**The British Churches and the 2015 General Election.**

The article develops three categories to analyze the contributions of the UK churches to the 2015 General Election campaign. These are the prophetic type, the Church constituency type, and the local resource type. The strengths and weaknesses of each type are examined. The problem of agency in the prophetic type is explored in relation to the Church of England Bishops’ pastoral Letter. The difficulty of identifying or forming a coherent ecclesial political group is examined in relation to the Church constituency type. The local resource type is critiqued for its implicit political bias, something unacknowledged in the documents. It is argued that the local resource type is perhaps the most mundane of the churches’ contributions but nevertheless likely to be the most effective.

The UK General Election of 2015 was unusual because, as a consequence of the 2011 Fixed Term Parliaments Act, the date of the vote was announced well in advance. This meant that the churches, like a number of organisations in civil society, had plenty of time to prepare their members for the election campaign and vote. The result was a plethora of contributions from all the mainstream churches including letters from Bishops, videos, discussion materials, a DVD, a report and a manifesto. The following analysis of the churches’ contributions will begin by dividing the various texts into three types; these are the ‘prophetic’ type, the ‘local resource’ type and the ‘church constituency’ type. Each type will be defined briefly before we move on to analyze their key characteristics and features. In the analysis it will be argued that the prophetic type struggles with the question of agency. It posits a radical vision of an alternate political order, however it does not address the question of how this vision can be enacted, meaning its proposals are somewhat general and vacuous. The church constituency type seeks to construct an ecclesial grouping which politicians are encouraged to court, however there are questions about whether such a coherent political group exists or could be constructed. The local resource type is pragmatic, helping church members decide on the key question of who to vote for. As such my hypothesis is that the local resource type, whilst perhaps being somewhat mundane, is in fact the most effective type of church contribution.

The Prophetic Type.

Of the three types being analysed the prophetic appeal is the one many people associate with the Church when it contributes to political life. It is the type which famously seeks to ‘speak truth to power’. It offers some type of critique of the established order and a vision of an alternate political structure, based on beliefs and values. It is premised on an ecclesiology which positions the Church alongside the political establishment as a wise, albeit critical, friend offering insightful, and party politically neutral, advice. It assumes the Church has the capacity to discern problems, issues or questions denied to those enveloped in the immediacy of daily political life. As a type it depends for its effectiveness on the Church having the authority to be an important, critical partner. The Church of England House of Bishops’ Letter ‘Who is my neighbour?’ is a classic example of this type.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Letter warns of the danger to political life of a lack of vision amongst politicians.

The Bishops present a prophetic critique of contemporary British politics, a critique influenced by the post-liberalism of Philip Blond, and then a vision of the type of politics they desire. They argue that British politics has been corroded by individualism, and this needs to be replaced by an emphasis on local community and personal virtue. The critique begins with an analysis of the problems caused by ‘individualism’. Individualism is not mentioned explicitly at first however its problematic influence is implied in the critique of ‘retail politics’ and of politics as an ‘extension of consumerism’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Political parties are critiqued because they are more concerned with winning elections than they are with promoting a vision of the common good. The critique of individualism is then made explicit and developed in more detail through the analysis that Britain has become a ‘society of strangers’ rather than a ‘community of communities’.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Letter argues that the ‘individualism of consumer economics and political life today makes the individual sovereign’.[[4]](#footnote-4) The critique is developed further in the section of the Letter discussing the ‘Person in Community’. In this section the Bishops argue that our ‘society celebrates the autonomy of individuals but does too little to acknowledge that dependency on others is what makes human beings social creatures’.[[5]](#footnote-5) They maintain that ‘too much stress on the individual’ has ‘tended to diminish rather than enhance the moral significance of each unique person’.[[6]](#footnote-6) All of which means it is ‘important to move away from the focus on the individual to a richer narrative of the person in community’.[[7]](#footnote-7) There is then a hint that this emphasis on the individual is tied up with the dominance of Enlightenment ethical systems such as utilitarianism, when the Bishops state that, ‘(r)estoring the balance between the individual and the community around them is a necessity if every person is to be truly valued for who they are and not just a crude calculus of utility’.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Bishops are clear that at the heart of the problem of British politics is the success of individualism, as opposed to a notion of the person in a strong local community.

