

The values of nationhood

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HEALING NATIONHOOD

Alastair McIntosh
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THERE IS NOTHING to stir up a hornets nest like questioning the basis of nationhood. When the Runnymede Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain reported that the concept of Britishness needed to adapt to embrace a 'community of communities' a torrent of pedantry was unleashed. The Home Secretary rushed to distance himself from the report he had commissioned; the right-wing press launched an avalanche of defences of 'traditional values' and the radical left demanded a re-evaluation of what it means to be British – even extending to abandoning the Union Jack because it is a symbol of 'white supremacy'.

But behind this turbulent froth there is a place for a mature and intelligent inquiry into the meaning of 'nation' and nationhood in the 21st century. One contribution comes from Scotland. Alastair McIntosh's *Healing Nationhood* examines the relevance of Biblical insight to land economics, power and the national renewal of cultural identity in Russia, drawing on the Scottish experience. The result is an illuminating essay on the interaction of spirituality and national identity and an exploration of the essential foundations of nationhood.

Central to this is the land with which people identify: "We Scots have come to realise that it is not just of economic importance. It is also vital to our cultural, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Land is the primary contributor to our sense of belonging as a people. From our sense of belonging we derive our

identity – our sense of who we are."

From this foundation is derived a principle of private use and community ownership of land which finds its expression in the system of collecting site rental values for community purposes.

But it is not enough for a nation to have a place, a 'land of our fathers'. A nation also has a soul, and when the soul is tired and sick it needs a spiritual regeneration to flood it with new life. This spirituality is the source of a nation's power and is born of a 'higher vocation' that is essentially good and embodies all that is best in the inner life of the nation. This is the nation's real soul, and if the nation remains true to it, it retains its vitality and integrity.

But, quotes McIntosh, "The Powers are good; the Powers are fallen; the Powers must be redeemed", and this is a book about redemption, about lifting the tired souls of nations from the degradation of capitalist (or socialist) materialism to a happier and more

dignified life, a promised land, of justice and freedom.

This is to be achieved by following the Biblical guidance in respect of the lands which nations inhabit. The conclusion of a detailed examination of the Old and New Testaments is this: "The landlord may speak of his 'sacred rights to property' but the theological position is that property rights are sacred only to God".

This in turn has compelling implications for the distribution of land ownership and the rights and attitudes of communities and individuals to the land on which they depend for their existence. McIntosh seeks to show "...how sovereign power comes to a nation through the land and its people, from God. The individual rests in the community, the community rests in the land and the land rests in God. The land and all that flows from it should therefore be treated with reverence.

"Restoration of a nations identity", he says, "therefore depends upon discerning its vocation and rebuilding an identity that can

be nourished from spiritual roots. This requires faith in the movement of the Spirit and a willingness to be of service in that work of God".

McIntosh makes a compelling case for the spiritual foundations of nationhood and for the view that the land a people inhabits is a common resource upon which the very existence of nations depends. His espousal of land value rating as a system of collecting community and national revenue follows from it, but should not be confused with it. It is perhaps more important that he demonstrates that a simple and practical fiscal reform is more likely to follow from than to be

the cause of a spiritual and cultural regeneration.

A collection of additional essays shows how these principles are being put to practical use in Scotland and teems with ideas about how they could be applied elsewhere.

