

The David Nicholls Memorial Lectures

No. 6

2005

‘Law, Power and Peace: Christian Perspectives on Sovereignty’

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David Nicholls Memorial Lecture: 'Law, Power and Peace: Christian Perspectives on Sovereignty'
- The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford

Thursday 29 September 2005

The Iraq War was fought for the sake of freedom and democracy, so we are insistently told. And just as insistently, the news from Iraq tells us that, whatever else may have resulted from that ill-fated enterprise, the present situation is not exactly 'freedom and democracy' in the sense that the war's apologists probably had in mind. 'Democracy' is a word that we take to mean a certain sort of political accountability: government is made to answer to the will of the people, regularly and routinely, so that particular interest groups cannot cling unchallenged to power. But the tormenting problems over the shaping of an Iraqi constitution have brought to light very clearly some of the central tensions in understanding democracy. What if the popular will is overwhelmingly in favour of a form of government that does not correspond to our ordinary liberal assumptions? And what is to be done to secure the rights and liberties of minorities in a context of significant religious or ethnic diversity, where a majority vote may be the accurate representation not of arguments won but of a demographic advantage?

Most of us in the West would probably want to argue that democracy needs to be more than the guarantee that majorities have their way. This means that we have to introduce into our discussion the idea of 'lawful' democracy, democratic institutions that earn credibility not just by corresponding to 'popular will' but by placing themselves under law. But how we understand lawful democracy requires some reflection: if we are to avoid the self-defeating definition that law is what a majority says it is, we must clarify what it means. And in what follows, I want to connect this question with a set of issues much illuminated by David Nicholls' work and the tradition it represents, issues around the concepts of sovereignty and the state. This tradition has rather a lot to say to a range of current questions; and following this through will, I suggest, help us clarify at least some of the ways in which our present political conundrums need to be better anchored in a history of practice and theology that is normally ignored these days.

David Nicholls wrote, eloquently and pungently, on 'pluralist' theories of the state, following through and elaborating the insights of J.N.Figgis and Harold Laski in particular among twentieth century theorists. Roughly speaking, this defines a state as a particular cluster of smaller political communities negotiating with each other under the umbrella of a system of arbitration recognised by all. These smaller communities may be of very diverse kinds – trade unions, ethnic and cultural groups, co-operative societies, professional guilds (universities, the BMA, the Bar Association) and, of course, churches and faith groups; what they have in common is that they are what we might call 'first-level' associations, groups of agents dealing with the questions of self-regulation and self-defence that arise routinely in work and life together. They represent relatively unstructured forms of belonging, some of them chosen, some of them not. What is significant for the wider political scene is that they assume they have a right to exist and to take corporate action to keep their common life going in a reasonably orderly way.

But no one of them occupies the whole political and social territory; belonging to the Methodist Church and the BMA doesn't exhaust who you are in your daily business and interaction. So there has to be something that deals with your life when you are not acting specifically as a Methodist, something that clarifies what is everyone's business in the public sphere. And there may have to be 'brokerage' between different communities where diverse sorts of belonging provoke conflict. There have to be taxes, speed limits, a monopoly of legitimate force or restraint. The law of the state is what provides the stable climate for all first-level communities to flourish and the means for settling – and enforcing – 'boundary disputes' between them. The law does not attempt total regulation of how these communities govern themselves (though it may, as with British charity law,

require certain standards of accountable practice); Nicholls quotes (The Pluralist State, p.113) from William James, who insists as a metaphysical principle that 'there is always some self-governing aspect remaining, which cannot be reduced to unity', and notes that Figgis and others use philosophers such as James to provide a base or at least an analogy of some sort for political pluralism. What the law of the state does is to create the conditions, within a complex social environment, that allow each group to pursue what it sees as good. And if any group's notion of what is good veers towards anything that undermines the good of other groups, the law's task is restraint and control of any such tendency, as well as the defence of the whole network against destabilising from outside. If pluralism is understood in this way, then, as Nicholls points out, it is a great mistake to think of Hegel as some kind of an apologist for monolithic centralism. English Idealists who were influenced by Hegel were glad to point out Hegel's critique of the French political system because of its lack of intermediate civil society associations (ibid. p.77).

