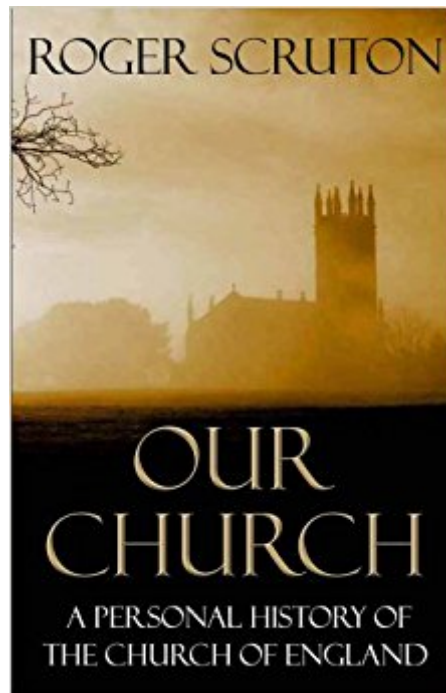




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Our Church: A Personal History Of The Church Of England



Synopsis

For most people in England today, the church is simply the empty building at the end of the road, visited for the first time, if at all, when dead. It offers its sacraments to a population that lives without rites of passage, and which regards the National Health Service rather than the National Church as its true spiritual guardian. In *Our Church*, Scruton argues that the Anglican Church is the forlorn trustee of an architectural and artistic inheritance that remains one of the treasures of European civilization. He contends that it is a still point in the center of English culture and that its defining texts, the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer are the sources from which much of our national identity derives. At once an elegy to a vanishing world and a clarion call to recognize Anglicanism's continuing relevance, *Our Church* is a graceful and persuasive book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Scruton writes beautifully about a subject to which he is clearly devoted -- Simon Jenkins *

Spectator * Scruton is suave and fluent... Evocative * London Review of Books * --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Roger Scruton is a writer and philosopher who has written on aesthetics, politics, music, and architecture. He is Research Professor at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences in Washington and Oxford and is Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. His most recent books, *The Uses of Pessimism* and *Green Philosophy*, were published by Atlantic Books.

From its beginnings, the Church of England was first something of a political creation rather than a religious one. It was carved out of the Roman Catholic Church, once Henry VIII decided to make the break when the pope refused to grant a divorce or annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Spain. Its early years were marked by the tumult of the Tudor era – Henry and the dissolution of the monasteries and Mary’s attempt to restore Catholicism (including burning Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, at the stake in Oxford). Life was comparatively quiet for almost a century, until Cromwell took power. The church weathered all that and more. But it has always had an official position within England’s (and Britain’s) governance structure, influence that helped to shape the Americans to decide upon an established church once the new country was born. As Roger Scruton points out in –Our Church: A Personal History of the Church of England, – the church has also been something more, even for those who don’t attend. It is a cultural presence in thousands of English towns, villages, and cities. C of E churches are a familiar sight, anchoring a locality in history, tradition, and community. This doesn’t mean that the church is a thriving organization in 21st century Britain; far from it. It represents tradition in a country that is knitted of traditions. –Our Church, – published in 2012, is not a history of the Anglican Church. Instead, it is a personal reflection and meditation of how Scruton understands the church; why he, raised a Baptist, converted to Anglicanism when he was 15; what the church’s sacraments mean; and how being a member of the church unites him to believers like C.S. Lewis and R.S. Thomas, doubters like Philip Larkin and Benjamin Britten, and to atheists and agnostics like Robert Vaughn Williams and Paul Nash. Scruton doesn’t tell a history but rather roams the history, art, and architecture of the church, writing with both affection and insight. He fully understands the problems the church but this is about what’s wrong and how to fix it. If anything, he has doubts about whether the serious problems the church faces can be fixed. Roger Scruton is an English writer and philosopher who has published more than 30 books on philosophy, aesthetics, beauty, environmental conservatism, conservative politics, human nature, and other subjects. He’s also written several novels. He teaches part-time at Boston University and the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., helped found The Salisbury Review, a conservative political journal, and founded Claridge Press. From my own experience, I can say that during the many times we have visited England, we have always included churches large and small on our itineraries – Westminster Abbey, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Southwark Cathedral, the cathedrals at Canterbury and Salisbury, St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle, Westminster Chapel, Westminster Cathedral, the chapels at Merton’s

College and Christ College in Oxford, and the churches of St. Mary-le-Bow, All Hallows by the Tower, and many others. The churches speak to England's history and tradition, and they speak to England's soul. Our Church is a meditative, often moving account of one of the country's most important institutions.

Our Church: a Personal History of the Church of England by Christian and philosopher, Roger Scruton, is a fascinating and unusual read. There is memoir as the reader learns about Scruton's belief in the Church of England. There is history as Scruton explains how the church came to be and how it different from other churches (denominations). And there is theology as Scruton explains what the church believes and why its beliefs are more acceptable to him than others are. In contradistinction to non-Christians, Scruton states that Christians "accept Christ as one Person of the Holy Trinity and the living Word of God" (176). And he states that "Christians are better fitted to endure [persecution] than most religious believers. Their model and example is a man who was despised and rejected", and although they are commanded to love their neighbors, they also know that the person who commanded this was crucified for doing so" (186). As far as the denomination itself, one might find the sum of his attachment to the Church of England in that other denominations were "nothing, for me, save doctrine" (105). The liturgy of the Church of England makes up an essential part of the expression of Scruton's belief. Throughout the book, Scruton argues that the Church is not something that is invented but coalesces around the foundation of doctrine or practice "that is, the Church exists, first, as a community" (12). The beliefs and rituals of the Church make for a "strict compliance to a community-forming code" (54). The Church, then, is organic and only exists in community. Scruton has not written an apology, per se, for the Church of England against other denominations, so there is not an intensive comparison amongst them. He does, however, look both historically and doctrinally at the Puritans who thrived at the same time as the formation of the Church of England "and he does not care for them" which is not a surprise. (Though his dismissal of the Puritan understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a "merely symbolic ritual" falls short of their explanation of "real presence," and, thus, Scruton is in error here.) This is an unusual and largely sound work of memoir and historical theology. I believe I understand more about the Church of England and Roger Scruton having read it "and it encourages me to read more of his work. However, as always, don't assume authors are always correct.

"Our Church" is one of the finest books I've read. It is a poetic, longing and soulful elegy for what is gone now but still lives in the memory of our senses, and hearts. All of us need a home, and Rodger Scruton's home is so much more than just the "empty Gothic building at the end of the road, visited for the first time, if at all, when dead." The Anglican Church is a treasure of European civilization. And here he gives us a tour. The book is too personal and particular to be for everyone. But it speaks to my heart like TS Eliot once did decades ago. I do not want to give the impression that this book is one of poetry or retreat. It is full of all the passionate bloody history of England and her church. Full of facts and lists and complexities. But that is not why I praise it so highly here. Rodger Scruton is a graceful, educated, gentleman of the old school; here, guiding us through ancient ivy covered Gothic stone, with stories of our music, history, architecture, literature. If you like introspection and quiet time with the old prayer book and the KJV Bible in a home you'll know as your own, then this book is for you.

It's great to get the religious views of this important modern philosopher. What we have in this work is a personal memoir with a lot of history and philosophy added to the mix. This is Scruton at his best.

This is a book to be read by every European. Scruton is the scholar to be read by all world readers who know English and understand what is going on in the world. This is a very well written book which shows how English (religious and not only) identity was sculptured through the centuries. A must to be read.

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