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### SENIOR APPOINTMENTS SURVEY

By David Phillips

In recent decades, and possibly for much longer, there has been discrimination against classical evangelicals in the Church of England and in particular in relation to appointment to what are called senior posts. By classical evangelical I mean those who are evangelical and remain convinced that Scripture does not permit women to be presbyters.

The Pilling Report, *Talent & Calling*, which looked at some issues to do with senior appointments acknowledged the problem and stated:

*'we have to recognize that there are two groups of members of the Church of England who believe that clergy of their views are not treated fairly and equally when senior appointments are made.'*  
(Section 4.4.1)

The "two groups" are traditional Anglo-Catholics and classical evangelicals.

The point has been made to the Archbishops' and Prime Minister's Appointments Secretaries and in correspondence with Bishops. However, in addition to classical evangelicals feeling that they are discriminated against there is the perception that they are actually unwilling to accept senior appointments.

It was therefore decided to conduct a survey of classical evangelical clergy in order to add some statistical substance to impressions and anecdote.

First we identified just over 400 parochial clergy who we believe to be classical evangelicals. We believe these people have self-identified as fitting our definition of classical evangelical. It was intended to include a few retired clergy but not those in first curacies or non-stipendiary posts. In fact a few curates and NSMs did slip into the list. Since we thus excluded a large number of curates and since there are undoubtedly others who slipped through our net of classical evangelicals I believe that the actual number ought to be between 500 and 600, possibly larger.

Therefore, the initial group represents at least 5% and possibly more than 7.5% of the stipendiary clergy of the Church of England. They are at least 6% and possibly nearly 10% of the stipendiary men, bearing in mind that this is the pool from which Bishops have been chosen to date.

Of these 400 we selected 200 at random to whom we sent a simple survey form. Almost exactly one half (98) of those surveyed responded, fewer than we hoped but a decent number. It felt a bit like Gideon preparing the army to meet the Midianites.

#### Profile

More than two thirds of the respondents were incumbents, Priest-in-Charge or Team Vicar. The remainder were a mixture of assistant clergy of some sort, in non-parochial posts or retired. About two thirds of the respondents were in their 40s or 50s. Those younger than this would not have been considered for senior posts yet, whilst those who were older might have been in the past but it would be unlikely in the future. We made no attempt to assess the present responsibilities of the respondents. However, amongst the original 400 are pastors of some of the numerically largest congregations in the country who lead large staff teams and who exercise wide-ranging, even international, ministries.

## **Expectations**

What might we expect from such a group of people? At the bare minimum these clergy represent 1 in 20 of the stipendiary clergy. On this basis we would expect to see that 2 are among the 44 Diocesan Bishops, 2 among the 44 Cathedral Deans, 3 or 4 among the 60-70 Suffragan Bishops and 5 or 6 among the 110+ Archdeacons. That is at least 13 among the current 260 senior posts. A more realistic expectation would be around 20 in senior posts and possibly as many as 11 among the Diocesan, Suffragan and Area Bishops. In fact, in our original list there are just two self-identified classical evangelicals among the senior posts.

To add substance to the above it should be noted that there have now been around 200 appointments of Bishops since 1992. Some of these of course are of a Suffragan becoming a Diocesan. Of these only one has been of a classical evangelical and many will remember the uproar in certain quarters when his appointment was announced.

From these figures it ought to be abundantly plain that there is a problem. The first aim of our survey was to collect further information to illustrate the discrimination that is going on. However, it is also possible that there are classical evangelicals who have been asked to take senior posts but who have refused. In addition if the perception exists in the wider church that classical evangelicals are unwilling to take such posts this would provide some small justification for people not being asked. There is anecdotal evidence that this has happened but understandably no-one is able to break confidences and give actual instances. Therefore we hoped that the survey would indicate whether there is evidence that this has happened or that the perception has a solid basis.

## **Results**

Of the 98 respondents only three indicated that they had been considered in any way for senior appointments and only one had actually been appointed. With such small numbers it is hard to know what to make of these figures, nevertheless it would seem to indicate that people are not just being appointed but not being considered. At any given time just over 3% of stipendiary clergy are in senior posts, although remember that our survey excluded first curates and included a few retired folk. I don't know how many clergy on retiring have ever been in a senior post but if any reader wishes to do a little random research using your copy of Crockfords please let me know.