The pluralist tradition contrasts this vision of diffused governance and interdependence with a rival idea of state and law, in which what comes first, conceptually speaking, is a single sovereign power, beyond challenge, something that is not only a final court of appeal but in some sense a source of legitimacy for other groups. Here the law of the state is a universal and impersonal tribunal, before which every individual stands on a perfectly equal, neutral footing. If legal citizens decide to associate with each other in some way, they need the licence of the sovereign authority; unauthorised associations are by definition problematic, and the state has the right to suppress them. In the public sphere, all citizens are just that – individuals who have certain civic rights and duties. Nothing else should impinge, visibly or conceptually, on this public space.

Figgis, like his German inspiration Gierke, tended to identify this latter model with 'Roman' law and the former with the laws of the Germanic peoples. This is not a very easily defensible historical model; but it reminds us that Roman law was indeed intensely centralised, and that it was systematically suspicious of private societies – which is why the early Christians suffered. As an empire, the Roman state granted equality of status to people of all nationalities, and imposed upon all nationalities an absolutely uniform culture, reinforced by a formidably organised army drawn from all regions. The collapse of the empire left a dangerous void; into that gap stepped, simultaneously, the new Germanic kingdoms and the early mediaeval Church. The latter became the inheritor of the basic principles of Roman law, with a centralised system of courts and a universal sovereign authority, the Pope. But as this system lost much of its effectiveness and credibility in the later Middle Ages, it came to be replaced, not by some version of the looser systems of the old kingdoms, but by a new phenomenon, the nation state under its all-powerful prince. The sixteenth century monarch (Henry VIII, Philip II or whoever) was the single source of all legality and jurisdiction within the 'empire' of his or her territory (Henry VIII's legislation explicitly declared that 'this realm of England is an empire' – a single sovereign jurisdiction). And that territory was increasingly likely to see itself as a community with a single history and destiny, a nation whose members were united in a sort of racial distinctiveness. It is worth noting that the first openly racist laws were passed in Spain in the sixteenth century.

Now the detail of this is, again, vulnerable in a good many places; it is a broad sweep of argument, against which several points can rightly be made, about the other elements in the mediaeval papacy's practice, about the survival in Renaissance states of older feudal patterns and so on. But in outline it remains a powerful analysis, and is not unrelated to the very detailed and nuanced historical picture painted by Philip Bobbitt in recent years of the progression from princely state to nation state and thence ultimately to the modern 'market state'. There is, though, one more point to note, one that is more likely to slip the attention of a contemporary commentator. Figgis and Nicholls both give it suitable priority. I mentioned that the idea of the Roman state was intrinsically hostile to the presence of the Christian Church as an unlicensed association. The effect of this was to set a question mark against the sacredness, the ultimate claim, of the Roman state; its lawfulness

could not be seen as absolute and universal. The state has a proper power (early Christians are careful to say that they are quite content to pay taxes), but it is not a holy power. It can be challenged, and its finality can be contested. It has become secular, as we say. And across the centuries the effect – most noticeably in western Christianity – was to build in to a lot of Christian thinking a certain scepticism about political power in itself. The state administration might be good or bad, but it was not the dispenser of heavenly law.

This was frequently taken to mean that the Church could claim to offer what the state couldn't, a focal, omnicompetent authority; but there are some signs in the Middle Ages and after of a theological awareness that the whole idea of sacralised central authority, a single source of law, might be questionable, in the visible Church as much as in the state. At the Reformation, what happened all too often was that the all-powerful Pope was simply replaced by national sovereigns, and later by nationalism, the idea that this mysterious entity, 'the nation', was a God-given, unquestionable unit whose freedom to do what it collectively wanted had to be secured at all costs. Nineteenth century romanticism (and racism) did a great deal to make this seem self-evident; twentieth century history ought to make us wonder. We are now, in fact, in quite a good position, historically and culturally, to revisit the original theological impulses of the secular state and to understand more clearly the relation between belief in a divinely revealed order of community and the actual business of any state in the world as it is. And we have perhaps learned the dangers of imagining that the divinely revealed order can simply be made the material of legislative dominance in a complex society, of diverse convictions and practices. We are more likely to grasp the irreducibility of negotiation, tension and diversity, with communities of religious conviction playing their part in the middle of it all.

Out of this a number of points emerge with some clear contemporary relevance. One of them I have already tried to outline at some length elsewhere, and I shall touch on it here only briefly. If the pluralist account is to be preferred, it is a mistake to suppose that a healthy or just society can be sustained where there is a systematic attempt to restrict religious belonging or identity to the private sphere. The faith community – like other self-regulating communities – has to be seen as a partner in the negotiations of public life; otherwise, the most important motivations for moral action in the public sphere will be obliged to conceal themselves; and religious identity, pursued and cultivated behind locked doors, can be distorted by its lack of access to the air and the criticism of public debate.

