

A legitimate witness: on loyalty to the Church of England's inheritance of faith

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Introduction

What rationale should be given for the Church of England's standing claim on the attention of the English public? We live in an attention economy in which very many organisations, interest groups, media and commodities jostle for the affections of that subset of God's human creatures who reside in England. While the hopes and fears of all these folk and the communities they inhabit meet in Christ, not just at Christmas but every day and night, the phenomena which predominate in the English and wider British consciousness do not unequivocally manifest this reality. Instead, multiple forms of faith, belief and loyalty encounter one another, like the surface of an ever-changing sea, much as the waves of the English Channel rise and fall, inflected by the wind and tide of powerful national and global movements. The cities and towns of England, and increasingly the villages and rural communities, become concentrated centres for the encounter of heterogeneous traditions of family life, culture, work, worklessness, food, drink, leisure and language – with elements of religious faith working to some degree as subtle leaven throughout the whole.

Amidst these global encounters – nationally and locally concentrated – the Church of England regularly requires its ministers to announce their loyalty to an 'inheritance of faith' which is both universal and localised. What we do with an inheritance matters for legitimacy and for witness. It matters for answering the question of why anyone should listen to the Church of England's voice. It would be odd to suggest that all the people who reside in England have consented to the public role of the Church of England – at least if consent is conceived solely in terms of individual wills. And yet there is a view that only the institutions which we have chosen – the people which we have elected – have any legitimate authority. In contrast, the long-serving Church of England organist and philosopher, Roger Scruton, put the matter quite differently, arguing that 'legitimacy is given by inheritance rather than created by choice.' (Scruton, 2017, p.25)

So how is the Church of England to navigate between these rival ways of seeing life and legitimacy amidst the attention economy in God's beloved world?

Loyalty, inheritance and covenant

Instead of the subscription to the thirty-nine articles previously required, Anglican ministers now declare their assent to the following words:

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of

Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

Now 'assent' might sound rather an underwhelming response to this stirring invitation. However, in agreement with Scruton above, one Anglican politician, Danny Kruger, put the matter this way, observing that a covenant has

the quality not of choice but of givenness. A covenant is not created by your consent but sustained by your assent. (Kruger, 2023, p.20)

The pairing of loyalty with inheritance draws out some crucial features of loyalty which are important for the covenantal argument in this chapter. Loyalty is about something which is *ours* – something which belongs to us – not in the sense of a property right to be claimed against others – mine not thine – but in the sense of an inherited gift. It is a home, passed down through generations, into which we welcome others, including strangers, and which has now come into our care. The first, still sitting and ultimate resident of this homely inheritance of faith is God who promised, through Jesus Christ, to come to dwell with human creatures to the very ends of the earth, including even England and the rest of the United Kingdom. Faithfully fulfilling the promises of God, Immanuel became emplaced in one nation, Israel, in order to dwell with all peoples; was lifted on high over all nations; and now still gives Himself within places, remaining boundless in love and affection.

Fittingly then, the structure within which loyalty to such an inheritance is properly disciplined is covenant. As Kruger puts it,

A covenant is a way of expressing and formalising the love – unconditional, unstinting and permanent – that can exist between people who are unrelated by blood...places – human communities situated in a geography – are made by the covenants of civil society, the formal and informal institutions and associations through which the people of a neighbourhood achieve agency and belonging. Nations, meanwhile, are formed by the covenant of statehood, the mysterious complex of powers, ceremonies and institutions in which a people recognise, authorise and confess allegiance to their country. (Kruger, 2023, p.18)

To declare assent and so pledge *loyalty* sustains covenantal life by committing people to certain objects of attention and affection: a people, a place, a community which is in some way theirs and to which they belong. To pledge loyalty to an *inheritance* which incorporates the Scriptures as attested in the Church's formularies is to say that these forms of belongings and these objects of affection have historic roots. The commitment of a loyal community to take on this historic inheritance, to make it *ours* in each generation and pass it on to the next, is what sustains a first-person plural – 'we'.

The Scriptures and historic formularies of the Church of England are in just this way recognised by an assent to inclusion in a covenantal life. The loyalty of the covenant

which follows defines a people whose God is the Lord and who love their neighbours as themselves. In so pledging loyalty, then, to an inheritance of faith, a navigational course is set, a root is laid down, and, in England's case, an element of national, covenantal, constitutional-spiritual infrastructure is renewed.

Why be loyal?