The bishops then call for a new vision which is ‘Beyond “Left” and “Right”’, echoing the title of Blond’s book and drawing on some of his analysis.[[9]](#footnote-9) By this they do not mean some sort of equidistant splitting of the political difference, but a new politics which avoids the mistakes of the past.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Bishops are critical both of the dominance of the market and the dominance of the State, arguing that without strong forms of mutuality the market and the State cannot generate a ‘better, more humane, society.’[[11]](#footnote-11) The Letter promotes the idea of strong local groups and communities in civil society. It has a section entitled ‘A Community of Communities’ in which the benefits of economic and political devolution are proclaimed, mirroring Blond’s promotion of greater devolution to local communities.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Bishops argue that, a ‘thriving society needs many intermediate institutions, including those who disagree with each other and pursue incompatible goals’.[[13]](#footnote-13) The Archbishop of Canterbury’s promotion of Credit Unions is analysed as an example of the importance of strong local communities, the Letter stating that they and Housing Associations, ‘are not important simply because they are effective but because they embody the principle of mutuality – the common bond between people being the heart of the operation and not just a bolt-on accessory’.[[14]](#footnote-14) The Bishops’ Letter commends the idea of ‘The Big Society’, despite its current unpopularity, stating that, ‘the ideals that The Big Society stood for should not be consigned to the political dustbin – they could still be the foundation for the new approach to politics, economics and community which we seek’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Related to this trust in local communities is an emphasis on the importance of personal virtues and wisdom, set against impersonal bureaucracy and individualism. There are hints that Alasdair MacIntyre is important when the Bishops write that it ‘is a fallacy to believe that a community of communities can be built from a position of assumed neutrality – everybody is rooted somewhere’.[[16]](#footnote-16) The Bishops then signal their faith in a virtues based approach to politics. The Letter argues that part ‘of our tragedy is that our politics has been incapable of holding a careful balance between different kinds of goods or virtues’.[[17]](#footnote-17) The Bishops suggest that ‘neighbourliness, strong voluntary commitment and personal responsibility’ were ‘virtues’ that ‘must be practiced, not just in pursuit of one’s own well-being, but for the flourishing of the communities in which one is set’.[[18]](#footnote-18) In this context economics is described as a ‘moral discipline’ because it is ‘hard to promote virtuous living when the shape of the economy sends a very different message about human responsibility’.[[19]](#footnote-19) Finally, beginning with the notion of virtue, the coherence of the Bishops’ critique and commendation of a new vision is described,

This letter is about building a vision of a better kind of world, a better society and better politics. Underlying those ideals is the concept of virtue – what it means to be a good person, a good politician, a good neighbour or a good community. Virtues are nourished, not by atomised individualism, but in strong communities which relate honestly and respectfully to other groups and communities which make up this nation.[[20]](#footnote-20)

This is a vision of politics indebted to Blond and the post-liberal theology which shapes his political ideas. There are a number of ways in which it can be critiqued; there has been much analysis and critical evaluation of the work of Blond and, even more so, John Milbank. The focus here, however, is on the problems with the Letter which arise because it fits the classic prophetic type Church document, as compared with either the resource or church constituency types.

There are two problems with the prophetic notion of ‘speaking truth to power’, illustrated by the Bishops’ Letter, of which the second, locating power, is the most important. The first problem is that it is difficult to speak of a shared understanding of truth. Philosophy, since the radical contributions of Nietzsche, then Wittgenstein and then in different ways Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty, have challenged the idea that we have a single Truth which is accessible through a shared, agreeable rationality. So when we speak truth to power we are, at best, speaking our truth to power. This is not an enormous problem for the churches because they, especially in post-liberal guise, are happy to be located as alternate ecclesial polities compared with the political establishment, informed by an alternate reasonableness and truthfulness. Nevertheless the authority inherent in the idea of truth is reduced when it becomes my truth, or more accurately, my perspective.