But there is another implication that needs a little longer to tease out. In the pluralist thesis, state government makes provision for what is agreed to be everyone's business. There are areas of our social life where you can't begin to make a sensible case for different communities legislating their own preferences. In some degree, you could say that the state here protects the very conditions for there being any coherent action by anyone at all for the sake of a social good. If there are no taxes or speed limits or entitlements to medical care, there is no dependable social environment. No group will be able fully to achieve the goals that their particular association has in view because of the absence of certain general social conditions of stability. When the diverse first-level communities of the pluralist theory accept the arbitration of the state, they do so because they recognise the need for someone to address the necessary agenda which no one of them can manage – and indeed which no one of them has any obvious right to manage. The 'lawful' state is not one in which sovereign authority delegates downwards but one in which the component overlapping but distinct 'first-level' communities and associations that make up the state are assured that their interests are both recognised and effectively brokered, so that none of these communities is threatened in its pursuit of social good by others.

Now when we turn to the vexed questions around international law, we often come up against the idea that international law represents some deeply dangerous infraction of the sovereignty of the

actual national jurisdictions that govern us in our daily lives. But there is an obvious analogy between what the pluralist says about the state and what needs to be said (with some urgency these days) about international law. Just as the particular state has the task of addressing issues that no one community can tackle, so in the global context there are issues beyond the resource, the competence or the legitimate interest of any specific state. The most blindingly obvious at the moment is the ecological crisis, the complex of challenges around degradation of the environment, access to water, global warming and so on. It would be absurd to think that these matters could be dealt with effectively by any one jurisdiction; but if they are to be dealt with at all, then there must be some transnational authority capable of implementing 'pollution taxes', controls on deforestation or overfishing and a range of similar measures. This is the most extreme case of a power that secures what I have just called 'the very conditions for there being any coherent action by anyone at all for the sake of a social good'. Enough and more than enough has been written in recent years about the middle and long term effects on health and social stability of a process of environmental abuse developing at the present rate. The catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina has suddenly made these concerns very immediate, and reminded us of the social crises that come in the wake of environmental disaster.

But there are other issues of this kind. The Geneva Convention acknowledges that the ethics of international conflict cannot be regulated simply by individual nations; there has to be a compact that has some binding force – even if, in this case, it is not clear how much more than moral force is involved. The International Criminal Court is at best patchily effective, but it has at least kept on the table the notion that there is such a thing as a criminal way to conduct conflicts and that this can be adjudicated. Recently, the ICC has begun to take some steps towards identifying forms of the arms trade as criminal complicity in unacceptable forms of conflict. There is an issue over the sale of small arms that relates directly to the use of child soldiers in certain regions, and this has rightly been seen as a prime example of such complicity. The UN has encouraged regional agreements on this and has lent its weight to proposals for new conventions that allow higher levels of tracking and monitoring of small arms. It may well be too little and too late, but once again the issue is at least within the horizon of public discussion.

These examples are meant to show that we are increasingly aware of living in a world where the independence of nation states is severely limited – by economic globalisation, by the uncontrollable spread of pollutants, by the regional effects of local conflicts. And as we become aware of this, we realise that a tight definition of national sovereignty simply does not fit this kind of world. We can hang on to a conception of national interest and hope for the best; or we can grasp the various nettles involved in ideas of transnational jurisdiction – precisely on the analogy of the pluralist thesis about national government itself. We need a clear vision not only of the lawful state but of the lawful international system. There are things that are appropriately dealt with at different levels, and it is essential to recognise what no single nation or national jurisdiction can manage. There are issues that have to do with the security of any imaginable political and social environment, safeguards without which no individual state can realise its own conception of the good.

It could be said to be a version of the familiar principle of 'subsidiarity' – except that the term and to some extent the theory still seems to envisage a sort of delegation downwards of responsibility, as opposed to the referral 'upwards' to transnational level. The way we discuss sovereignty is often in terms of Renaissance debates – the illegitimacy of thinking there is any court of appeal higher than the national jurisdiction. This was, after all, at the heart of Henry VIII's changes to the mediaeval system. To be sovereign is to be inviolable, beyond challenge. But this works on the assumption that the rival to national sovereignty is supranational sovereignty of the same sort – a single jurisdiction from which authority flows downwards. The princely state and the nation state take their character from their reaction against a version of papal jurisdiction. So now, ideas of 'world government' provoke profound anxiety; and the British nervousness about 'Europe' as some

sort of unitary political or economic reality is a local version of this (understandable) fear of local decision-making being trumped by a higher court.

