church of England was Ronald Preston, and Preston never looked much beyond *Christianity and Social Order*, to represent Temple’s legacy. A lot of what Temple believed is captured not so much in his books but in his sermons and his addresses, not all of which have been recorded. That is why the famous saying about the Church of England being the only organisation that exists for those that are not its members, is untraceable as a quote, but people who knew Temple say he said it all of the time. But he never wrote it down as far as we know in anything published. And so, with Temple’s beliefs, to get some of the subtlety you have to interpolate. There is an interesting doctoral thesis published by a woman called Wendy Dackson in the States, who says the key to Temple’s ecclesiology and therefore his political theology, is in his more systematic books, and I don’t know of anyone else who has tried to bring those two together. I think the book is called *The Ecclesiology of William Temple*.

**Question 5**

**Do you, then, draw a clear distinction between the Beveridge/Temple perspective on the Welfare State and the Attlee delivery model?**

Beveridge saw the need to give a corrective in *Voluntary Action*, and so put the two together and you get both in his political philosophy. Regarding Temple — this is less clear; but there is much evidence if you dig for it, that he would have shared that balanced and subtle view. The Attlee Government made it essentially practical politics but lost the element of what you might now call the Big Society or strong intermediate institutions aspect, and the Church of England, not the most cerebral of organisations at the best of times, having been won over by Temple, then equated what was going on in the Welfare State as a statement thing, but without really thinking it through. That is why, in more recent years, when we have been accused of defending a strong welfare settlement, when we have been accused of simply championing a centralised government action/command and control economics model, most of our bishops, and most of our people, would look completely bemused by that, because they haven’t realised that they have, themselves, forgotten a bit of the tradition that had once won them over. That is, the richness of Beveridge’s vision in *Voluntary Action*.

In 1986 you have a significant social responsibility report called *Not Just for the Poor*, which was on the future of the Welfare State and authored almost exclusively by Ronald Preston, that, for a long time, was our position paper on welfare. It has all of Ronald Preston’s strengths and weaknesses. It is essentially Niebuhrian Christian realism theologically. That is, the Church of England trying to speak to those in power in its own idiom, so it is addressed largely to government. And it is written out of the sense of crisis that the Thatcher Government was redefining the Welfare State, as indeed it did, as a safety net for the poor rather than a matrix of relationships for the whole community, which was, of course, part of the Beveridge vision, which is something that everybody buys into. I have never seen this written but I have a suspicion that if Temple influenced Beveridge, it is partly because you have something almost like a Eucharistic theology. Everyone partakes in the Eucharist; that’s what binds the community together. It’s taking the welfare system as something that everybody participates in.
Question 6

Do you think there was a paradigm shift in the Church’s response to the ‘Big Society’ project 2010, to that of its position in Not just for The Poor, in that the latter emphasised a need for cooperation between the state, voluntary and private providers of welfare, whereas the former emphasised a need for greater competition between them via the Localism Act of 2011?

Absolutely. Ronald Preston used to say Christians get co-operation wrong, they think it is the opposite of competition. For an economist the opposite of competition is monopoly. This is a key to Preston’s mentality. He was studying economics before he ever studied theology. So you see how we were in 2010. Working again with a Conservative Government, having had a disappointing number of years with the Blair/ Brown Governments. Unemployment and the Future of Work came out just before the 1997 election, and George Carey tried to suppress it, as he didn’t want it landing in the middle of an election campaign. It fell like a stone. It didn’t make any significant impact. It was David Sheppard’s attempt to do Faith in the City again. And it fell flat because all parties accepted it. It was the last serious book-length study into welfare that we did and it cost a lot of money. Thus we no longer do reports like Faith in the City, Not Just for the Poor or Unemployment and the Future of Work because the message has gone out that they are either embarrassing or they fall flat, and we haven’t got the money anyway. There is a shift of method and model between 1997 and 2010. We don’t do it anymore like that.

In 2010, Cameron, rather as Theresa May did in her first few months, was talking up one nation Conservatism. Now, we have to make an assessment. We have had a rather disappointing Labour interregnum as it were. But this appears to be a change of gear in the Conservative Party into a post-Thatcherite Tory party. Meanwhile, we are getting kicked all the time for being left/red; all the kind of stuff the Tories and the Daily Mail love to throw at the Church of England. And especially on welfare because the bishops’ instinctive response to change in welfare provision is to look at those who are going to get hurt.

