scientific knowledge, and the extraordinary productive power that capitalism unleashed. A truly liberal society needed to invest, Keynes believed, much more heavily in the first three and to worry a good deal less about the final member of this quartet. We should not, Keynes wrote: 'overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance'. The liberal challenge of our own times is even more clearly established than it was for Keynes. Finding an appropriate place for economic growth, controlling our numbers, keeping the peace and making more intelligent use of the power we have in order to lead fulfilling lives, without at the same time destroying the planet or sinking into avoidable military conflict with each other, is the trial that we face today.

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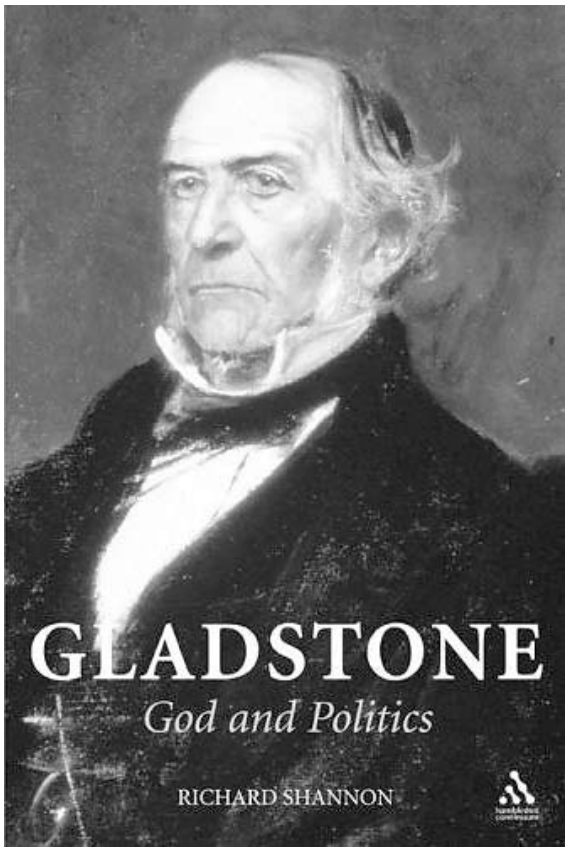
So many Gladstones

Richard Shannon: *Gladstone: God and Politics* (Hambledon Continuum, London 2007)

Reviewed by **Michael Ledger-Lomas**

Some years ago, Travis Crosby introduced readers to *The Two Mr Gladstones*. Historians of Victorian Liberalism might now be forgiven for wishing there were so few to contend with. The first generations of Gladstone's interpreters only had to map the stern young Tory churchman on to the crusader for disestablishment and home rule, who backed the masses against the classes. Since then, the publication of his diaries and the ongoing exploration of his papers has generated ever more Gladstones to be squeezed into the grand old man's silhouette: the lay theologian interested in Dante and Christian art who also scribbled anti-papal polemics; the icon of popular radicalism who was also a patriarchal Welsh squire and an 'out and out inequalitarian'; the erudite scholar of Homer; the dabbler in spiritualism and the self-scourging rescuer of prostitutes; even the progenitor of Blairite foreign policy. In years to come, historians of religion, culture and gender will turn up even more Gladstones as they continue to explore his vast hinterland, which survives in the physical form of his library at St Deiniol's, Hawarden. Yet Gladstone's eminence as a Liberal politician remains his major title to our attention: home rule mattered more than Homerology; the Liberal Party more than the ladies of the town. Both scholars and the general reader will then continue to need lives of Gladstone that reintegrate the burgeoning research into his inner life with his outer activity. It is this need that Richard Shannon's massively researched and pithily written *Gladstone: God and Politics* aims to satisfy.