Why would someone pledge such an *historically rooted* loyalty? Why would someone assent to what is unchosen, even allowing for the degree of latitude possible now compared to the days when an overt, unqualified subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles was compulsory? The answer is that we pledge loyalty because of a faith that one's hopes and fears and those of one's neighbours are interwoven with the hopes and fears *of all the years*. These hopes are in turn in the hands of the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ. Loyalty to this God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as the properly and uniquely *ultimate* focus for attention and affection, the one to whom we belong and who, by God's gracious gift, belongs to us – is then the golden thread of a loyalty which is fit and worthy to bind together and discipline a people's loyalty to the inheritance of faith. If faith is to be true faith, it ought not to be faith in the Church of England or even in the catholic church of which it is a part, but in the God whom the church universal and across time has worshipped and worships today.

Such faith gives rise to a loyalty first to God. But second, necessarily, it gives rise to some instantiation of that faith in the form of an inherited tradition in which a people are rooted. So to the question "What rationale should be given for the Church of England's standing claim on the attention of the English public?", the chief answer is that the legitimacy of the claim on public attention is dependent firstly and decisively on the quality of the inheritance of faith received; but secondly, though more contingently, upon the quality of faith in Christ and the loyalty which arises from that faith as it is sown within England in the church's carrying forward of its inheritance.

A voice witnessing in the wilderness makes a legitimate claim on the public just to the extent that it enables public attention and affection to be given to how this inheritance of faith enables the voice of God revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, to be proclaimed and heard afresh.

A political inheritance

As we will consider in this chapter, the Church of England's inheritance of faith, by means of which it bears witness to God, incorporates within its life, witness and liturgy an *ecclesio-political* element. The questions which motivated Jonathan Chaplin and John Ritzema in the first two chapters of this section turn on what is required of being a 'loyal Anglican', in Chaplin's well-chosen phrase. To be a loyal Anglican includes attending to what the Scriptures may be taken to prove, as the sixth Article of the thirty-nine articles says. And so wise answers to questions about establishment will involve adjudicating on whether the word of God supports or, as Ritzema thinks, undermines that crucial loadbearing feature of Chaplin's argument from Scripture: namely that nations (and the governments of nations) cannot know the things of God in such a way as to prefer one

form of national religion. If, as I believe, Ritzema is exegetically right and Chaplin basically wrong on this point, then this endorses an exploration of how loyalty to the *ecclesio-political* inheritance of faith should be received and passed on in order that ‘grace and truth may be brought to this generation’ as the Preface quoted above puts it. A sub-question then becomes what witness to Christ, who came full of grace and truth, may legitimately be woven through the *political settlement* within which the Church of England is established.

To be clear, the purview of the inheritance of faith goes beyond the specific role of ‘high establishment’ in the divine economy. For the loyalties which shape human life, some of which arise from faith in God, are wider and more subtle than the loyalties meshed with a government or a whole nation, however important and missionally energising (or distorting) the interplay of loyalties to God, nation and government may be. In addition to the ‘earthed establishment’ in locality which also gives definition to loyalty, the inheritance of faith, viewed as a catholic as well as a local good deposit, is what God has providentially given to all people and to the whole created order. Thus ‘loyalty to the inheritance of faith’, this late twentieth century watchword of the Church of England in responding to the gracious initiative of God, should be a sign of hope, turning loving attention and affections not only to what is close at hand in England but also to neighbours both across the British isles and beyond national borders, in transnational ecclesial and political concern.

Loyalty as a human phenomenon

However, to be a human possibility, such faith, hope and love cannot begin from nowhere but from somewhere: in the domestication of loyalty to God within the specific land and places of England. This signals a more general point about loyalty. Loyalty is an ordinary, normal aspect of human social life. The human questions then concern not *whether* to be loyal but *how* to be loyal. To whom or what is one loyal and why? How are ones differing loyalties ordered? Are our loyalties and their ordering wise and well-placed?

Throughout time and place loyalty has been closely associated with religion. Wherever Christ has been known, existing loyalties have come into complex encounter with Christian faith. How ought one’s loyalties – to a king, a people, a place, a church, one’s neighbours – to be ordered so that loyalty to Christ within the covenant of his body and blood, shed on the cross, is the rhythmic heartbeat of life? This question is a routine if fascinating feature of the long history of European Christianity, including European Christian political thought and practice, from within which the Church of England became a conceivable institution (see Holland 2019; Omrani 2025).

To think of ordered loyalties recalls the longstanding conversations in Christian thought, associated especially with Augustine and Aquinas, about an order of love. One way to think about the ordering of loyalties is to think about the disciplining of loyalties. By ‘discipline’ is meant something like ‘guided development’ or ‘directed learning’ – it signals the call of Christ to become his disciples. Just as a curriculum might discipline someone’s studies in chemistry or classical literature, focussing their attention and (for the devoted scientists) their affection and imagination on the proper domains of their study (and not

other ones) just so the disciplines of ecclesial and political infrastructure set a kind of course within which loyalties run, not in any way an individual creates and prefers, but according to an inherited order, which a people discover and cherish – and within which people find freedom.

