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SENIOR CHURCH APPOINTMENTS

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During the last year a review has been underway of senior church appointments. This followed a Private Members' Resolution passed at the General Synod. The review does not cover Diocesan Bishops, for whose appointment changes have only recently been made, but Suffragan Bishops, Archdeacons, Cathedral Deans and Residentiary Canons. The following is based on a submission to the review group. I was subsequently asked to give evidence to the group in person.

Introduction – on roles

The most important issue to be addressed in relation to senior appointments is the nature of the work to which people are being appointed. This is probably beyond the scope of the review, but unless it is resolved changes in process will be largely irrelevant. The nature of the roles clearly affects the appointments process since it ought to determine the qualities being sought in applicants which will in turn affect how the process is conducted.

The perception of many is that there is a centralising tendency within the Church and that the roles of Bishops and others are being increasingly dominated by administration. There has been a quip that 'Bishops are only Deacons' which, whilst unfair, has summed up the perception. For example in the Diocese of St. Albans a recent initiative on mission included the following statement in relation to clergy employment issues:

'Proposals currently under consideration are likely to have a significant impact on the work of bishops and senior staff in terms of ensuring procedures relating to appointment, review and capability are properly handled.'

This sort of pressure is turning senior staff into line-managers rather than ministers of the gospel. Likewise, during the last decade, a number of changes have gone through General Synod which burden Bishops and Archdeacons with more and more administration and management.

In this regard the general perception that Archdeacon is a stepping-stone to Bishops should be challenged. The role of Bishop should primarily be that of a pastor-teacher, and the role of an Archdeacon more that of administration and organisation. This being the case, the two roles require different and distinct gifts and in general a person is more likely to be suited for one role rather than the other. If we treat one as a stepping-stone to the other, this can and does shape the nature of both roles in an unhelpful way. I should say that I do not see why Archdeacons need to be ordained, but that is perhaps well beyond our scope.

Confidence

Perhaps the greatest problem we face is a lack of confidence in many of those appointed to senior posts. There are a variety of reasons for this but amongst 'classical evangelicals' part of the reason is that during the last 20 years there appears to have been only one appointment of a 'classical evangelical' Diocesan or Suffragan Bishop (ie. Wallace Benn). We can therefore fairly claim that the appointments process discriminates against us. This all contributes to the lack of confidence in those appointed to senior posts.

Doctrine & Life

Another contributory factor to the lack of confidence is that Bishops, in particular, are not felt by many to uphold the doctrines of the Church. This is nothing new, but it has been brought into sharp focus by some recent appointments. Therefore, it is essential that there is built into the

appointments process the explicit requirement that those considered for senior appointments conform to the life and faith laid down in Scripture and in the formularies of the Church of England. This does not mean a need to conduct a public enquiry into the teaching and lifestyle of individuals. But there must be widespread confidence that those involved in appointments are taking these requirements seriously, are asking the right questions and are prepared to say no when someone falls short.

God teaches us in His Word the requirements on those to be ministers in His Church which necessarily, and perhaps to a greater extent, includes those who occupy 'senior' roles.

1Tim. 3:2-7 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. (NRSV)

The words episcopos (1 Tim 3.2) and presbuteros (Tit 1.5) appear to describe the same office in Scripture. In the polity of the Church of England this includes priests and bishops, whether they are presbyters over a local church or Bishops, Archdeacons, Deans and Residentiary Canons. It is not sufficient to assume that someone who is ordained already matches these requirements. People and circumstances change and therefore the appointments process must ensure that a person for senior office is measured against these standards. As stated above this need not be done publicly but there must be confidence that it is done properly.

The instructions of Paul to Titus add a significant new dimension.

Titus 1:5-9 I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town ... He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Here is added the requirement that the presbyter upholds sound doctrine, teaches it, and refutes error. This requirement is clearly echoed in The Ordinal and is especially important for those who are to be Bishops. Our appointment process must ensure that those considered for senior posts do *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)*. They must be apt to teach (1 Tim 3.2), able to *preach with sound doctrine* (Tit 1.9) and also be competent to refute those who teach error (Tit 1.9). Great harm is done to the Church of Christ when appointments are made of those who appear more intent on undermining the historic faith of the Church than in upholding it.

Proven ability

As a consequence of the previous point, we should expect that in general those appointed to senior office should have proven ability in pastoral ministry. An exception to this might be some who have followed an academic career path since we recognise that the Church has always had some scholar-Bishops, though they must clearly have a pastoral heart and be able both to teach and stir ordinary church members. Therefore, the appointments process should favour those who have made a good work of ordinary ministry (this doesn't necessarily mean they have grown a substantial suburban church – but that genuine fruit can be seen bearing in mind the situations in which they have laboured – rural or urban for example).

This also raises the issue that many of those who are best qualified for senior office are the least willing to take it. One side of this is that they look at the offices and do not see them as being what they should be, this has to be addressed and I have referred to it above. The other side is the

reluctance of good people to leave parochial ministry. One way to approach this would be to follow the example of Empress Euodoxia who kidnapped John Chrysostom in order to make him Patriarch of Constantinople! A more workable suggestion is that the appointments process should actively seek out those who are doing a good work, and ensure that their reluctance is not a bar to them being considered, and cajoled.

Process

The process of appointments is secondary and unless we are clear as to the role and qualities required in senior appointments no amount of tinkering with the process will do any good.

Nevertheless the following are important to the process.

1. The process must not be bureaucratically complex. In particular, it must not burden Bishops and Archdeacons with more paperwork and committees.
2. Transparency is desirable but unless all appointments are to be made by open election there must be some degree of discretion, secrecy and trust.
3. Whilst democracy is a good thing there is nothing sacred about it. A small body appointed for the purpose is therefore desirable in making appointments. However, there must be a feeling that those making such appointments are accountable. The sense that Bishops and the Prime Minister's office are largely unaccountable has been the source of some recent controversy.
4. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the involvement of the Crown in the process of appointments. The danger for episcopal churches is that power becomes focussed on the Bishops. At its best establishment is a safeguard against episcopal tyranny. Nevertheless there needs to be confidence that appointments are not being made or blocked for political reasons and the role of the Crown and Prime Minister must be more transparent and accountable.