Shannon argues that the reluctance of previous biographers to 'do God' has prevented them from offering a rounded or fully accurate picture of Gladstone the politician. H.C.G. Matthew's two-volume life of Gladstone (1986, 1995) did much to reverse the neglect of Gladstone's Christian faith that had prevailed ever since his first biographer, John Morley, turned a positivist's blind eye to it. Yet in Matthew's interpretation, Gladstone's migration from the Conservative to the Liberal Party was synonymous with the diminishing salience of his Anglican agenda. Scorned by Sir Robert Peel, ridiculed in print by Macaulay, and unable to accommodate the grievances of Ireland or political dissent, the young Gladstone's Coleridgean doctrine that the state should work exclusively for the Church of England quickly became a political liability. He had therefore moved quickly towards considering the state's priority as the promotion of fiscal justice between classes – Peel's lesson – and justice between nations. Gladstone's crusading governments worked on the assumption that the people had a fiscal contract with the state and duties towards Ireland and the wider world,



not an exclusive covenant with God. Without disputing the intensity of his religion or denying the tensions between him the Liberal Party, this account established Gladstone as the progressive heavyweight in opposition to Benjamin Disraeli's court jester, and was widely popularised in Roy Jenkins's biography (1995).

Shannon mounts a comprehensive assault on this interpretation. While claiming that historians can identify consistent themes in Gladstone's career, he denies that his understanding of politics underwent even mild secularisation. Gladstone's mind ran on a noxious cocktail of evangelical conscientiousness, Aristotelian logic-chopping and high-church ecclesiology until the end; he even privately wished that his death might occur in the middle of a church service. Shannon identifies some startlingly direct connections between Gladstone's beliefs and his political conduct, invoking, for instance, the Tractarian doctrine of 'reserve' to explain why Gladstone stubbornly withheld his intentions on home rule from his party and stressing that he privately credited successful speeches to the direct intervention of the Almighty.

Without disputing the formative influence of Gladstone's membership of Peel's second administration, Shannon denies that it was a school of moderation. If anything, it strengthened his authoritarianism, as he absorbed Peel's conviction that it was legitimate to defy party feeling in wielding the power of the state. Gladstone was no more interested in listening to the people than Peel had been. Unlike Peel, his rhetoric dwelt lovingly on the moral purity of working men and came to welcome their enfranchisement, but it denied them intelligent agency. It was generally reserved for Gladstone, with his providential gift for scenting the right 'juncture', to determine public opinion. Where the people did have a role it was as a picturesque backdrop to his prophetic oratory, or as an abstraction that could be used to shake Disraeli's government and menace Salisbury's House of Lords.

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Shannon is fond of Palmerston's prediction that Gladstone would destroy the Liberal Party and die in a madhouse: his trust in a 'great and high election of God' made him a commanding but ultimately disastrous Liberal leader. This was particularly true when it came to Ireland. Gladstone's obsession with providential mission led him to ignore the promising reforms proposed by other liberals and in due course to introduce a home rule measure that was eccentric in its reading of Irish history, vague in its details and absurdly sanguine in gauging the feelings of Ulster. In strong-arming the party into persisting with this hopeless measure, the elderly Gladstone condemned the late nineteenth century Liberal Party to impotence. At one point, Shannon suggests that General Gordon's mulish fanaticism made him the only man able to mirror and outface Gladstone's wilfulness. If the parallel is admitted, then home rule was the murderer of Gordon's Khartoum, a disaster resulting from a holy scorn for sound advice.

The book's dense narrative of Westminster politicking etches the negative lines of the portrait even deeper, as it necessarily shifts attention away from Gladstone's God to the intricate scheming required to implement His will. Hostile in its framework, Shannon's biography is also disapproving in detail. Briskly dismissive of Gladstone's scholarly productions, Shannon also has a sharp eye for his foibles: his weakness for foreign holidays paid for by wealthy businessmen and his inability to understand or respect minds, notably Disraeli's and the Queen's, which worked differently than his own.