Loyalties gain a disciplined form, then, not only from their object – the focus of their attention and affection which gives any particular loyalty a specific content (loyalty to Northumberland will take different practical forms from loyalty to North London); but also from the ‘infrastructure’ within which that object finds its meaning. The practical significance of any loyalty, the kind of active commitment which the object of loyalty requires, follows from that. An infrastructure means that a commitment does not take some random form but follows a disciplined pattern, shared with others – how a community lives and loves in Northumberland is in some discernible relation to a community in North London.

To give a party-political illustration: the loyalties of members of a political party are not unstructured but disciplined by the content of a more-or-less *shared set of beliefs* and *practical policies* – somewhat diversely formulated and in some ways contested precisely because those beliefs and policies attract the attention and affection of the members who belong to the relevant party. Some loyalties are more restricted than this, bringing together a single-interest group around *some cause*, perhaps the protection of a minority interest over against a majority culture; or of a majority culture seemingly endangered by the arrival of diverse minorities. Loyalties to political parties can never be unconditional since what binds people together is not the party apparatus but the ways of believing and acting which they judge to be best.

Or again, consider the loyalties of a professional association or military unit, in which the ties that bind attention and affection together are coordinated to a *specific professional competence and service* rendered in some area of life in the wider body politic. Groups of doctors, nurses, lawyers, military personnel or perhaps even AI engineers come to mind.

Finally, consider the loyalty of a group of thieves, among whom a loyalty to one another is disciplined by a code of conduct (even an *omertà* in some contexts), a shared refusal to betray each other to the authorities, even if that means waiting a considerable length of time to retrieve some concealed ill-gotten gains. For a literary figure who represents this well, consider Jonathan Small in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* (Conan Doyle, 1890). Lest the relevance of such a narrative be lost, note that, to its shame, ministers of the Church of England have sometimes exercised an *omertà* in respect of abuse.

In each case – and many more could be cited – loyalty plays a decisive role. Loyalty is a pervasive feature of human life. But in each case, loyalty is mediated among but ultimately directed beyond the immediate group: the political party is (in principle) loyal to the overall nation it serves if (in practice) often only to its own supporters; the interest group, including the minority (or majority) it supports, is loyal to some standard of justice; the professional association is, again, ultimately coordinated not inwardly for the good of the group but for the service of a dimension of public life; the loyalty of the thieves, even when brought under pressure by the law, is to the object of their affection,

some beloved treasure, albeit still yet interwoven with their shared experience of colonial *punitive* discipline, as in the case of *The Sign of Four*.

What makes the difference between these illustrations is the way that the loyalties proper to each community are disciplined by their object and through the processes, standards and commitments which order the community's common life – the infrastructure. In short, loyalties take on a specific character on account of the company they keep: the loyalties of a political party will be distinct from a single interest group, a band of thieves or a battalion of soldiers. Notice too that such a character may be more-or-less malign – the professional association (or church) which closes ranks against whistleblowers is as loyal to each other in preventing access to the truth from those to whom it is owed as the thieves are in preventing rightful owners from gaining possession of that which has been taken from them. But such a loyalty is a malign force.

The challenge for any community (or community of communities like a city, region or nation-state) is how to organise loyalties. Such a challenge, though dealing in people's moral orientation, is not yet moral, properly speaking. The further challenge is how to discipline – or disciple – a *rightly ordered* loyalty or network of loyalties. This is so not only in relation to the immediate objects of loyalty in people's families, neighbours, local institutions, churches and so on but also in relation to multiple forms of online communities and nodes of attraction, including forms of Christian community and interest, vying for attention, affection and cash. So while it is an important public question to discern how human loyalties ought to be disciplined and to examine the infrastructure which can enable that, the digital permeation of life in the second quarter of the twenty first century will continue to shape, enhance, unsettle and reorder the infrastructure of loyalty.

The longing for a disciplined life of loyalty has surfaced albeit variously in English, British, wider Anglosphere and European public life. The desire to recognise and abide by a covenantal way of life influenced both Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and now, as noted above, the thinking of Danny Kruger and a significant section of centre-right Christian thought. The various iterations of Christian nationalism in the first part of the twenty-first century provide complicating – and in some cases deeply concerning – factors. These require a range of responses: as cries are listened to, tested and answered with the judgment of Christian wisdom.