## **What did respondents feel were the barriers to them being considered?**

First, and frequently cited is our opposition to the ordination of women. This is understandable. People will have different views but there is the perception that a classical evangelical will be unable to minister in senior roles because of their opposition to women as presbyters and the fact that they would have to minister alongside such women. This is a problem too for Anglo-Catholics who are also being discriminated against in senior appointments but for whom there are existing Dioceses, such as Chichester, London and Blackburn, which have had traditional Anglo-Catholic leadership.

One respondent to the survey remarked that his Bishop had told him that there was more sympathy for Anglo-Catholic opponents because so many evangelicals have accepted the ordination of women that those who refuse to do so are felt by others to just be awkward.

Secondly, there is the perception that we are too narrow. Or, to be more accurate there is the assumption that narrow is bad and broad is good. One respondent wrote: *"We aren't perceived to be inclusive enough and therefore wouldn't be able to function as a bishop to a whole diocese"*. Given that 'broad is the way that leads to destruction' I am not sure this is something we should worry about and it appears that our respondents were generally not worried. At the same time many are prepared to minister in settings that are not evangelical if they are free to proclaim Christ and

teach the Scriptures. Therefore, this perception is largely irrelevant. Remember too that there are many fine Christians from the past who it seems could not be Bishops in the Church of England today and one might particularly evidence the Apostle Paul who would definitely be considered too narrow. If Apostles could no longer be leaders in our Church what right do we have to call ourselves part of the Apostolic Church?

### **Are classical evangelicals willing to consider senior appointments?**

Most respondents were decidedly cool about the prospect of being considered for senior posts. Around a fifth would categorically not consider any such appointment and only a third positively stated that they were willing to consider any. The remainder were largely unwilling but not entirely closed to the idea or already felt they were past it, and need not worry about the possibility. This could well be a factor in why such appointments have not been made, but no respondent had actually been in the position of turning down an approach and as indicated about only three had any reason to think they had been considered.

### **Why are classical evangelicals reluctant?**

First, some naturally felt that they would not have the right gifts for the particular ministry, and this is to be expected in any group of honest clergy though some may well have the gifts but just cannot see it in themselves.

Secondly, many felt that the roles are very unappealing in the sense that they do not embody the ministry to which classical evangelicals feel called. I stressed this a few years ago in a verbal submission to the Pilling Group and the subsequent report did mention the fact though recommendations for reform were beyond the remit of the Group. Episcopacy in particular needs to be much more rooted in the local Church, and in pastoral ministry. All these Senior roles are seen as involving far too much administration and too many committees. There were calls at the General Synod in July to reduce the number of senior posts but nobody seems willing to stop piling more work onto them.

Related to this is the apparent expectation that because Bishops have a civic role then evidence of having engaged in such beforehand is seen as important. This disadvantages those who have immersed themselves in parochial ministry, especially in large churches and seems to favour those in other posts.

Thirdly, many respondents felt that there were expectations of those in senior positions which they could not in conscience meet. For example, "*Many Bishops exercise a ministry of compromise which is unbiblical.*" It is felt that some Bishops turn a blind eye to immorality and gross error, but this surely does not mean all Bishops must. The problem is that if someone takes a stand others may castigate them and if they run into opposition the general climate will be used against them to portray them as extreme rather than just doing their duty. It is not an appealing prospect but since when have those called to be ministers of the gospel let this deter them?

Fourthly, asked why senior posts are unappealing one respondent wrote: *Fear of being isolated by fellow evangelicals who regard senior clergy as necessarily compromised because they must deal with non-evangelicals.* Sadly people do complain, I have done it myself, against brothers in senior posts. There may be good reason but we must be especially careful before we speak against those in such roles.

### **Conclusion**

Overall the survey appears to confirm that there is discrimination against classical evangelicals in senior appointments. We are excluded, even ignored, from certain settings and this has fostered a sense of alienation. Despite having hammered away on this for some time I think Bishops and

others listen and then ignore what has been said. Increasingly classical evangelicals are no longer prepared to tolerate this situation.

At the same time I do feel that classical evangelical clergy need to be more open to appointment to such posts. We have to ask whether we are creating unnecessary barriers but at the same time be determined not to compromise on essentials. Ultimately however all this demonstrates that reform is necessary not just of some processes but of the fundamental nature of these senior posts.

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