The much more substantial problem comes from the notion that we can locate power and then seek to influence it. The work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault challenges the idea that it is easy for the Church, or any other critical agent, to identify power in an authoritative centre.[[21]](#footnote-21) He has argued that power is more diffuse and fluid than such a monarchical model implies. This means that those desiring to be prophets have no simple figure, the sovereign, to whom they can direct their advice. It would be better, in a Modern, liberal, democratic society, to think of varied locations of power, created, perpetuated and supported by diverse mechanisms and discourses. This difficulty of locating a central powerful figure, to whom prophetic utterance can be directed, is demonstrated by the confusion of audience inherent in the Bishops’ Letter. The question they do not address is, who can change British political culture? The document is subtitled a letter to the ‘People and Parishes of the Church of England’ but then, because of its call for a renewal of the vision which underpins politics, seems addressed to politicians and in particular party political leaders. The Letter is not explicit about who will act as agents for this new vision, nor how it might be implemented, but the presumption is that this is the work of political leaders. The absence of identified agency can make the Bishops appeal for visionary renewal seem vacuous and idealistic. It could be suggested that the most effective means for achieving the change in political culture, which the Bishops desire, is to copy Blond’s strategy and establish a think tank which seeks to bring about change through conferences, reports and ministerial lobbying. The think tank model acknowledges that locating and addressing the diverse operations of power requires a multifaceted set of tasks. But then the question becomes why, so far, has this approach struggled to be a consistently successful agent of change, again a question the Bishops neglect.

One critical point to make therefore is that the Bishops’ Letter struggles to be effective because it fails to address this question of political agency. But this is not the end of the story. If we re-employ Foucault it is possible to ask of the Bishops, how it is that their exercise of prophetic intervention is itself a strategy whereby they can exercise public, political power? The answer is found in the ecclesiological assumptions of the Bishops. As we have noted the Bishops position themselves as partners to the established political order, able to act as wise and critical friend. That is, the rhetorical device of critiquing the established political order as a whole, for its lack of vision, serves to enforce a notion that the Bishops possess the authority and power to sit in judgement, alongside and contributing to, but not located within, the political sphere. Were the Bishops to offer more pragmatic or specific electoral advice, were they in fact to answer the taboo question they so studiously avoid, namely ‘who should I vote for?’, then their position as ‘beyond’ rather than within the polity would be removed. The Bishops offer a very general and dislocated prophetic call because this allows them to buttress their sense of their public authority. The dependence on Blond gives this general prophetic call the illusion of specificity. However it could well be surmised that the Bishops strategy of locating themselves outside the mainstream political sphere is one factor which generates frustration amongst politicians, for whom no such presumption or possibility exists.[[22]](#footnote-22) This leads to the paradox that, at the moment the Bishops seek to bolster their authority, at the same moment, it is undermined by alienating the very politicians to whom they are appealing. However were the Bishops to abandon their position as prophets then a greater loss of authority would occur as they would no longer be ‘beyond’ the political sphere.

The Church Constituency Type.