Amidst England's changing landscape, the question is how the Church of England's infrastructure takes the ordinary human proclivity to be loyal and disciples - or disciplines it – by giving it proper order, objects and foci. The inheritance of faith offers a disciplining infrastructure, within which loyalty is properly directed into witness to the faith revealed in the Scriptures which the historic formularies provide. The temptation for the Church of England is to behave like political parties or even professional associations and to seek legitimacy for its voice in ways which echo those organisations and so achieve some kind of 'relevance', a hearing for its voice in the crowded and competitive public square. In so striving to gain legitimacy, it can forget that it is the Church of Jesus Christ and so abandon any claim to legitimacy at all. The true test of the Church of England's legitimacy in claiming public attention and affection – and doing so

with a uniquely inherited standing compared to other churches in England, let alone other religious groups – is that it offers a way to order and discipline loyalties which lead people towards an allegiance to God.

In summary, the proper discipling (or disciplining) of loyalty is a vital public concern. The challenge for the Church of England is how and how well it addresses this concern.

Proximate and ultimate loyalties

If this is so, then we have gone some considerable way already towards answering the question of legitimacy. In the introduction to this volume, we discussed the notion of legitimacy at some length. In this section, it is the interrelation of faith and loyalty with legitimacy that is particularly important, focussed within humanity's relationship with God, as uniquely revealed in Jesus Christ. It is faith – planting people's lives in God and place and passed on across generations – that is the root from which a godly loyalty may grow, a loyalty which, when worked out in word and deed, makes the Church of England's public role (and its continued legal establishment) faithful to God, attractive and compelling – in a word 'legitimate'.

Turning to the Book of Common Prayer and Cranmer's Psalter within it, the Psalmist sings:

The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance, of my cup: thou shalt maintain my lot

The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea I have a goodly heritage. (Psalm 16:6-7)

St Augustine, reflecting on this Psalm, exhorts his hearers 'Let others choose earthly and temporal portions to enjoy; the share of the saints is the Lord eternal'. (Augustine, 1995, 3 15:183)

The Lord God, revealed in Jesus Christ, communicated among us by the Holy Spirit, is the inheritance of faith for the catholic church, of which the Church of England is a part. There is no rival for the personal inheritance which God's loving self-donation constitutes, both now and in eternity. It is God whom humans need to receive with a loyal delight. Thus an infrastructure of loyalties ought to enable and be permeated at every point by the uniquely tender invitation and authoritative challenge which loyalty to Jesus Christ provides.

And just as loyalties may have a proximate and an ultimate focus in ordinary human affairs, the God who become incarnate as our ultimate inheritance has allowed for a proximate sense of inheritance. Just so, the worship of this eternal God takes certain temporal, proximate forms – not that our love for God might fully rest in them; but that they might give us 'a boost' towards the ultimate enjoyment of God (Augustine, 1997, 1.4.7).

In this way, loyalty to *this* inheritance of faith in God may be properly focussed through the traditions which have arisen in our national landscape. In other words, our loyalty to,

our allegiance to, our faith in God the Trinity, who is revealed in Scripture, attested in the creeds, is disciplined or disciplined through the particular inheritance the Church of England has received – the Book of Common Prayer, ordinal and articles. Loyalty to the God in whom Christians place their faith is refracted through expressions of faith which have taken root in English life.

At the same time, such faith must retain some critical distance on its temporal inheritance, as to how well it refers people on to an ultimate loyalty to God. While, on the one hand, loyalty to a specific inheritance cannot cohere with despising or hating that inheritance, yet, on the other hand, loyalty cannot be Christian loyalty if it is wilfully blind about its inheritance, and thus unable to distinguish between what is godly and ungodly. It is an important question, then, what loyalty to God, disciplined through loyalty to this inheritance of faith entails for a loyalty to other people whose inheritance is relevantly similar, not least those within the Church of England or wider Anglican Communion. On these points, Bishop Graham Tomlin's chapter presses the matter in terms of those to whom loyalty is owed but with whom one disagrees. Bishop Eleanor Sanderson's chapter offers an intriguing interplay between the ecclesio-political infrastructures of Aotearoa New Zealand and England. Bishop Eleanor offers us what we might call a 'theo-geography', as she reflects on the missional interconnections and current contextual differences between Aotearoa New Zealand and England. In the common threads which unite the Anglican churches across place and time, a powerful witness emerges of how the subterranean (even submarine) roots of faith may, in God's providence, stretch under and across nations, borders and seas, like vast undersea communication-bearing cables, giving rise to loving loyalty and hope in Christ.