But if we have clarified our understanding of what sovereignty means within the state, it should be easier to talk about international law without these myths. The sovereign power is the power that is lawfully equipped to arbitrate among actual first-level communities on matters that affect the viability of any and all of them to exist securely and usefully. Comparably, an international jurisdiction is the power lawfully equipped to secure co-existence among nations in those matters outside any particular state's responsibilities or capacities. And this is perfectly compatible with the recognition that there are areas in which those responsibilities and capacities are and should be clearly in unchallenged operation. Where transnational jurisdictions are rightly suspect is when they assume rights to some degree of 'micromanagement', cultural or economic; Europe has not always had a good record in this respect; but the European Union in its original vision seems to assume at least some of the pluralist's principles.

To go back to our starting point: if democracy in any one state is not merely a recipe for majoritarian dictatorship, if the sovereign power is more than just the will of a majority, it should be possible to think of the international scene in a similar way. The unchallenged dominance of one national interest will always need restraining. Equally, international institutions damage their legitimacy if they become a context where majorities can enforce their group interests on particular states. If there is to be international intervention, it presumably has to be in a situation where a specific state has become manifestly dysfunctional, terminally incapable of securing the lives and welfare of its citizens, to the degree that their corporate interest, their common good as a state, has no organs for its expression. It is in fact not an easy discernment; though Rwanda in the nineties remains one of the obvious test cases (and one where international institutions did not, of course, cover themselves with glory). There remain questions about whether it is ever proper for a state to intervene in another on behalf of an international moral consensus or to salvage any remains of civil order in a situation of chaos (Tanzania's intervention in Amin's Uganda is a case in point). It is not a matter that invites a brief answer; I shall say only that such action needs at the very least a high level of explicit international assent, even if not a fully formal level, if it is not to be seen as self-serving and so to undermine its own purposes.

Let me return for a moment to the theological thesis outlined earlier. If one of the effects of Christian theology and practice is the emergence of the 'secular' state, the state that has no absolutely given claim on ultimate loyalties yet can rightly claim to be 'lawful' to the extent that it faithfully enables the negotiation of diverse communities in a peaceful context, it is important to exercise the same kind of theological reserve about international order. It is a secular matter, a matter of the network of political virtues like prudence and justice that enables the recognition and arbitration of conflict and the securing of an environment that is for everyone's good. There is a proper 'justice' in the attempt to guarantee that all specific states have access to environmental goods and protection against unrestrained trade in weaponry. There is a proper 'prudence' in seeking enforceable controls upon environmentally dangerous practice, and limits to acceptable methods of coercion within states and in conflict between states (so that torture, genocide and germ warfare are outlawed). But this is good and defensible not because there is a sacrosanct universal power imposing political morality; it is good because it is good for every participant in the negotiations of the international political world. When a transnational jurisdiction steps beyond the limits of what can be shown to be good for any state and seeks to prescribe what is good for this or that particular state, it is right to raise questions. This is, as I have said, not an easy distinction to apply; but it is important to have the distinction to hand.

A pluralist model of political life can thus, I believe, make sense of international law without binding us to the undoubtedly risky idea of some kind of universal sovereign state. The Christian

denial of sacred 'givenness' to any political order should make us as wary of any such universal sovereignty as of any sacred claims for this or that national polity. There is, ultimately, only one sovereignty which is theologically grounded, and that is Christ's. To quote Oliver O'Donovan's sharp formulation, 'the only sense of political authority acknowledged within Christendom was the law of the ascended Christ, and ... all political authority was the authority of that law' (*The Desire of the Nations*, p.233). And the legacy of 'Christendom' to modernity was the notion that particular administrations are open to challenge because they are there to implement a law they have not made and do not control (see Christopher Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty*, esp. pp. 1-14). The law of the state or of the international system exists to serve the variety of specific goods that are being pursued and often argued about in actual complex societies. When it appears to serve the interest of any of those specific groups in an exclusive way or, in the international context, the interests of one nation or federation of nations, it betrays its purpose and risks reducing the idea of law to the safeguarding of power, that ancient distortion defined by Plato.