The second category of churches’ contributions to the election is the Church constituency type. It seeks to present an ecclesial organisation as a group with a coherent political identity which politicians might woo for their electoral advantage. Contributions of this type are not appealing to politicians to change their ways, in the Church of England’s sense of adopting a new vision, but instead are calling on politicians to see the electoral opportunities represented by courting these ecclesial groupings. There are two examples of this type; they are the Evangelical Alliance, who published ‘Faith in Politics? 21st Century Evangelicals. A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK – Spring 2015’; and the National Church Leaders Forum and their document ‘Black Church Political Mobilisation – a manifesto for action’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The EA document illustrates the type most clearly. It is presented as a report, the only one of the church contributions to be a report, with a wealth of statistics presented in various diagrammatic forms, ranging from charts to speech bubbles to illustrative see saws. It seeks to construct an evangelical vote through the mechanism of reporting on the voting habits and intentions of evangelicals, identifying the issues which matter most to them. At various points these views and beliefs are contrasted with the wider population. The EA report establishes three key points early on to demonstrate that this is an ecclesial political constituency worth courting. First it states that 94% of evangelicals say they are ‘certain or likely to vote in the coming General Election’.[[24]](#footnote-24) Second 39% say ‘they won’t be voting for the same party as they did in 2010’ and third 24% ‘are still undecided which way they will vote’.[[25]](#footnote-25) In other words there are evangelical votes to be won. However there does not appear to be a block Christian vote in the sense of the Religious Right in the US reliably voting Republican. When asked how they would vote ‘if there was a general election tomorrow’ 31% said they would vote Labour, 28% Conservative, 12% UKIP and 11% for the Liberal Democrats.[[26]](#footnote-26) So the vote is split, marginally more favourable to the Labour Party than was the case nationally.

The report sought to determine which issues were most important to evangelicals. The message it offered was slightly confused. When asked ‘what is the single most important issue facing the UK today?’, the most oft cited response, with 32%, was ‘Poverty / inequality’.[[27]](#footnote-27) This is in-line with the most significant issue in local resource type documents. The next issue was the economy on 17% followed by ‘other’ on 13% and race / immigration on 6%.[[28]](#footnote-28) Those surveyed were then asked ‘when considering how you will vote, how important are these policy positions or issues?’.[[29]](#footnote-29) 61% responded that policies around poverty were important, mirroring the issues question, however 71% cited ‘religious liberty and freedom of expression’ as important, this being the highest group. In the top ten policy positions other issues included socially conservative positions on same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia with some poverty issues around the living wage and food banks. The appearance of religious liberty as an issue is perhaps surprising given its low status generally in the campaign. This said, the EA’s own campaigning on the issue may account for its disproportionate visibility amongst the evangelicals selected for survey. What this amounts to is a mixed picture. The style and aims of the EA contribution, particularly the report format, are innovative and creative. They reflect a very different type of public theology. However the results seem less dramatic. In many ways the evangelicals surveyed show themselves to be concerned about poverty and inequality, politically responsible, socially conservative and conscious of some religious liberty issues. They do not constitute voting block that could have a decisive or significant influence on the election outcome.

The NCLF document is subtitled a ‘manifesto’ and has as its aim the mobilization of African and Caribbean churches for ‘social and political action’.[[30]](#footnote-30) The document seeks both to encourage members of the Black churches to engage in the election, through mechanisms such as voter registration, and make politicians aware that the Black churches are a coherent constituency whose vote could well be significant in relation to the final result. The manifesro stated that, ‘what we hope to do is to signal our maturing presence and renewed commitment to mobilise African and Caribbean churches and the wider Black community for social and political action’.[[31]](#footnote-31) It was the first time such a document had been produced by the ‘Black Church constituency’.[[32]](#footnote-32) The manifesto sought to examine a number of areas of ‘particular concern to the BMC (Black Majority Church).[[33]](#footnote-33) The areas listed were: the relationship between BMCs and the community; police and criminal justice; prisons; mental health; voting and political mobilization; family and marriage; youth and education; media, music and the arts; and international aid and development. In many cases these areas and concerns parallel social issues which impact on all members of the Black community, whether church members or not. For example the manifesto records the well-established position that a majority of Black people do not trust the police or expect fair treatment at their hands.[[34]](#footnote-34) However the purpose of the manifesto was not especially to discover or present new issues. Its aim was to mobilise the Black vote so that it could influence politicians.