Faith as the root of loyalty

Since loyalty is about the inheritance of faith, it is inevitably *doctrinal*. This is a decisive feature of what was spoken of above in terms of infrastructure which disciplines (in other words enables the development of) loyalty. Put plainly, the legitimacy of the claim to the public attention and affection of the English people turns on the doctrine to which the Church adheres. Put positively – in a manner akin to Malcolm Brown's encouragement in a later chapter that the church bear confident witness to the promise of eternal life – Anglican theological and moral doctrine is vital to the Church of England's legitimacy, giving life to the practical renewal of English (and wider British) national life in a manner which fits people for the Kingdom of God.

How does the inheritance of faith exert this doctrinal discipline – which is to say a discipline on our worship of God, a discipline on the manner in which faith in God gives rise to loyalty to God, expressed in word and deed, throughout all of life. We hear again the Psalmist's joyful song:

The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea I have a goodly heritage. (Psalm 16:6)

While the Lord is the goodly heritage of the whole earth, the example of Israel's life communicates the way in which a particular 'fair ground' is the place in which that inheritance is received. The Psalmist's reception of God is imagined as interwoven within

the places in which he and his neighbours live. Accordingly, saying or singing this Psalm inspires a responsibility for the Church of England to discern and celebrate the beauty of its inheritance in the land, the fair ground, of the living. For loyalty to God and to people takes on granular forms in specific times which in turn become sedimented in specific places. This does not require that England (or Britain or the United Kingdom) is a covenanted nation like the ancient Israel who first sang these Psalms; nor that the English are a covenanted people like ancient Israelites. Rather the more modest claim is that other nations – like the English – should learn the conditions which make for the legitimacy of the church from the model of Israel’s God-ordained and emplaced way of inhabiting the human condition.

It is precisely this place-based doctrinal sedimentation that strengthens the basis for the legitimacy of the Church’s public voice. As doctrine about God settles down within a people, it in turn inspires specific cultural, educational and legal forms by which love is disciplined and secured, animating and permeating legality with the law of love. A doctrinal discipline for loyalty is interwoven with the knowledge-and-love of the places where God’s voice is heard through the ministry of the Church.

The church may have a legitimate claim on public attention: a rationale for legitimacy forged through long-term place-based love, working according to a doctrinal discipline that holds the church and nation together. The inheritance of faith is planted, nurtured and developed within the particular places in which the people of the Church of England are rooted: by these means, love makes a legitimate claim on public attention.

The life of faith in the wilderness

Returning to the theme of faith and loyalty, we may say that roots are in land and place, village and town, urban area and fertile field. In hope, we may also say that new roots can go down, trusting God’s promises that

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus
it shall blossom abundantly (Isaiah 35:1-2, NRSV)

Indeed, while sharing a common inheritance, the people and places among whom roots have gone down receive a particular inflection which rooted faith takes – in this or that cathedral; in this parish or that one. William Tyndale, whose labours in bible translation and exegesis did so much to enable God’s word to be spoken in an English voice and so to shape the Church of England, thereby providing for the inheritance of faith to which loyalty is due, and who famously expected the plough boys of the field to know more of the word of God than certain clergy, proclaimed that, “Faith is the life of man, *out of which life* the pleasantness of all his works spring.” (Tyndale, 1849, p.125, italics added)

Thus, we might think of how the coincidence of faith, place and loyalty, gives rise to activities such as the joyful celebration of harvest, the creative sustaining of urban and rural traditions and the patriotic honour given to regimental colours in churches and cathedrals; but also the long-term commitment to addressing the immediate poverty and

long-term causes of poverty in a community, to investigating the presence of doctrinal error and moral failure and to proclaiming the good news of the forgiveness of sins. Just so, the encouragement of James that faith without works is dead inspires the thought that faith without loyalty is dead. Just as in many of Jesus' parables, the logic of legitimacy by *inheritance*, challenges the present holders of an inheritance to give an account of their conduct.

Oliver O'Donovan explains that we 'may properly describe faith, then, as the "root" of morality.' (O'Donovan, 2013, p.106) O'Donovan goes on to observe that, in this sense, faith, as a root, 'gives substance to the objects of our hope and proves realities that cannot be seen' (Hebrews 11:1). For Tyndale, he explains that

faith in Christ's blood inscribes upon our hearts...the law as the chief object of our love. Love for the law means love for the order of reality disclosed through law, the order both of creation and of salvation-history. "To love the law truly, that is to say, to love God that is the Father of all and giveth all; and Jesus Christ, that is Lord of us all, and bought us all, with all our hearts, souls, power and might; and our brethren for our Father's sake (because they be created after his image) and for our Lord and master Christ's sake, because they be the price of his blood." Faith, then, is inseparable from love, because a sense of free and forgiven agency is inseparable from the objective universe which is constituted by God, Christ and neighbour. But faith and love together are inseparable from hope. "Faith, hope and love are the inward baptism, and they are the mark of the true church. Where one of them is, there will be all three." (O'Donovan, 2013, p.100; citing Tyndale 1849)

