

Crown Appointments

Submission to the Archbishops' Council
from Church Society / Church Society Trust

Church Society is a long-standing voluntary society within the Church of England. Church Society Trust holds the patronage to 113 livings and is the proprietor of four chapels.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make submission to the Archbishops' Council regarding their consultation paper. Below we make some general observations, general suggestions and specific suggestions.

1. General Observations

We are not against the idea of the Prime Minister giving up his role in ecclesiastical appointments but we are concerned that what results should be a long-term gain.

1.1 *Disestablishment*

1.1.1 Whilst the Green Paper and Consultation Paper stress that this change is not about disestablishment we believe that this a mistaken view and that it is better to face up to the fact that it is a factor.

1.1.2 There is a strong secular pressure in our society which has been amply demonstrated by Tony Blair's recent admissions regarding keeping his faith in the background whilst in office and the comments of some MPs and journalists in response.

1.1.3 Secularism is the desire to remove religion from the public arena and education. To the secularists it is undesirable that a Prime Minister should have a role in the appointment of religious leaders. We believe that this is the primary motivation for the present change. The pressure of secularism is a major problem for Christians and other groups wishing to live out their faith, particularly those who seek to serve in public office.

1.1.4 Since establishment is very definitely about having a religious expression in the public arena, albeit a particular religious expression, then we can only conclude that this change will be a step in the process of disestablishment and it is better to admit what is happening rather than to pretend it isn't.

1.2 *What sort of Church?*

1.2.1 There is a definite pressure in an episcopal church to centralise power in the hands of Bishops and bodies around them. It is possible to see this at work in some of the legal battles being fought out in the United States Episcopal Church and in some of the conflicts in churches which have separated from the Anglican Communion in recent decades. It is also very clear in the Roman Catholic Church in the way that power transferred to the papacy and then the papacy sought to retain that power through doctrinal assertions.

- 1.2.2 The latter point is particularly important because in the centuries prior to the Reformation there was a long conflict between the English Crown and the See of Rome. Henry VIII finally resolved the conflict (though for largely selfish reasons) and in the decades that followed, the Church of England, and the English political system, developed a series of checks and balances to develop and retain the character of both.
- 1.2.3 One of the key features of the Church is that we have ways of working which have prevented the Church falling to the pressure of centralising power in its Bishops. Lay patronage has been a key component in this and it is regrettable that legislation at various points in the 20th century has meant a gradual drift of patronage into the hands of Bishops.
- 1.2.4 Another key feature has been the involvement of parliament in church legislation and of the prime minister in ecclesiastical appointments. The principle behind this is that responsibility rests not with Bishops or monarch but with elected officials who are chosen by, and, in principle, answerable to the people of England (or more particularly the people of the UK).
- 1.2.5 Clearly the environment has changed, although more than half the population of England still identify with the Church of England, it does look increasingly anomalous that Parliament and the Prime Minister should have such an active role. Nevertheless, if changes are to be made then benefits of the present system must not be lost.
- 1.2.6 We are concerned that neither the Green Paper nor the consultation document really recognise the important checks and balances built into our system. Since the saying goes that you should not take down a fence until you know why it was put up we would wish to see the present benefits more clearly identified. Then, if change is to take place we should seek to ensure that their benefits are not lost and that whatever is produced should have checks and balances which are as good, and ideally better than the present system. We fear that what is at issue here is the nature and future of the Church of England.

1.3 *The role of the Crown*

- 1.3.1 We recognise that there are delicate negotiations to take place with the Crown and the consultation document had to be quite tentative, however we are concerned about what role the Crown will have.
- 1.3.2 Is it expected that the monarch will simply rubber stamp decisions made by Diocesan Bishops or Church committees? The proposal to send only one name in the case of all Bishops does seem to remove even the notional element of choice. It is understandable why the monarch should do this when the name comes from the Prime Minister but should she be expected to do the same when the name comes from the Church?
- 1.3.3 Therefore, should we expect that the monarch will have a far more active role? Might the crown for example take on the work currently done from Downing Street and become more active as a patron of crown livings and in the early stages of senior appointments? Might the crown indeed take more discretion in rejecting names put forward. If this is what results then we will

have replaced a situation which gives substantial power to an elected officer accountable to parliament and people and passed it to an unelected person who is not really accountable for day to day decisions.

2. General Suggestions

2.1 *Greater lay involvement*

Therefore, it seems to us that new arrangements should give a far greater involvement and say to lay people. We note that this is proposed in relation to Cathedral Deans but otherwise it does not seem to be a factor. Remember that the Prime Minister is a layman elected by the people, therefore it can be said that the people are losing out.

2.2 *Episcopal involvement*

We believe it unwise and unnecessary to involve Diocesan Bishops more through these proposals. In addition we believe that Bishops are already over-burdened with matters such as appointments and need to be set free to be leaders in evangelism. Any proposals which add to their burden should be resisted. Therefore we do not wish to see the role of the Diocesan Bishop increased.

3 Specific Suggestions

3.1 *Appointments Secretary*

Someone is clearly going to be required to do the work undertaken by the Prime Minister's Appointments Secretary. There are likely to be concerns if this simply transfers to a crown official or a member of the Archbishop's own staff team. The Clergy Appointments Advisor may provide a useful model since he retains and has cultivated a degree of independence and is perceived to be such.

3.2 *Diocesan Bishops*

Our only concerns with this relate to the role of the Crown noted in 1.3 above.

3.3 *Suffragan Bishops*

3.3.1 We note that the proposal to remove the requirement to submit two names does have the effect of reducing the discretion given and therefore necessarily increases the role of the Diocesan Bishop.

3.3.2 We believe this consultation and the Pilling report would be a good opportunity to introduce an appointments process that does not rely purely on the Diocesan Bishop. Perhaps something akin to the panel envisaged for Deans would be appropriate.

3.4 *Deans*

3.4.1 The proposed panel for the appointment of Deans certainly has merit. It is not entirely clear why the Diocesan Bishop should always have the right of veto and whilst it seems highly unlikely that an appointment would be made against his wishes it is possible to imagine situations in which others might wish to do so. For example if a Bishop was about to retire the need for the Dean and Bishop to work closely together would be far less relevant.

3.4.2 Therefore, we suggest that a better arrangement would be to require that at least 3 of the panel must agree to an appointment with no more than 1 voting against.

3.5 *Canons*

This would be a good opportunity to change the way that Residentiary Canons are appointed. In line with our general comments we see it as unnecessary to propose that the crown canonries simply transfer to the Bishop. It would be far better to produce a process in which more people have a say and the Bishop is, if at all possible, less burdened.

3.6 *Crown Livings*

3.6.1 On the face of it the Crown and the Lord Chancellor are no different to any other private patron. We would certainly oppose any move to transfer patronage wholesale to Bishops. When the Lord Chancellor's patronage was under discussion a few years ago we proposed that parishes be given the option to set up a local patronage trust or choose to opt for an existing body (we have a vested interest of course) or the Bishop.

3.6.2 Our concern with the present proposal, as indicated above, is that whereas at least in principle the present staff are answerable to someone, the new arrangement might not provide this.

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