The pluralist vision has been questioned by some because it leaves the state as such without a goal, a specific good. Matthew Grimley in his excellent recent monograph on *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*, observes how the pluralism of Figgis, for example, came to look far less attractive in the course and in the wake of the First World War because the crisis seemed to demand a more robust affirmation of the goods upheld and pursued by all British citizens. The nineteenth century confidence, rooted in the tradition of Hooker and Coleridge and refined by English Idealists like T.H. Green, that the state had the right to require and pursue its own moral goals, that it was itself a moral community, received a considerable shot in the arm between 1914 and 1918, and, as Grimley shows, it survived the thirties with great resilience – only to collapse after 1945 with surprising rapidity.

But this is only part of the picture. It is true that the pluralist model assumes that the state is in no sense an interested party, and so that it cannot in any simple sense have goals of its own, goals that are potentially in competition with those of its constituent communities. However, the very idea of the coexistence of moral communities in a complex state could be seen as itself a convergent morality of sorts, and one with a theological underpinning. It is good for first-level communities to see their account of the social good set in the context of other such accounts, good for it to have to argue its case, expose itself to the exchanges of the public forum. It is good that the peace of a society or of an international system should be more than the juxtaposition of wary and rather distant units, generally sealed off from each other, occasionally petitioning the state's tribunal for its rights. It is good because it represents the best security we have against uncriticised, sacralised power in the political realm. In the actual historical world of existing societies, the good is something that gets argued about. Certainly, societies regularly become impatient with argument and hungry for an account of the social good that is final and obvious – theocracy in past ages, ideological systems of left or right in the twentieth century, programmatic secularism in our own day. But this is to seek an escape from history; as we have seen, the fundamental vision of Christian theology both claims that the future has arrived in the assembly of believers around Word and Sacrament, and warns against supposing that this future can be rendered now as a public system, a regime, within the political world. When this happens, the Kingdom of God becomes a contender alongside others for the control of debated territory; it becomes less than itself.

This is a little different from the simple commendation of pluralism on the basis of a multiculturalist philosophy. That can in practice mean not much more than what I called the juxtaposition of mutually non-communicating groups. More can be said. If the state does indeed have a kind of moral interest, as I have been suggesting, it is twofold – an interest in securing the liberty of groups to pursue their own social goods, and an interest in building in to its own processes a set of cautions and defences against absolutism. But – to use the phrase yet again – in a complex society, groups may need each other's co-operation to pursue their own social goods. And one of

the things that the state can do is to facilitate such co-operation through its own sponsorship and partnership. A proper development forum in a city or region is one of the ways in which people build up an environment within which it is easier for all to pursue their goals – which is why it needs the co-presence of representative community bodies, commercial concerns, interest groups and faith groups. Education is an obvious context in which the state has a moral interest of the kind I have outlined in nourishing co-operation. To pick up a currently controversial issue, the state's assistance to 'faith schools' is not the subsidising of exclusivism but the bringing of communities out of isolation to engage with the process of maintaining what they and other communities together need, and to argue and negotiate. The state is thus more than a tribunal; it exercises its lawful character by promoting and resourcing collaboration.

And so, to return to our earlier analogy, international systems of various sorts can properly address those conditions that affect all states; they can seek for covenants of restraint over arms sales and pollutant emissions, even unregulated capital flow. The concept of a form of taxation recognising the transnational costs of some practices – the 'Tobin tax', the Contraction and Convergence proposals on pollution – is one that reappears more and more frequently in current discussion; and it is important to give a rationale for this independent of any fantasies of universal sovereign jurisdiction, a world superstate. What I have been suggesting is that the pluralist critique of certain ideas of national sovereignty offers a way forward in helping us see lawful authority as, at every level, what secures the bare conditions of any social good.