So loyalty to the inheritance of faith is inseparable from love and hope: a focussed affection towards that to which we belong requires an anticipatory posture of hope, not only ultimately in the return of Christ but also, empowered by hope, penultimately in the way that the tradition once received will be handed on to future generations, a people yet unborn. This is how life of faith is renewed, not least in time where the church's legitimacy and relevance are questioned. It is how the whole church, but especially its ordained members, are called to live in what the ordinal calls the 'wilderness of this world's temptations', even temptations to which the Church has herself fallen prey. So then, a voice in the wilderness should be listened to where it enables the new roots of faith to be planted, and life to be nurtured and grown.

How will that voice speak? Loyalty to God means that it will resist the besetting temptation to speak or act like a political lobbying group, or non-governmental organisation. It will resist the temptation to ape the voices of political parties in an attempt to gain a public hearing, but which end up drawing people's attention away from the good news of God's love.

A loyal love, indeed a patriotic love which cares for the English people whom the Church of England serves, will incorporate the mode of prophetic *critique*. Such theological critique rooted in faith includes appropriate assessment of previous generations' past actions and their consequences. For one cannot have the legitimacy afforded by inheritance which Scruton rightly recognised without a reckoning with the sinful omission and commissions of that inheritance which inheritors suffer or benefit from

today: a failure to minister to the desires and needs of the working-class people of England; a failure to identify and repudiate racism where it exists. A loyal critique will thus concern current states of affairs which are destroying the well-being or economic opportunity of people who live in the places we love.

But it will conduct prophetic critique always with a view to the ultimate promise of reconciliation with God and neighbour from which good news the whole gospel ethic unfolds. Moreover, a loyal voice will also address those who seek to deny some essential feature of the inheritance of faith, for example in some area of moral doctrine. Nowhere is this brought to a sharper point than when bishops, who themselves seek such change of doctrine, ask an ordinand: 'Do *you* believe the doctrine of the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it, and in your ministry will you expound and teach it?' (Italics added) While the focus has been upon the nature of marriage in recent times, as Mark Chapman's and Graham Tomlin's chapters variously observe, what loyalty requires with respect to the passing of the faith will cover a wide range of matters.

We may say then that a well-ordered doctrinal discipline is the root of a *moral* theological discipline. A loyal hope will mean working out, with others, how to act so as to fill 'the space of opportune time into which our resistance to adversity and our service to God and neighbour may be ventured.' (O'Donovan, 2013, p.100) So faith as a root gives rise to hope and love – all cardinal features of witness to the inheritance of the Church of England, grounding our life of Scripture, creeds, liturgy, articles and ordinal, within the places which and among the people whom God loves.

The infrastructure of loyalty

How then may we sustain this common life in Christ, within the Church and for the sake of England? As just suggested, unfolding from within our theological doctrine is moral and political doctrine and accompanying practical reasoning. A key presupposition of the formularies is that there is a political settlement established by Christian faith which revolves around the sovereign as supreme governor of the Church of England and head of state. So to be loyal to the inheritance of faith, and sustain the grounds of legitimacy, one must in some way reckon with the ecclesio-political settlement within which the formularies gain a key element of their orientation. In short, we must receive and do something with a *political* inheritance of faith.

But what *is* to be done? Jonathan Chaplin argues against the high establishment settlement and 'national church' theology which underpins it, claiming that

we need to recover a robust theology of the church's overriding loyalty to Christ and of the freedom of the church over against both state and nation, and of the state as lacking the authority to identify religious truth and thus to favour any religion. (Chaplin, 2022, p.68)

His claim is that legitimacy, loyalty and mission are hindered by the very structures of legal establishment which interweave crown, church, land and law. On the contrary, I say that the legitimacy of the Church of England rests precisely in its ability to enable people to bring together their many loyalties coherently together under one head, Jesus Christ, precisely through the infrastructure of the inheritance of faith, including its political

elements. For the structures of loyalty which shape any national life are not narratively neutral but tell a story about human life. The church's seasons tell a story; the eucharistic liturgies of the church tell a story; and the ways in which monarchy and civil government are enfolded within the prayers and practices of the church's life, whether on the 'high' level of a coronation or on the 'earthed' level of parish or regional life, tell a story both national and personal. It has been well said that parish life

has to do not just with geography and ecclesiastical administration, but with history and a system of loyalties...it is the indefinable territory to which we feel we belong...Its boundaries are more the limits of our intimate allegiances than lines on a map." (White, 1977, p. xvii)¹

The challenge is to discern both urban and rural life within the terms of this vision.