In the 2010 administration, we were frequently accused of having no sense that debt was a bad thing. We were seen as being prepared to bankrupt the country to preserve an unjust model of the Welfare State. I lost count of the number of times we were accused either in parliament or in the papers of the bishops never saying that debt is a bad thing. I can show you the Hansard entries where they did say that, but everyone in Daily Mail land/Tory Party land works off the principle that if I didn’t hear it, it wasn’t said. So we were doing a balanced ticket, and we were still being misinterpreted. The realpolitik of this is that we had got a Conservative-led coalition administration, and whatever we said we got kicked for saying it. How could we find a language that engaged with them, so that we were not simply the opposition in waiting? Whereas in the Faith in the City years, we were broadly seen as being the unofficial opposition to Thatcherism. This did no good to people like Runcie. Now, thirty five years on, we have got far less legitimacy. The question of the Bishops in the Lords, for example, was barely a live issue in 1985. It is now a very lively issue all of the time. So the Church’s political platform is wobbly. What we were looking for, and this was not theology or political theory but realpolitik, was what can we say that shows that Conservatives were not the enemy of the Church of England — that there were some policies on which the Church of England and the Conservative Government can align themselves. Along comes the Big Society.
Frankly, the Church of England had always been the Tory party at prayer if it is a one
nation Tory party. It is only Thatcher that broke that. And so, yes, we have got something
we can build on here.

I don’t want to over play my own hand in this. But my own journey, from being a
kind of William Temple left leaning Christian Socialist, moved when I started reading
MacIntyre in the early 1980s. When After Virtue came out, I read it around 1985. When I
read that it was like an eye opener. When Faith in the City came out, Raymond Plant,
who was then Professor of Politics at Southampton — and I was a vicar at Southampton
at that time — it was clear he was really quite depressed about how Faith in the City had
misunderstood Thatcher. We, in the C of E thought the Conservative administration in
1985 had simply not seen the impact of their polices; had they seen what they were doing,
they would have changed them. His view was that Faith in the City had no sense of
Thatcherism as a moral project, as a crusade. And so Raymond went around the country
speaking to Church groups to make the case for market economics, and then he would
critique it. This is what you are up against. It is the moral case for markets and it’s why
we don’t like it. I was at one of the very first of these talks on a wet Saturday night at a
Church Hall in Southampton and only five people turned up, and I listened to Ray Plant
and thought that I am sure there is a better attack on Thatcherism than that. That ended up
twenty years later as my doctoral thesis.

Question 7
So MacIntyre and Plant were key influences on your theoretical development?
Yes, because Plant said to me Thatcherism isn’t just wickedness; it’s an alternative moral
universe.

Question 8
Where did you go from there?
I was trying to take MacIntyre seriously. I was an inner city vicar in Southampton and
needed some theology to make sense of it all. At the same time I was coming out of a
tradition that I didn’t want to abandon. So that’s why I developed the idea of traditions in
dialogue with each other. I was using MacIntyre’s idea of epistemological crisis which
Maurice Glassman also picks up, on how traditions grow and develop. So, I was trying to
get a sort of synthesis of the Temple tradition with MacIntyre, whereas Milbank, at that
stage, was dissing the Temple/Niebuhr tradition. Hauerwas was dissing Niebuhr in the
most outlandish terms. I wanted to try and build a bridge. And that was a personal
journey.

Question 9
Where, if at all, does Radical Orthodoxy fit into this development in your thinking?
Well, that came a little later as the book Radical Orthodoxy came out after I had
completed my thesis. So I was working more on Milbank’s Theology and Social Theory.
And to understand that I went to one of his early essays which has an amazing title — you
may have come across it — Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: 42 answers to Unasked
Questions. It’s actually a very useful document for understanding Milbank, and I got
something out of that, without wanting to buy the post-modern argument which in the 90s
was running wild. I wanted to get something out of it, and on that I used Andrew Shanks’s work on post-modernity as a new phase of modernity. But you must remember that some of these academic disputes are driven by things that are not academic at all. I knew Milbank many years ago; we were both ordinands together though he didn’t get ordained. He is certainly impenetrable and when he began to rise to stardom on the back of *Theology and Social Theory* and I met him at a conference, I challenged him on some of the arguments and he said of my arguments — it is the usual William Temple guff. I said, on the whole, that is better than starry eyed romanticism. He said, you have understood my book: I am a romantic! And so what you have got, actually, are two things — they are both necessary. You have to have something of the Christian realism of Niebuhr and Temple if you are going to do anything in the real world, as I think John is finding out with the Blue Labour project — but at that stage he was a naked romantic.