One problem the manifesto had to address was the assumption that, unlike the evangelical vote, a majority of the Black community traditionally voted Labour. To a certain extent this was confirmed by the manifesto, it reporting that in 2010 68% voted Labour compared with 16% Conservative and 14% Liberal Democrat. What is interesting is that the manifesto qualifies this seemingly strong support for Labour by arguing that ‘the BME vote for Labour in 2010 was down from that of 2005’. It further states that ‘This trend is expected to continue’, citing the authors of the Ethnic Minority British Election Study as saying there is no bloc vote inevitably cast for Labour.[[35]](#footnote-35) In other words the Black vote is available for those who can address effectively the issues the manifesto analyses as central to the Black community.

The advantage of these two approaches are that they avoid the problems associated with the prophetic type document, namely the question of whether the churches have the authority to stand as a parallel body alongside the mainstream polity. The EA and NCLF deliberately limit themselves to the interaction of party politician and constituent, and so are located within the political sphere. There is no sense that the churches can go ‘deeper’ into political issues, or address foundational issues of vision. The disadvantage of this type is twofold. One problem is whether this ecclesial bloc vote actually exists, or could be formed. Despite the arguments of the two documents there is little evidence that an ecclesial political constituency has been established and could be courted by politicians. At second dilemma is the inevitable concurrent acceptance of the existing, mainstream polity inherent in the type. The scope for the churches to challenge the norms of politicians and the media is limited by their desire to be attractive to party leaders and potential government ministers. Whereas the Church of England may provoke anger and suffer alienation as a result of saying, in effect, a plague on all your houses, the EA and NCLF risk compromising the Church by working within the confines of the political establishment. This is not to say the EA and NCLF always agree with the politicians, they do not, and one of their aims is to change government policy in certain areas, but it is to say that they neglect what from the Church of England’s perspective is a fundamental role of the Church, namely to explore ‘deeper’, and potentially politically unpopular issues.

The Local Resource Type.

The third type is the most popular of the types of Church contributions to the election, namely the local resource type documents. There is a broad spectrum of this type ranging from those which include questions for party political candidates almost as an afterthought, and those which are specifically designed as local resources for church members and congregations. The Letter from the Roman Catholic Bishops is an example of a local resource document which is very close to the prophetic type. In the letter the Bishops identify ‘important issues’ and then suggest questions to be considered.[[36]](#footnote-36) The questions are frequently pseudo-questions in the sense that they are essentially points phrased as questions, and of a very general nature. For example the Letter recommends asking candidates whether they ‘have a commitment to support marriage and family life?’.[[37]](#footnote-37) An example at the other end of the spectrum of this local resource type would be the document from the Quakers, ‘General Election 2015. A guide for Quakers’.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Quaker guide included sections on what a local Quaker meeting could do in preparation for the vote, of which the predominant suggestion was to host a hustings but other ideas included writing to candidates, encouraging voter registration and inviting people in for a cup of tea and chat.[[39]](#footnote-39) Like the churches, the Quakers then identified a series of key policy issues. For each issue they offered a list of pertinent questions, some internet resources, some background information and statements from Quaker sources. The Quakers produced a separate document on holding hustings as well as a website and social media resources. Other examples of local resource type documents include: the Joint Public Issues Team document ‘Faith in Politics 2015 – Preparing Churches for the General Election 2015’; the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland document ‘2020 Vision of the Good Society. An ecumenical resource and a contribution to public debate in the run up to the 2015 UK General Election’; and the Salvation Army’s series of videos ‘Asking Questions that Matter’.[[40]](#footnote-40) While it is the case that these documents do also make political points, through both the issues they highlight, the examples they select to illustrate arguments, and in some cases through the statements they make, each are presented as a resource rather than an overt prophetic type statement. This different emphasis reflects an alternate ecclesiology. The Church of England has a firm sense of itself as a partner, alongside politicians, the media, the civil service and elements of civil society, which means it is able to think of its contribution as that of a critical friend.[[41]](#footnote-41) The Roman Catholic Church can also think of itself as an alternative ekklesia to the political establishment because of its history in Western Europe. This means its document reads much like the prophetic type statement of the Church of England. However this is not so clearly the case for the non-Conformist churches. Their ecclesiology locates them within the public sphere as one participant alongside others in civil society. So whilst the Church of England asked how it could change the political settlement so that it is in some sense better, the non-Conformist churches asked how they could shape the current political settlement so that it can better reflect their concerns. Such an ecclesiology may seem less ambitious than the Church of England but it avoids some of the confusion of audience that bedevils ‘Who is my neighbor?’. The resource type documents and the church constituency documents are clear about their audience, and so their understanding of the place of the churches in political life.