To this end, both high and earthed forms of life are sustained *across* the Church through a weaving *of* the Church within the nation's constitution by means of covenantal loyalty. The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks spoke wisely about covenantal life. His idea was that when we share certain kinds of goods such as friendship, kindness, or love, we end up with more not less. The secret to this strange economy is 'to cultivate...environments in which we are bound to one another not by transactions of power or wealth but by *besed*, covenant love...God lives in the between that joins self to self through an act of covenant kindness.' (Sacks 2005, p. 54)

The infrastructure of England offers such an environment. Covenants and oaths in our national life offer ways of disciplining loyalty within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How are loyalty and legitimacy secured? There are ways this happens through myriad low key and unremarkable forms of witness which put flesh on the bones of life in the parish or in the nation as a whole: the toddlers' group, the funeral preparation, the workplace witness in fulfilment of vocation, the national memorial service, the local walk of witness. Others are referred to elsewhere in this volume.

But one visible and indeed audible way covenantal life is displayed, heard and secured is through the interpersonal interlocking of oaths and covenants. Consider in particular the promises laid out in the Church of England's declaration of assent; in the oaths of allegiance and canonical obedience; in the ordinal; and, crucially, how all these intersect with the promises made by the sovereign in the coronation oath.

The Oath of Allegiance to the sovereign by Church of England ministers should be understood within [the context of the sovereign's Coronation Oath]. On this view, every time an ordinand, member of the clergy or licensed lay minister makes the Oath of Allegiance to the sovereign, there is an interlocking of these promises, forming and reaffirming the mutual loyalty which lies between the sovereign and the Church of England. (Faith and Order Commission, 2022)

These are serious commitments which provide, if you like, a covenantal root network, in Tyndale's sense, spreading across the life of England, joining up organic life with organic

¹ These are the words of Richard Mabey in his introduction to White's *The Natural History of Selborne*. I note that they are frequently cited by Bishop Andrew Rumsey. I am grateful to Emma Webb for alerting me to this reference.

life from place to place. This interweaving of lawful requirement with subjective commitment, in the presence of a bishop or an archbishop, has a weight in English life, a capacity for enabling for all what is prayed for ministers: ‘that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened.’ (*Common Worship*, The Ordination of Priests, also called Presbyters) For these promises sustain living covenants which permeate our national life as a kind of subterranean root structure. Fixed points are thus created where the roots of faith – and loyalty to the inheritance of faith – are particularly laid down.

This covenanted life, sealed by oath and promise, represents another aspect of the Church of England’s claim to legitimacy, to a call on public attention. The church’s legitimacy, ultimately dependent on loyalty to God, is perceived through those who, in a godly manner, hold together a people in the faith of the gospel through covenantal life, the purpose of which is the love revealed in the gospel, empowered by the Spirit who sustains the hope of the gospel.

To read oaths and covenantal loyalty like this should make it clear that the infrastructure of loyalty is not maintained exclusively by those who are ordained as deacon or priest or consecrated as bishops. Licensed lay ministers in the Church of England also make the declaration of assent, committing themselves to the inheritance of faith. Moreover, the coronation oath is of course the oath of a lay person. Beyond these official declarative moments, it is worth observing that the whole purpose of the infrastructure is to sustain a faithful mission of the church, unfolding people within a covenantal life as disciples of Christ. If we are to think of a ‘Christian nation’ and a covenanted nation, it is perhaps best conceived along just these lines.

An articulate witness

Returning to the discussion between Chaplin and Ritzema, we may say that it is this covenantal life of love which enables an articulation of Christian truth such that government may indeed know the things of God. Loyalty to our inheritance of faith, interwoven with our inherited civic and political standing, enables witness. If we say that faith is the root of loyalty, then we should also remember that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). In what way does witness address the underlying questions of legitimacy under consideration here?

First, there are the opportunities for enabling the *faithful celebration of what is good*. The church’s witness involves listening to and discerning the loves of the times; what people value as good – in the church, the wider community, the nation as a whole and in international affairs, including the wider Anglican communion and in ecumenical relations. Witness requires speaking about those loves in ways which attract people to Christ in order both to foster loyalty to Christ and to foster wise public discussion. This work of fostering love and loyalty seems basic to the legitimacy of a public voice that, following listening and discernment, speaks. Discerning the loves of the times, deeply understanding what people value or long for as good, and speaking into those loves affords the church’s voice a pastoral as well as a doctrinal weight, precisely in the complexly secular and religious life people share. We may frame this in terms of what Augustine thought of as common objects of love held within an established infrastructure of loyalties. This infrastructure is contested by some outside the Church

and indeed inside, as Jonathan Chaplain's analysis suggests. In terms of common celebration, it is intriguing that this internal contestation is the source of some surprise to observers such as Daniel Greenberg in his chapter in this volume.