**Question 10**

*So you think you have to have something of the Temple/Niebuhr realism but also something of the romantic challenge to it?*

Yes, I see that working here. You have to work with the reality of what can be done on the ground as well as what is theologically sound. Milbank has also gone on this journey. He has taken that challenge on board and all credit to him. He is now actually trying to deal in something that is doable and not just highfalutin romanticism, and he is doing a pretty good job of that.

**Question 11**

*Has Phillip Blond’s thinking been an influence on you?*

Blond was a fellow traveller in some respects because Phillip crystallized in *Red Tory* the sort of ideas we were working on here. For us, and I say this in the plural as I am working in a team here with a tradition which is moving on from Temple but we are still drawing on Christian realism to some extent, we are trying to get out of the situation that whatever we do as the Church of England is immediately forced into either “it’s a Daily Mail idea or a Guardian idea”: that is, that it is either right or left. We are trying to say that the Church of England’s interventions in politics are not partisan. They are based on a sound political theology that is not the same as a partisan political philosophy. So we are looking for bits and pieces of what Jeffrey Stout calls moral bricolage: you know, to piece something together that makes sense, bearing in mind that Anglicanism is itself a contested ecclesiology.

**Question 12**

*Have you been influenced by the Figgis, Demant, Christendom strand of Anglican social thinking?*

I only came to Figgis later in life. In the last ten years really. He wasn’t, as it were, part of the syllabus. My lineage is Temple, Preston, Atherton. Ronald Preston supervised John Atherton’s thesis. John supervised my thesis. And all of us were associated with the William Temple Foundation. And so Figgis and Demant were not really part of that. And they were the ones we weren’t in agreement with. You look at Ronald’s books and he is not complimentary towards Demant and he barely mentions Figgis. John Atherton, in the 1990s, would say things like people like Peter Selby, who had been a radical leftist but
then started writing much more radical orthodoxy before the name. And John’s reaction was that: “Selby has gone soft”. In fact, most people had gone soft by the end for John because, for him, the Demant/Christendom tradition was soft. It was unrealistic, it was about a separatist Church. It would lead to Hauerwas if you see what I mean. However, my doctorate, After the Market, was an attempt at holding both traditions together as having something interesting to say, provided one tradition is used as a corrective to the other, instead of the Hauerwas approach which is to diss everybody who disagrees with him.

**Question 13**

So, let me be clear here. Are you arguing that the Temple, Preston, Atherton tradition can work together with the Figgis, Demant, Milbank / Radical Orthodoxy tradition as correctives to one another?

Yes, as correctives to each other but not as a synthesising thing. That when you are in one tradition you have to look over your shoulder and say — maybe they have got something here, and so it is not a synthesis. It’s what MacIntyre calls an epistemological crisis, when you realise the tradition is not up to carrying the questions that are being asked of it — what you can get is a new, enlarged tradition.

**Question 14**

So, to clarify, in 2010 were you, in your paper GS1804, where you advised the Church of England on the handling of the ‘Big Society’ project, trying to incorporate both of those traditions — trying to get the best of both?

That was certainly behind my thinking and I am fascinated that it comes through in the paper, if it does. It was essentially in practical realpolitik terms trying to position the Church of England, at least on this, as not an enemy of the Coalition Government. Normally, on any issue like this we are treated as the enemy. First of all, I am an Anglican. The Anglican Church is not a synthesis of reformed and catholic — it is the two acting as correctives to each other. That is why we have parties who hate each other. My political theology here is an Anglican one, which is not about evangelicals having to push liberals out and liberals having to push catholics out, which is conducted on the floor of synod — but that we are most ourselves when we recognise the corrective influences of each party on the other. When you think evangelicals have all the truth, by definition they don’t. When you think liberals have all the truth, by definition they don’t. You have to work with them. They are not reconcilable. Do bear in mind that’s my approach to the traditions of Hauerwas, Milbank, and Temple, and so on.