The suggestion that Gladstone's peculiar faith made 'Gladstonian liberalism' an unstable, even an oxymoronic concoction is hardly novel. Shannon made it himself in a two-volume biography of Gladstone (1982, 1999), of which *God and Politics* represents a sort of executive summary. Jonathan Parry has compellingly argued a similar case, but differs from Shannon in his empathy for the Protestant latitudinarianism that actuated many of Gladstone's rivals for the control of the Liberal Party. God also 'spoke' to Lord John Russell and even to Lord Palmerston, although admittedly in a different accent. Moreover, Shannon's cursory and overly psychologised treatment of Gladstone's theology makes it an overly reductive key to his politics: little more at times than the belief that the ace that was invariably up his sleeve had been put there by the Almighty. David Bebbington has shown that it is possible to give a more nuanced account of the religious 'mind of Gladstone'. This emphasises change rather than consistency in his religious views and specifically his embrace from mid-century of a mellower, incarnational Christianity and of the humanism inculcated by his studies of Homer, which were not as off the wall as Shannon implies. Many Liberal electors shared these values, if not always the faith itself: the freedom of individuals and nations from unjust restraint and iniquitous taxation, tempered by reverence for social and intellectual superiors, and a love of common humanity. They were not just browbeaten into stage-managed acquiescence by their 'Caesarist plebiscitarian' leaders. Indeed, if we follow Eugenio Biagini and Peter Ghosh's recent arguments, Gladstone was less of the imperious Peelite and much more of the sincere party man, anxious

both to naturalise himself in Whig liberal tradition and to meet the desire of popular liberals for peace, economy and Cobdenite free trade.

The problem, then, with this kind of narrative biography is that the very sharpness of its focus on a Victorian statesman's quirks causes the environments that sustained him to fade from view, making it harder to explain the political achievement that drew our attention in the first place. The shortcomings of that approach are particularly evident when it comes to Ireland. Even if Gladstone's embrace of home rule represented a last fling of religiose selfishness, popular British Liberalism, as Eugenio Biagini has powerfully argued, was set to become increasingly preoccupied with the Irish problem anyway. If Gladstone's proposed solution split the party, this reflected not just his devious tactics, but the profoundly conflicted attitudes of British and particularly English Liberals towards Ireland: itching on the one hand to meet religious grievances and extend constitutional liberties, they worried on the other about maintaining the rule of law, the integrity of the Empire and the influence of Protestantism.

Richard Shannon has, then, not so much put a stop to the proliferation of Gladstones as added yet another to the list, with which historians of Liberalism will want to take issue. It is only a pity that the book's hefty price tag is likely to deter the general reader.

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Burke reflected

Peter J. Stanlis (ed.): *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Transaction Publishers, 2007).

Reviewed by **Sylvana Tomaselli**

It is a testimony to Edmund Burke's enduring popularity as a political writer that *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* is the fourth edition of this collection of speeches and letters, first published in 1963. Furthermore, Peter J. Stanlis's is the only available volume of its kind. 1984 saw the publication of Harvey C. Mansfield Jr.'s *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke*, followed in 1993 by Ian Harris's edition of Burke's *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, while Yale University Press published David Bromwich's *Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters, Edmund Burke* in 2000, which is closest in aim and content to Stanlis's volume. All are indebted to Thomas Copeland's *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols. (Chicago, 1958–78) and Paul Langford's *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1981–).

Both Stanlis's and Bromwich's selections seek to make more easily accessible Burke's writings and utterances other than the work with which he is most readily, and, regrettably, often almost solely, identified, namely his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Bromwich's choice of texts was partly determined by a desire not to abridge, and all but one, the four-day 'Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings' (15–18 February 1788), are presented in their entirety. This compilation does not, therefore, include early works, such as *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), *Tract on the Popery Laws* (1765), and *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). Instead, it begins with his first speech for the contested seat of Bristol in 1774, and is the shorter (by nearly 200 pages) and the more compact of the two selections, though it is nonetheless representative of much of Burke's political thought. Both editions provide a general introduction as well as more specific preambles to each of Burke's pieces. Both editors appear to greatly admire their subject, not least for his moral fortitude.

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The Burke that emerges from Bromwich's collection is the gifted parliamentarian, principled, tenacious, and an unembarrassed apologist of high politics in a lost world, one that was suspicious of the ambitious power of a commercial elite, and which perceived a marked distinction between political and mercantile interest. As Bromwich sees it, the real subject of Burke's writings on France is the ruination of deliberative representation by plebiscitary politics and slavish reliance on the popular will, while the real subject of his writings on India is the ruination of constitutional government by the usurping power of a commercial empire.

The Burke that emerges from Stanlis's collection is the impressively erudite man of letters, the talented stylist steeped in the classics, deeply knowledgeable about the natural law tradition and continental legal philosophy, as well as English legal history. His legal training, whilst abandoned, shaped his understanding of the nature