



From the Editor

Churches, Communities and Society

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ABSTRACT

Four articles based on presentations from the Lincoln Theological Institute's 2013 Conference on 'Churches, Communities and Society' deal with issues facing the Church of England and other faith communities in the UK, and reflect the legacy of the Institute and the previous Lincoln Theological College.

KEYWORDS: Anglicanism, 'Churches, Communities and Society', Lincoln Theological Institute

The four following articles in this number of the *Journal of Anglican Studies* originate from the 2013 anniversary conference, 'Churches, Communities and Society', held to celebrate ten years of the Lincoln Theological Institute at the University of Manchester, UK.

The conference began from the premise that in contemporary British society, Christian religion refuses to stay in its place. Unruly, it is established in some places (England, Scotland) and yet in all places numerically in decline; public, and yet caught off guard by an Occupy movement; suborned, and yet capable of protest; lordly, and yet attempting to represent the common good; proactively interfaith, and yet caught up in its own internal concerns; and national, yet present in very different ways in city and country.

It has been noted that the older Christian denominations are decreasing in size, and with this comes a certain defensiveness. Admittedly, this decline is sometimes obscured by immigration from

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within the European Union and the growth of Christian churches that are outcomes of 'Empire'. Nonetheless, British Christianities remain *public* in remarkably diverse ways and vigorously *active* in civil society. Witness the furore over *Sharia*, an Archbishop penning a column in Britain's best-selling tabloid, and the dispute over whether public prayers should be banned. The 2008 report *Moral, but No Compass: Government, Church and the Future of Welfare* gave some indication of the formal engagement of the churches in civil society.² The informal contribution of the churches to social capital in civil society is incalculable.

The 2013 conference explored some of the issues, concerns and contradictions generated by this remarkable state of affairs. It did so from a variety of perspectives: theological, ethical and social. And the voices raised range from the concerned to the sceptical. The articles presented here reflect some of that diversity as they seek to explore issues of concern to (Anglican) church and society.

Stephen Platten, the present chair of the trustees of the Lincoln Theological Institute, explores an integralist approach to ethics that has deep roots in English Anglicanism. In this reference to a form of virtue ethics, he is joined by Alison Milbank who – drawing on different sources – argues for the centrality of the parish church and the church school as sites for the learning of Christian virtue and the recovery of a 'deeper magic' that opens onto a transcendent reality. Expressed here is a vision in English Anglicanism of the centrality of the church to parish and community.

A profound concern for a different aspect of the church – its buildings – animates the contribution by William Whyte. Arguing that the Church of England underestimates the importance of its buildings for its mission, Whyte argues in effect for a theology of architecture. Finally, Philip Lewis in an article that captures some of the deep changes occurring in English society and elsewhere over the last 50 years explores the role of Anglican churches in the incorporation of Muslims into a wider society.

I have already noted the conference was held to mark the ten-year anniversary of the Lincoln Theological Institute's arrival at the University of Manchester. The Institute is an international centre of expertise in the theological study of religion and society and a promoter of theological research and study into a variety of ethical, pastoral, social and ecclesial issues.

2. Francis Davis, Elizabeth Paulhus and Andrew Bradstock, *Moral, but No Compass: Church, Government and the Future of Welfare* (Chelmsford: Matthew James, 2008).

The Institute was inaugurated in 1997 and is the successor body to the Lincoln Theological College, a residential centre for Anglican training that closed in 1995. The Institute transferred to the University of Manchester in 2003. The Institute's work has been made possible by the unique collaboration between the Institute's trustees and the University of Manchester. The embedding of the Lincoln Theological Institute in the Department of Religions and Theology within the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures has been secured by the co-inherence of two visions. The first, provided by the Institute's trustees, is that LTI should be a centre of excellence for advanced research in the relations between theology, society, and publics (including the churches and other religious communities). The second is the School's commitment to world class research and social responsibility that has provided an excellent context for the Institute's work to develop.

As the successor body to the Lincoln Theological College, the Institute has an Anglican provenance. The Lincoln Theological Institute has continued to honour the legacy bequeathed to it by the College: an 'open, broad Anglicanism, rich in training and formation, and a deep scholarship that is concerned with understanding the place of the church in the world today', as Martyn Percy (the Institute's first director) puts it.³ To give a flavour of this, tutors at the College have included Michael Ramsey (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1961–74), Eric Lionel Mascall, Eric Symes Abbott, Oliver Stratford Tomkins and Alan Webster.

Something old, something new: it is my hope that the articles presented here under the theme 'Churches, Communities and Society' maintain some of the theological commitments for which the College was well known and highly regarded. Moreover, that the effort to address contemporary issues of great concern from a theological perspective is also present here to honour the work of the Lincoln Theological Institute.

3. See the 2013 anniversary brochure about the Lincoln Theological Institute available at www.lincolnthologicalinstitute.com/liti, p. 10 (accessed 4 June 2015).