**Question 15**

So, to clarify, is your view that GS1804 reflected an Anglican inclination to want to try to get different people from different traditions working together?

Correct! To recognise that each of them, in a fallible world, may have something to offer. I here quote Cromwell: “Consider in the bowels of Christ that you might be mistaken”. What I find difficult in Anglican politics in synod is the fact that there are parties who would be delighted if all the others went away. It would be a diminished Church. In the Milbank of the 1990s and in Hauerwas throughout, you have the desire to destroy liberals. That is what I am against.
Question 16

But how can you seek to accommodate these stands of thinking in a way that is theologically coherent if they are so antithetical in so many ways?

I don’t think they are as antithetical as all that. There is a beautiful piece in Nicholas Lash in one of his essays on *Theology and Social Theory* — it’s about Milbank’s pacifism — where he says Milbank calls the Church to exist on the other side of the cross, as it were, to embody the kingdom. What this neglects is that the Church is located on both sides of the cross, including the side of the cross where we have to engage in what Lash calls a kind of politics in the service of a kind of power. In other words, you have to get your hands dirty. Milbank’s theology, for Lash, is too ethereal and squeaky clean. It’s on the other side of the cross and forgets that the classic Christian vocabulary is now and not yet.

Question 17

So, to be clear, is it the case that when you were seeking to advise the Church of England on the Big Society project, you were taking the Temple, Preston, Atherton legacy, though not uncritically, and consciously taking the Figgis, Demant, Christendom, Milbank, Blond, critique of that, and finding some positives there too, that could provide a theoretical entry point into that project?

Not so much entry for the Church into the project as to recognise and have it recognised that this project was, to some extent, describing where the Church was already on this. This wasn’t about — let us have some of the action, as — as do you realise who you are talking about here? It’s us.

Question 18

Do you consider the Church of England to have changed since the 1980s in a way that the Christendom perspective has become more prominent?

No, I don’t think so. I think what happened was that when Beveridge wrote “Voluntary Action” he was actually describing what went on, and what he was saying was that the Welfare State won’t work unless you have these strong bonds of neighbourliness. I see the Church 60 years on from that, as one of the few places where that is left. And so, what I am saying is that when you talk about the Big Society you are not going to create it out of nothing — your building blocks are almost all in the hands of the churches and to some extent the other faith communities. You are talking about us here. We were there already. So the arguments about church schools — why should you have this privilege? The answer is that we were there before you were brother, we set up education in this country for the poor.

Question 19

So, did you see the Near Neighbours project as something coming out of Beveridge’s thinking?

You mustn’t attribute too much theological coherence to the *realpolitik*. What happened was that we guessed well before 2010 that there might well be a change of government. And we started talking to people from all of the parties, and we would have a sandwich lunch and invite some who were interested to come and have a natter. Near Neighbours
was conceived as a counter to the Labour Government’s ‘prevent strategy’. I think it was Greg Clark who asked us: What would you do if we were to give you some money to enhance harmony between the faith communities? We said we would do something about small things. It was to be local, gentle and under the radar — simple things that once you have done them, make a difference. Our strap line was that we would like to see greater understanding between each other: between Mr and Mrs Singh, Mr and Mrs Patel etc. — it was at that level. And we thought it was a nice idea and interesting that Tories were thinking like that. And they won the election and came back to us and said: do you remember that conversation? We can find you some money if you are up for it. And we put a structure together and a business plan and we took a lot of getting it through DCLG which was Eric Pickles priority at the time, and he did it.

**Question 20**

**Was there a five million pounds grant given?**

It was five million to start with and we have had two further updates since then, and we have to argue every time for it, but we did it. How do you do a multi-faith community better than we had been doing it before? The Tories’ emphasis was to go to the people on the ground, the people who are there, and Church of England are there in every parish. We should build on what we have got, and you are what we have got. Now it really upset others like the Methodists that they were giving this money to the Church of England. We had to say to the Methodists, sorry but you haven’t got that kind of network.