So if we go back to where we began, to the complications of how we understand the word 'democracy', we have perhaps a fuller sense of what is fundamental. Representative institutions and elective practices are no more than a means of majoritarian dictatorship without a robust account of what lawfulness means in society. Unrestricted liberty for any individual or group is unfeasible in any stable setting; but law is the bid to identify what everyone can recognise as guaranteeing stability and an equitable distribution of the freedoms of groups to pursue their goals. And this has a great deal to do with the way in which a state authority establishes dependable public institutions and infrastructures and guarantees due public process to deal with criminal offences. This helps, incidentally, to explain why military intervention to promote 'democracy' is so seldom anything other than hugely counterproductive: large-scale degradation of an infrastructure, almost inevitable in prolonged warfare, especially involving modern techniques of aerial attack, is itself an immediate obstacle to creating a trustworthy and thus lawful system of administration. As we have seen in Iraq in recent months, the setting-up of representative institutions alone fails to solve anything so long as there is no confidence that a system exists to secure the social environment and to act as a disinterested broker between communities. Despite careful and costly negotiations about the representation of diverse religious groupings in the Iraqi constitution – a proper recognition of one aspect of the pluralist concern – even this will not automatically outweigh the sense of a lack of public dependability, visibly embodied in failures in security, medical care, education, water supplies and so forth. Occupying troops are placed in an impossible and highly vulnerable position, expected to maintain an order that really needs so much more development of a firm infrastructure in the whole of the society. The tragedy of Iraq in the past two years should serve to make us more attentive, please God, to the gap between slogans about democratisation and the hard work needed to secure a reliable material environment for civil society to mature, and thus for a fully lawful state apparatus to be shaped.

To try and sum up. Lawful democracy is a situation in which the ordinary associations of human life, largely self-regulating, sometimes voluntary (credit unions, the Bar), sometimes not (ethnic groups, say, or the 'community' of those who suffer disablement of some kind), sometimes hybrid (religious groups), are held together in negotiation and limited but significant interaction through an administrative system that can plausibly claim to be defending the conditions needed for any one of these groups to do what it seeks to do. This system does not legislate provisions that directly attack

the beliefs and goals of its constituent communities, except insofar as there may be any such beliefs or goals that threaten the existence of other groups. It is also careful in its legislation to conserve certain basic principles of human dignity: it safeguards life and it prohibits the deliberate degradation of or causing of pain to any person in the name of the state (hence the now practically universal prohibition of torture in legal systems – despite the countless outrages in practice). In all these ways, the lawful state embodies the possibility of its being held to account; it denies its own invulnerability from criticism. Its sovereignty is not a claim to be the source of law, but the agreed monopoly of legal force and a recognition of where the ultimate court of appeal is to be located for virtually all practical and routine purposes. This does not and cannot preclude consideration of how the state's own conditions for effective existence are taken care of by instruments that deal with those matters, like the conduct of conflict and the defence of the environment, that are indisputably beyond any local jurisdiction. And the pluralist account of sovereignty and law within the state allow us to think this through without invoking the hugely risky resort of a proactive transnational sovereign power.

But the finally significant point remains the theological ground of all this. Despite its regular collapse back into theocratic dreams, the Christian tradition rests upon a strong conviction that no political order other than the Body of Christ can claim the authority of God; and the Body of Christ is not a political order on the same level as others, competing for control, but a community that signifies, that points to a possible healed human world. Thus its effect on the political communities of its environment is bound to be, sooner or later, sceptical and demystifying. In spite of the massive counter-movements of the twentieth century, Communism and the Third Reich, the drift of modern society seems inexorably away from any commitment to the state as morally purposive reality. In this context, we have a choice. We can look to what I have called 'programmatically' secularism as a solution: public life as a sphere of rational negotiation according to universal enlightened principles, with a strong commitment to equality before an impartial tribunal as the essence of citizenship. We can embrace a multiculturalism which seeks to keep the peace between essentially separate social groups or interest groups, with minimal government and much reliance on private initiative. Or we can explore the tradition I have been trying to work with here and ask what an 'interactive' pluralism would look like, that had thought through what was involved in the state's arbitrating and balancing function in a way which allowed active partnership and exchange between communities themselves and between communities and state authority. I have argued that this is a viable moral definition of the lawful state, profoundly linked with the Christian – certainly the Augustinian Christian – sense of the hopes and limits that can be seen in political life. I have also suggested that the pluralist vision will help us tackle the overwhelmingly urgent issues around global justice and prudence which seem so often to be thought about these days with inadequate conceptual tools.

The Church – like all other 'first-level' communities though for dramatically different reasons from other groups – does not exist by licence of the state. And that fact gives both reinforcement and limit to the state – reinforcement to the state as a system of lawful brokerage and stable provision, not threatened by theocratic claims, limit to the state as an atomistic sovereign system answerable to nothing outside itself. The tradition of theological and political thinking to which David Nicholls contributed so fruitfully offers a perspective uniquely equipped in our own chaotic political and international setting to provide a rationale for effective work towards justice and peace.

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