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Aspects of Anglican Identity

COLIN PODMORE
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This collection of essays and articles has been published at a timely moment in the life not only of the Church of England but also of the Anglican Communion. Although Colin Podmore wrote most of these pieces before the current challenges facing the Communion arose, there is much here which will inform the present debates. The primary focus, however, is on the Church of England and there are important chapters on the origins and development of the Church, the understanding of Primacy in the Anglican tradition and on the history and principles of Synodical Government.

One of the great strengths of the collection is that Podmore writes as a church historian. But he is also an 'insider'. He has worked at Church House for almost twenty years and he has keenly observed and been at the heart of the key debates over that time. Of particular interest at this moment is the chapter on the development of the Anglican Communion, and anyone wanting to gain an understanding and perspective on the current debates should start here. The author makes the point that, throughout its history, the Church of England has been reluctant to claim a particular Anglican identity and he approvingly notes Michael Ramsey's question mark against the concept of Anglicanism.

There are obvious differences in the ecclesiologies of the churches of the Anglican Communion, and Podmore rightly suggests that these differences are often masked by the use of the same terminology. For Podmore there is a necessary provisionality about Anglicanism and he draws our attention to the address of Archbishop Runcie to the 1988 Lambeth Conference: 'The Churches of the Anglican Communion have never claimed to be more than a part of the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Anglicanism has a radically provisional character.'

There are helpful insights in the chapter on primacy in the Anglican tradition. It is a primacy of honour, not jurisdiction, and that distinction does not always seem to be understood. It remains to be seen whether an enhanced international role, currently being mooted for the Archbishop of Canterbury, is either a desirable or a necessary development for the communion.

Running though the book are three themes – catholicity, continuity and change in the Church of England. Podmore acknowledges that change and development are necessary signs of the Church's life, and he shows that the

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Church of England's way is one which always seeks to maintain catholicity and continuity. We should be grateful for this collection of essays, which provide illuminating and informative insights into the nature and identity of our Church and Communion.

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