**Question 21**

**Did you have qualms about taking that money from government in the context of a Big Society project which you acknowledged in GS1804 was at a time when a Coalition Government had “set out to deliver dramatic cuts to public spending, not least in social welfare?”**

No, Near Neighbours was not addressed to welfare issues. Near Neighbours was addressed to interfaith relations. But exactly the same time that we were taking the money, we were lobbying Ian Duncan Smith about welfare cuts, and that we were against them. See, that’s what got the headlines — Church of England, a load of ‘pinko communist’ types. We did not see any contradiction at all. Not only were the they from different ministries — five million pounds is only the money down the back of a sofa, for a government ministry. Let’s not kid ourselves that this was big money for them. Anyway, it was addressed to the interfaith agenda and not as a welfare programme. It was about relationships.

The Big Society project ran into the sand almost immediately. The bishop of Leicester sponsored the first parliamentary debate on the Big Society in the Lords, and all parties put up quite a lot of very good spokespersons. Lord Wei was appointed as minister for the Big Society and he was a business man who had been put in the Lords. He said O.K. you want me to be a working peer. Where is the salary? There was to be no salary! So he fizzled out into nothing. The Tories put up a number of relatively junior MPs to be Big Society champions. I had meetings with some of them and then never heard anything from them again. It was a Cameron gimmick — all presentation and no substance. And so, whilst we came in with the Bishop of London in that debate, making a very strong
pure Burkean speech with his ringing tones on the small platoons — nothing much happened after what was a marvellous debate.

**Question 22**

*When did you start to think it was all presentation and no substance?*

When we saw that Lord Wei was not going to be paid for his work. He was a businessman passionate about the Big Society and an evangelical Christian, and a lot of evangelical groups coalesced around him. But as soon as it became clear that he was a dead letter politically, we knew it wasn’t going anywhere. But, of course, they never repudiated the rhetoric so we could go on appealing to the rhetoric even as the Government walked away from it. Big Society — you said you were for it, we are doing it. Come on guys!

**Question 23**

*In GS1804 you stated that if the Near Neighbours initiative proved to be successful, there may be: “further opportunities for similar church/government partnership under The Big Society agenda. Some of these may involve the church in direct service delivery”. What had you in mind for the Church of England vis-à-vis direct service delivery when you wrote this?*

The problem was we had a number of Bishops who had been abroad and had seen in Australia and elsewhere such as in the Lutheran churches in Scandinavia and in Germany, the churches as, essentially, an arm of the civil service, and they got envious. And so we had people like Stephen Lowe, who was then Bishop of Hulme in Manchester, who was all for — we could take over major aspects of the Welfare State!

**Question 24**

*So, let me be clear: when you wrote GS1804, did you have a plan of action for delivering on more direct service delivery or was it just an aspiration?*

Don’t mistake these papers such as GS1804 as academic papers by a sole author; these are political papers by a church civil servant who might have an academic background. The pastoral letter that we wrote for the bishops in the 2015 election was almost pure Blue Labour/Red Tory. I wrote most of it, and it was then edited twice in the House of Bishops which is a committee of fifty voices trying to do detailed editing — can you imagine?

**Question 25**

*And the document “The Enemy Isolation” as well?*

Yes, that was a worked example from it. The reason for the Blue Labour/Red Tory influences regarding the pastoral letter was that we had more than the usual three weeks’ notice that we were going to have a general election, as it was the first under the fixed term parliament’s act. So, Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens, my colleague Richard Chapman and me said: “what we need is not to be on the back foot as we have been in other elections; we need to get the whole House of Bishops to spend at least a day thinking where do they want to position themselves. They had never done this before in their lives. We fought like hell to get a day on the agenda (they don’t like meetings and
so they have as few as possible. We got it. And we exposed them to some friendly politicians — Tony Baldry and Maeve Sherlock. But then we got Phillip Blond and Maurice Glassman — that was my choice. My thinking was to move the Church of England from this sterile right/left Guardian/Daily Mail argument and try and cut through in the way Rowan Williams used to by framing the question differently. So, the theme was: what is our positive political theology here? So, the Red Tory/Blue Labour influences — the mere titles were about crossover, and so by getting Phillip and Maurice to address the bishops, they came out of that meeting with more than 90 per cent saying this was brilliant. They really loved that day. Out of it they had a session at the end. What are we going to do? The pastoral letter was an attempt to move them into that territory.