But second, the other side of this coin is that witness will commonly require enabling *wise contestation about what is good* in the church and with the world. The Church will often be at odds with shifting points of societal consensus whether in debates on assisted suicide, sexual ethics, on other contested matters of social ethics, on the justice of any particular armed conflict or indeed on constitutional affairs. The work of witness is to discern, speak, and where necessary, offer critique amidst the contested loyalties which permeate life.

How then to frame witness, as contestation, when conceived on a *political* level? It will be natural to Anglicans to frame it in terms of worship. As noted by David Fergusson in this volume, Oliver O'Donovan comments that without

the act of worship political authority is unbelievable, so that binding political loyalties and obligations seem to be deprived of any point. The doctrine that we set up political authority, as a device to secure our own essentially private, local and unpolitical purposes, has left the Western democracies in a state of pervasive moral debilitation, which, from time to time, inevitably throws up idolatrous and authoritarian reactions. (O'Donovan, 1996, p.49)

These words are not only, as Fergusson rightly suggests, apt for reading the signs of our political times at an international and national level but also offer a reauthorisation of the worship of the church as socially and politically constructive and significant at every level. Over against a presupposition that it is the church who are the anomalous hangers-on within a secular settlement, it is the legitimacy of political authority which is here placed in question. And over against the idea that politics is solely our device and legitimate for that reason is set the idea of the political *inheritance* of faith – unchosen by us and so with a legitimacy which we rightly recognise but do not invent for ourselves.

How then should the church inhabit contestation, drawing on the inheritance of faith? Rowan Williams suggests that

the Church is a 'political seminar', because it loves and worships a God who transforms human society not just human individuals. Through God's love, the Church is a place where we argue about civic virtue and common good. And the better we get at that argument within the Church, the better we shall get at arguing in public about the values and visions that we derive from what God has done.²

Such a political seminar is not one of short duration or only of the *current* moment, inflected as it has done the many features of the Church of England's changing landscape, with differing "speakers" making presentations and offering their voices over the centuries. Following Burke, it is a seminar between the living, the dead and the yet unborn. Moreover, as Archbishops know by experience, the seminar covers far more than 'civic virtue and the common good'.

² Unpublished lecture entitled 'Relations between the Church and state today'.

Remembering the dead therefore, we recall that arguments about an enculturated church amidst deep contestation have a long history. It was Keble who posed the question:

How may a man best reconcile his allegiance to God and his Church with his duty to his country, that country, which now, by the supposition, is fast becoming hostile to the Church, and cannot therefore long be the friend of God? (Keble, 1833)

Contestation is an enduring state, though changing in focus across different decades, pressing in every time upon questions of faith, loyalty, allegiance and duty. To frame the thought Christologically, we might think about witness as a participation in Christ's sufferings. Keble appeals to Samuel, arguing that, in circumstances of hostility from the world towards the church, his desire is to have a 'true and loyal, though most heavy, heart [and say, with Samuel] "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way."' (Keble, 1833)

William Temple takes up just this thought, deepening the missional and social sense of national infrastructure developed above:

If what has true value as a means to an end beyond itself is in fact being sought as an end in itself, the Church must rebuke this dislocation of the structure of life and if possible point out the way of recovery. (Temple, 1942, p.21)

Thus the walls around the 'seminar' are collapsed as the Church discovers its role to proclaim afresh the good news in each generation. The Church, emplaced within the constitutional infrastructure of national life, is indeed in a responsible position: to advise and, where necessary, gently rebuke. How a witness of contestation which hopes for reconciliation will speak amidst worldly expressions of cultural war will differ, at least tonally, in a changed environment from the late nineteenth century or from post-war Britain. However, the steady purpose remains of preserving the inheritance of faith by inviting those who hear the voice of faith in Christ to share in that same faith.

Conclusion

Accordingly, in conclusion, the people of England should listen to the voice of Church of England to the extent that it enables the right ordering of loves and loyalties by faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of the wilderness of this world's temptations. Where the Church has itself failed to offer a faithful witness, it should humbly turn back to God.

For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isaiah 57:15, NRSV)

God has established his throne on high and yet is also earthed with the humble – a fitting vision to guide a church aspiring to be simpler, humbler and bolder. By God's grace through Christ, the opportunity lies ahead for Temple's 'way of recovery', for the roots of

faith to be strengthened again, for the church to be renewed in loyalty to the inheritance of faith and for the nation to be revived by the God to whom Christian faith clings in expectant prayer and eternal praise.

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