All the local resource type documents stated explicitly or implicitly that they could not advise Christians on which party should receive their vote. They claimed to be party politically neutral. However an examination of the issues identified for discussion by the local resource documents reveals that they tended to suggest Christians should vote for left-of-centre parties. The evidence for this is two-fold; first the issues the documents chose to discuss and then what they chose to neglect. To begin with the negative, it could well be claimed by the Conservatives, and to a certain extent the Liberal Democrats, that at the heart of a successful narrative of their performance in government was their economic competence. This took the form of making difficult and painful decisions to bring about government deficit and debt reduction. The coalition government’s central argument was that any increases in social provision depended on prior successful economic performance. This argument was ignored by all the local resource type documents. The economy was identified as an issue by some of the documents but it was discussed in the context of greater equality and fairness. For example CTBI’s document ‘2020 Vision of the Good Society’ in its section on ‘A moral economy in the service of all’ put forth a vision of an ‘economy that is as responsive to the knowledge and experience of the poorest communities as it is to the wealth and power of the richest’, something it contrasted with ‘the Reality’ of a global and national economy which ‘has generated great wealth’ but ‘at the expense of also creating growing inequality’.[[42]](#footnote-42) In its section on ‘The Economy’ the JPIT document, ‘Faith in Politics’, talked about how ‘(W)elfare cuts have proved worryingly acceptable to the general public, as the concept of the “undeserving poor” reappears’.[[43]](#footnote-43) It further presents as the main issues for the economy, personal debt, low paid work, material inequality, and the excessive corporate power. These two documents are the norm rather than the exception. The point is that this emphasis on inequality and injustice was not the Conservative Party’s starting point for a discussion of the economy. Further what was their starting point, deficit reduction, was not discussed by the documents.

The sense of a left-of-centre bias is reinforced by the issues these documents did choose to examine and discuss. What emerges is a sense of a politics of vulnerability, namely the issues explored by the churches were those which arose from, and impacted upon, the most vulnerable in society. Of the four most popular sets of issues discussed only one, the environment, is not concerned directly with the problems faced by the poorest and most vulnerable in society. This said, when the environment was discussed the point was frequently made that the global poorest would be hardest hit by climate change. This bias to the politics of vulnerability is most apparent in the videos produced by the Salvation Army, reflecting their work with poor and marginalized individuals and groups. They examine issues such as homelessness, alcohol abuse, unemployment and unsustainable personal debt. But it is by no means exclusive to them. The Roman Catholic Bishops have as their second question, ‘Where do your candidates stand on directly helping the poorest and most vulnerable people in the UK and also helping them to transform their lives?’.[[44]](#footnote-44) The Quakers highlight the statistic that ‘the richest 20 per cent of our population’ own ‘almost 100 times the wealth of the poorest 20 per cent’ which means that ‘Britain is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world’.[[45]](#footnote-45) This follows their statement that social security cuts ‘combined with new assessment and sanctions processes, are causing unacceptable hardship within our communities’.[[46]](#footnote-46) In fact if we examine the table of issues discussed by the local resource documents they fall into two broad categories. The first and main category is the needs and issues of the most vulnerable, in the UK and internationally. The second might be described as issues of particular concern to the relevant Church or organisation, for example peace for the Quakers, and the right to life for the Roman Catholics. What this concern with the politics of vulnerability calls into question is the party political neutrality of the churches’ documents. This is not a simple point of saying the Left care more about the poor than the Right. The Conservative Party is as concerned with economic and social policies that transform individuals and communities as say the Labour Party, the Scottish Nationalist Party or Plaid Cymru. Rather the point is more subtle and nuanced. It is the framing and discussion of these issues, without a supporting discourse about economic recovery, and with a supposition that the State can act as main benefactor, the impression is left that the authors of the documents prefer left-of-centre parties. In other words the overall effect of these resource documents is cumulatively in the direction of the Left. What this means is that whilst we have categorized the documents as resources to guide local members and churches they might also be thought of as a sort of ‘prophetic-lite’ contribution. That is, the documents tend to resource Christians in a particular direction despite their claimed neutrality. This is not to say either that such a bias is inappropriate or incorrect, even if it is denied. It is an inevitable result of the shared theological position of the churches. Rather it is to note that, in part, the local resource type document, although set up to guide and support members from a neutral perspective, also contains elements that might be thought of as prophetic, that is, proposing a party to support.