**Question 26**

*So you consider the Red Tory/Blue Labour thing was a crossover and synergistic to what you were trying to do?*

Yes. Going back to what I was saying about corrective traditions, Blue Labour/Red Tory are corrective traditions and this is an Anglican ecclesiology working out as a political theology.

**Question 27**

*In your article “Civil Society, Welfare and the State”, you refer critically to Phillip Blond’s ResPublica think tank, which proposes that the Church of England should take over large tranches of what has hitherto been state welfare provision as “an example of how communitarians risk retreating into nostalgic utopianism when direct experience of the institutions they discuss is deficient.” Can I ask you to develop your thinking on this specific point?*

Phillip Blond was someone I was nurturing. He was setting up a think tank. He needed a profile, he needed some big clients and wanted to make a splash. He got into a bed with an evangelical trust and this idea of taking over the Welfare State was big in evangelical circles, the HTB (Holy Trinity Brompton) style empire building churches. The report he came up with was different to what we expected. It was the Stephen Lowe thing, with the Church can take over the Welfare State line of argument. The report had no conception of what the Church of England was really like — it was unrealistic. It was bigging up the Church of England in a way that most people would find incomprehensible.

**Question 28**

*You are aware, no doubt, that John Milbank gave that report an out-an-out endorsement?*

Start with Milbank as a romantic medievalist; for him the mediaeval world is more divine than any other. He seems to have missed out how bad it was for a lot of people — but leave that aside; it is an attractive ecclesiological vision in some ways but is romantic twaddle historically. A report of that kind should be setting out the vision for the next five years of a parliament. Instead, it seemed to be setting a vision for a much longer period. I will say that more latterly, however, John has become more practical in his writing in at least attempting to tackle how the vision supports the policy and the policy supports the vision, instead of thinking they were just the same thing. But I just made sure I forgot all about Holistic Mission.
Question 29

Coming back to the Big Society project, in retrospect, what, if any, lessons do you think that the Church of England can take from it?

I can’t see how the Big Society bank helps to advance the vision of a thousand acts of supporting neighbourliness; it’s all about third sector grant giving. There is such a mismatch between the rhetoric and what they actually achieved. Remember, David Cameron had never really meant to set up the project — it was a bit of an accident. He did nothing to make it real. It came about because he was trying to redefine his sort of conservatism. The Big Society then became a shibboleth and he had to put some weight behind it politically.

My thinking on getting in behind the Big Society was (a) if they are talking about the Church, we might as well get something out of it, if there is anything to be had, and there wasn’t; (b) here’s a chance to align the Church of England in a way that says we do sometimes support Tories, because the story emerging was that we are a load of pinkos who never support the Conservative governments. We can now, and for a long time to come, say that we supported the Big Society, but where was the Tory Government? So that was important to be on the side of government for once. And the other bit was trying to think, if a government is committed to a Big Society in a Figgis intermediate institutions model, then that should be something that governs policy across the board — it should be a political philosophy and not a project. At best it was a project that fell into the ground. Yet, whilst it was live, we had the chance to say we could be part of redefining the Tory party, because we have no long term interest as the Church of England in a one party state of any particular hue. What we want and what we need is for all our political parties to be pursing policies that are at least conformable to the Christian ethic. There will be right and left versions of that; what we don’t want is one that simply erases Christian ethics from politics. In the Big Society you had the first inkling (that came to very little), of a return to a one nation Toryism that had a lot in common with the Church of England’s understanding of how an organic society works. So, if we could have leveraged the Big Society issue into a complete rebranding of the Tory Party, what an achievement that would have been. If it had been a serious government proposition, we would have gone on working with it. Not just in order to deliver things at ground level, but to, first of all, assert in public discourse, that those small acts of neighbourliness that go on in communities are valuable and not just invisible and overlooked.

This is about us. It’s about a development in government that could have been quite a significant win-win for Christian ethics, and, actually, the future of the Conservative party. An established church is about the responsibility to shape political discourse in a way that reflects the Christian understanding of society, and that means we have to have political parties that aren’t just favourable to the Church, but reflect the Christian understanding of society. Cameron and the Big Society might have been an understanding of the role of party politics and government that Christians could have given at least temporary allegiance to, whereas Margaret Thatcher’s vision of the unfettered market was not.
**Question 30**

Do you think that the Church of England’s overall positive response to the ‘Big Society’ project in 2010/11 and, specifically, your advice in GS1804, was a change in the Church of England’s theological perspective on the state to the one it had adopted in 1948?

