

C of E – Church of England or Church of Europe?



Edward Spalton on the ruination of a national institution by socialist and Europhile folly

The English church pre-existed the unified kingdom of England and throughout history has been closely bound with it as an Estate of the Realm and as the educator of many of its most eminent administrators. The first article of Magna Carta specifies “The English Church shall be free”.

Long before the Reformation, English kings wrestled with the problem of a church which, as a massive landowner, was exempt from the usual taxes on succession to estates because, unlike barons, the church never died. Barons likewise found ingenious ways of giving parts of their estates to the church in trust for the benefit of their heirs. The church took its cut as an on-shore tax haven, also offering prayers for the souls of benefactors, thus extending the benefits of wealth preservation of the hereafter – an attractive investment package. Tax accountancy is not a new profession!

These massively wealthy corporate landowners, the monastic orders and dioceses, were part of an interlocking supranational cartel with their own internal system of law, answerable to Rome and not to royal courts. Many acts of Parliament testify to this clash of interests. The best known are the increasingly severe acts of *Praemunire* (1353, 1365 and 1393) which penalised the offence of appealing to or obeying a foreign court. *Praemunire* was replaced in 1967 in the run up to joining the European Economic Community.

The Lords Spiritual

The high officers of the church were important people who had to be consulted in Parliament. Today every Act of Parliament begins "Be it enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual", who rank in precedence ahead of the Lords Temporal – lay the peers – and the Commons.

Today there are twenty six Lords Spiritual. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester serve *ex officio*. The remaining twenty one are drawn from the bishops with the longest service. On leaving office, they cease to be Lords Spiritual but some have become life peers and continue to serve in the Lords. At least one Lord Spiritual attends each sitting of the House to begin proceedings with prayer.

They sit together on their own bench without overt party affiliation or whip and have the same rights to debate and vote as any other peer. They can take different views on the same subject but mostly follow the general line of the leftish liberal "social gospel" ascendancy which has dominated the Church of England for the last forty years. One long-serving independent peer reports that they are "Europhiles to a man".

This seems a little odd, as the whole foundation of the reformed Church of England was based on the assertion of national independence from foreign jurisdiction. Henry VIII assembled a powerful think tank to justify this claim. Unsurprisingly, by consulting "divers sundry old histories and chronicles" they found the answers he wanted. Henry stopped the church from sending money to Rome (1532) and in 1533 passed the Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome.

This was repealed for Northern Ireland in 1950 and for the rest of the UK in 1969 – again in the approach to EEC membership.

The act of Supremacy of 1534 stuck to the theory that

Parliament was merely endorsing what had always been true – that the king was supreme over all subjects and inhabitants of his kingdom. For the church this is summed up in the Article now numbered XXXVII in the Articles of religion, to which beneficed clergy of the Church of England subscribe today.

“The King’s Majesty hath the chief power in this Realm of England, and other his Dominions, unto whom the chief Government of all Estates of this Realm, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil, in all causes doth appertain and is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign jurisdiction....”

It is the English Declaration of Independence and was accustomably included in the Book of Common Prayer to be found in each Parish. This largely established “one use for the whole Realm” in the forms of Anglican worship until the liturgical fidgets which afflicted the Church of England from the Sixties onwards. Very similar wording appears in the Bill of Rights of 1688 and in the oath taken by Privy Counsellors, including today’s Archbishops, to uphold the sovereignty of the Crown against all foreign powers.

Those of us who experienced the frantic liturgical innovations between the 1970s and 1990s wondered what it was all about. Leading churchmen told us very forcefully that newer, modern wording was needed to be “meaningful and relevant in this day and age and moment in time” and to reach out to younger people.

The Anglo-Catholic party saw an opportunity to move the communion service nearer to the vernacular Roman mass. Dom Gregory Dix’s book “The Shape of the Liturgy” was very influential. Others were influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s idea of “religion less Christianity” for the common man. Bonhoeffer was an admirable man and a martyr. He himself drew strength from the traditional forms, which, he felt, were beyond the understanding of the average person. There was a touch of arrogance in this which extended to the Anglican

modernisers. They seemed to believe that a dumbed down liturgy was needed for dumbed down people.

Older members of the congregation asked me to approach the vicar to ask for a Prayer Book Evensong occasionally. He brushed it aside "They won't understand it," he said – referring to people who had known the service all their lives! "We must look forwards and outwards, not backwards and inwards". Immediately afterwards, he threw out all the Books of Common Prayer.

There was a very successful traditional parish not too far away, frequently attracting over two hundred morning services and a hundred to evensong. So the Book of Common Prayer was certainly not repelling people there. A new vicar was who arrogantly quipped that, as a first step, he intended "to bring the church into the nineteenth century". Of course attendance plummeted. He has long since moved on to senior appointments. I am told that when recently asked about this episode, he replied that the then Bishop had instructed him to "Get rid of the Prayer Book within three months".

Without decrying the successful ministries of those using the modernised services, what was the point of suppressing what was working very well?

In ignorance of that episcopal directive, members of the Prayer Book Society went to see the Bishop's successor who assured us of his concern and intention to maintain the Prayer Book ministry. He insisted no minute should be kept. Having seen no improvement in the situation, we wrote suggesting that clergy might be reminded to use the service appointed for the anniversary of the Queen's accession. The response was volcanic. We had touched a raw nerve. Some of the clergy still using the Prayer Book said that they were pressured to omit the prayer for the Queen's Majesty "because she isn't important anymore".

La Trahison Des Clercs

In the preface of the now discarded Alternative Service Book of 1980 the intellectuals of the Liturgical Commission said that they were “the mind of the Church”. The book did not include the usual state prayers and Articles. Neither does its successor, the pick-and-mix Common Worship. In hindsight, it is plain that it was not just the sovereign who was being slighted but sovereignty itself. The pastoral was mixed with the political.

From the same era, the General Synod paper “Britain in Europe – the Social Responsibility of the Church” (Ref GS 95) is one of the most rabidly Europhile documents imaginable. It lauds the European projects to the skies, containing phrases like “The European Economic Community was conceived by its brilliant and innovating creators...” – and looks forward to the Church of England’s role in dissolving the nation into the European polity.

As a solid, spiritually sustaining, much loved bulwark of personal faith and the constitutional settlement of Church and state, the Book of Common Prayer had to go because the Church’s leadership had decided that the nation itself had to go. So had her Majesty’s Government.

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