It is very difficult to measure the impact of local resource type contributions on the voting habits of church members, and certainly beyond the remit of this article; likewise the impact of the prophetic type contributions and those which sought to construct Church constituencies. The CofE Bishops’ Letter attracted by far the most media coverage, but it was not the coverage they desired, nor did it last beyond the immediate 24 hour cycle. If the analysis is correct, that the local resource type documents were encouraging people to vote to the left, and presumably for the Labour Party, this was clearly not successful. However problems with the prophetic type contribution and also the Church constituency type mean that, in an election campaign, something along the lines of the local resource is the most effective. The prophetic type, in the absence of an identifiable centralized absolute power, struggles with questions of intended audience. The Church constituency type presumes a discrete and identifiable ecclesial political grouping exists, in some ways like the Republican Right in the US, or is likely to emerge in UK political culture. But the evidence of this is patchy. Finally the local resource type approach does address the fundamental question of a general election campaign, namely ‘who should I vote for?’. As an approach it is most able to equip Christians to answer this pragmatic question, at a particular moment in political history.

1. The Church of England House of Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?. A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015*, available for download at www.churchofengland.org/GeneralElection2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p14, para 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p19, para 43 & 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p20, para 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p26, para 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p26, para 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p28, para 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p28, para 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Blond, Phillip, *Red Tory: How the Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It*, London: Faber and Faber, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p40, para 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p18, para 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See for example the *ResPublica* report, ‘Power, People and Places: A Manifesto for Devolution to Britain’s Key Cities’, details available at http://www.respublica.org.uk/our-work/publications/power-people-and-places-a-manifesto-for-devolution-to-britains-key-cities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p36, para 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p37, para 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p41, para 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p38, para 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p16, para 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p18, para 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p48, para 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. CofE Bishops, *Who is my neighbor?*, p51, para 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In particular see Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, London: Vintage Books, 2nd ed., 1995, and for more accessible discussion of key ideas, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, London: Vintage, 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A frustration apparent in the immediate critique of the Bishops’ Letter offered by some Conservative MPs, including the Minister Iain Duncan Smith, despite the fact that the Letter was in many ways most favourable to the Conservatives, as the commendation of ‘The Big Society’ illustrates. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Evangelical Alliance (EA), *Faith in Politics? 21st Century Evangelicals. A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK – Spring 2015*; National Church Leaders Forum (NCLF), *Black Church Political Mobilisation – a manifesto for action*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p3 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p3 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p5. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p12. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p12. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. EA, *Faith in Politics?*, p13. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. NCLF, *Black Church Political Mobilisation*, p3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. NCLF, *Black Church Political Mobilisation*, p3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. NCLF, *Black Church Political Mobilisation*, p7. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. NCLF, *Black Church Political Mobilisation*, p8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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