There is no official theology of the state. Temple’s views were never the official line of the Church of England, but a lot of Anglicans, after his death in particular, sought inspiration from them. What I have been trying to say about all of this; the Big Society, the pastoral letter, “the Enemy Isolation”, is that instead of being reactive to government policy as we always are, we need to have a positive account of what we stand for.

So, if we believe the state has a role, that the state is justified by seeking to maximise the welfare of the citizen, it doesn’t follow that the Beveridge settlement is the only mechanism by which you can do that. Maximising the wellbeing of the citizen might be done by devolving powers into the smallest units, you know, the villages, the towns, the streets. That might be a totally different way of saying how you deal with welfare because, as in the Enemy Isolation, Beveridge looked at the five giant evils and, well, they are still around. But the overarching evil is isolation, it isn’t just loneliness; it’s the anthropopoly we have grown up with over forty years of market economics that says that the independent, autonomous consumer making autonomous choices, is what it is to be human. Now if you challenge that and say dependency is, as MacIntyre says in his book *Dependent Rational Animals*, part of a definition of being human, you have a different political philosophy. Milbank is quite right that the state is a modern construct, and the Church is where the kingdom of God is, etc. But if we believe in the kingdom of God coming on earth, it must come to some extent in human structures. Not just in ‘the other side of the cross’ structures. The fact is we live in states, so what does the practical Christian who has to make their way in the world do with that? Do they simply treat it as an aberration, as something that they cast off with their body at death — yes at one level, but that doesn’t give you any idea of how to live now? Or, is part of our vocation as an established church to recognise the intense burden of responsibility that people in authority carry?

Could there ever be one coherent theology of the state in the Church of England given that we are a coalition church — a coalition of parties who have very different theological foundations? You are thinking like a Catholic; that’s how Catholics think. I am saying, as Anglicans, we don’t look for a final settlement in these things. What we look for is — something that works for now. But we recognise its provisionality. There is always the authenticity of another theology over the horizon just saying, when we think we have got it right, by definition, we have got it wrong. And so that is part of the Anglican settlement since the Reformation, and certainly since the Civil War; that different parties have been saying they are not compromising with each other but are saying that each other is wrong. But we still walk as brothers and sisters. We are still different but we are still walking together; that is a very Anglican understanding. So I think the idea of an Anglican theology of the state is not coherent. What you will have is that at any one time there will be a dominant model, and it will be provisional.
**Question 31**

**Do you think there is a need to review the current dominant model?**

I don’t think there is a current dominant model/theology of the state in the Church. We have been negligent and haven’t given enough thought to the theology of the state for a very long time. That is why I have been trying to retrieve Temple, not to say Temple was right but say — look what he was trying to do guys. He was trying to do something quite serious here. He wasn’t saying should I vote in this lobby or that lobby when it comes to the Beveridge bill; he was saying: What should a Christian take into account when thinking about their relationship to the state. What sort of state must we oppose?

**Question 32**

**Are there any other points you want to make about what we have been discussing?**

I have to live with this day in, day out. Trying to deal with the reactive, the pragmatic but at the same time trying to be programmatic and theoretically coherent. This is essentially a job as a manager — a bureaucrat even. That is what I am. I am trying to make the complex bureaucracy of the Church of England, do something coherent and beneficial for the world, not only as regards our actions, but in shaping the dialogue, the discourse. But, remember also: where does our authority come from to do this? Why are we allowed to engage in public life? It may be we are the established church but that is a very declining asset. It cuts very little ice. As the Church of England we are still a Christian presence in every community. The fact that we have people on the ground everywhere, the rural villages, the outer estates, gave us, and still gives us some authority to speak on the basis that we actually have better links to the grass roots than almost anyone else. We deliver. The Church of England makes a difference on the ground. We are not just present, we are making a difference. That more than anything now gives us our authority to speak. So if I am designing a motion for synod on something, I will never have a clause calling on her majesty’s government to do this, that or the other unless there is another clause calling on the Church to deliver something concrete. Because that is the source of our authority.

The Tory party manifesto in 2017 was the closest to one that we could have endorsed; Nick Timothy put in some of the rhetoric that was pure Big Society. Yet the outcome is quite the other.
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