

CPAS and the Gift of Patronage in the Church of England

This paper answers the question: ‘Why does the Church of England have patrons?’

It suggests why patronage is helpful, why CPAS (an Anglican evangelical mission agency founded in 1836) is involved in patronage, and answers other issues that surround an ancient and historic tradition within the Church of England. Patrons are particularly important when a new Rector/Vicar is appointed to a parish/benefice in the Church of England and the significance of this involvement is evaluated for the 21st century church.

History

Each parish in the Church of England has a patron. This tradition has existed since Anglo-Saxon times. It is an ancient tradition, which often connects to the original foundations of Christian communities in the local context. Landowners and wealthy individuals often provided land and funding for the provision of worship and pastoral care on their estates. They built the churches and provided for clergy to minister. In the feudal and medieval system of governance, under the patronage of the Crown, the system worked well and relied on a partnership between Crown, local gentry and church. Patrons often paid for the original building and often provided land for the clergy to earn a living (so called glebe land), since there was no official stipend for clergy. For the church at large, the local bishop authorised (or licensed) clergy to minister, ensuring that official church holy orders were followed. The parishioners had little say on who ministered to them in ancient days! Patrons by nature of the role did not often change. They were mostly individuals and had significant and powerful parts to play.

Over time things changed. The reformation birthed the Church of England as a Protestant, established church governed by the Monarch, but patrons remained (the Crown is also a patron). The role and significance of bishops and their diocesan structures increased and so did the role of the parishioners, as parochial church councils were formed and church wardens had statutory duties alongside the incumbent. However, patrons always retained their right of patronage, which was (and still is) a property right (called an advowson) in law. Patronages could be sold and bought. Private individuals who no longer wished to act in the locality could sell the patronage right of a particular parish. The beneficiaries were often bishops, monasteries, Oxbridge colleges, cathedral chapters and so on. This introduced an important distinction. In selling to an organisation the patronage was no longer held by an individual, but by a ‘corporate body’ in law. In the eighteenth century many trusts were established with the purpose of acquiring patronages. Such patronage trusts were also corporate bodies. Individuals could bequeath (on their death) or gift their right of patronage to such trusts if they so desired. Eventually it became unlawful to sell patronages for money. The right of patronage in law still exists, but the worth is not measured in financial terms, and this is a good thing.

In 1986 the Church of England introduced a Measure (an act of Parliament that applies to the Church of England) governing the appointment processes for incumbents. In this 1986 Patronage (Benefices) Measure the parish gained legal rights in the appointment process for a new rector/vicar. The parochial church council now elects two parish representatives at the time of a vacancy process in the parish. These representatives have power to either endorse, or veto, any new appointment and their role is very significant. It is good that the parish gained significant rights at last! There are voices that wish to suggest that in the 21st Century, however interesting the history, patronage is now anachronistic. They wish for a move to employment, or to a potentially simpler set of processes and to something closer to a binary system. In response this paper wishes to set out that simpler is not necessarily better, and that there is a constitutional wisdom in patronage that is deeply embedded in our national life. Contrary to those voices this paper sets out why patronage maintains healthy balances of power, defends freedoms and builds relationships that enable good decisions to be made collaboratively.

Modern Day Parochial Appointments

The United Kingdom, unlike some other countries such as America, does not have a written constitution. In the USA, for example, this has resulted in the constitution requiring amendments (e.g. the first amendment, or the fifth). That approach places more emphasis on the written word. In the, whilst there are laws and customs, much more emphasis is often given to the concept of a balance of powers and of the necessity of the various parties working cooperatively. As a result, there is in the UK system a subtle mixture of law, balanced powers and relationships. Throughout the system there is a recurring pattern that is tripartite.

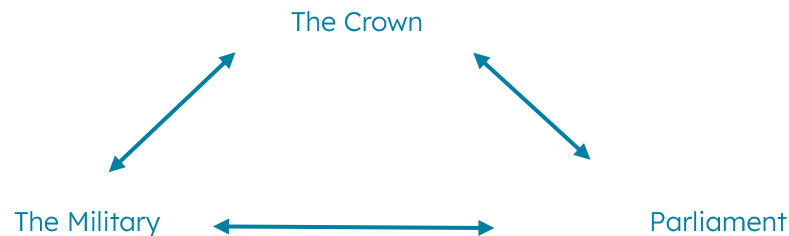
For the Church of England, in law, rectors/vicars are still uncontracted employees of a diocese. Instead, they are ‘office holders’ appointed and remunerated in a unique way. This legal distinction is recognised in Church canon law. At the time that an appointment is made the statutory interested parties come together to appoint and this legal situation can be best summarised by the tripartite system referred to above and the following diagram, which illustrates the role of each party: Patron, Bishop and Parish:



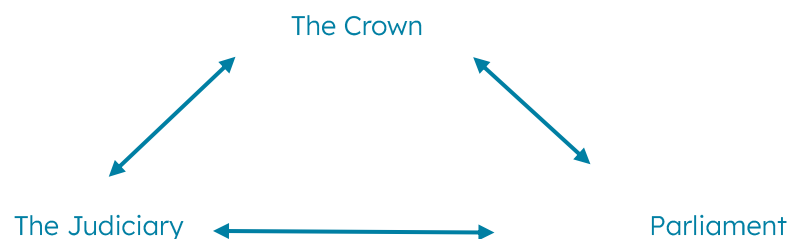
In any parochial appointment process all three parties have to collaborate to discern who may be the best person to become the incumbent of a parish. No one party can yield excessive power or influence over the process, and this tripartite arrangement is a natural check and balance on the abuse of power. In an established church, where parishes serve all the people in their area, this is a very significant and important model. It mirrors other parts of public life and governance in the UK.

Appointments to the Judiciary, Military and Episcopacy all have a tripartite arrangement involving the relevant body concerned; Parliament/prime minister; and the Crown. It is always the Crown that appoints. So, for a legal appointment there will be representatives who support

their legal profession, Parliament who present and the Queen who appoints. Similarly with bishops. Suffragans are chosen locally by the diocesan bishop and others. Diocesan bishops are chosen by the Crown Nominations Committee. In the case of diocesan bishops, it is the prime minister who represents Parliament and the Crown who appoints. Each case varies according to context, but each are a set of three-way, tripartite relationships.



Here is a diagram of another example involving Judiciary, Crown and Parliament.



In all these examples the tripartite model helps provide for good governance, because each party has to collaborate and co-operate with the other for the greater good and to ensure that power does not reside unhealthily in one place, or with one person.

What does Patronage Offer the Church of England Today?

1. Anglican Identity. Patronage connects the Church of England with its past and its historic duty of care to all the peoples of the land. Patrons often connect parishes with their foundation, their worship traditions and the core identity of what it means to be Anglican. Patrons have a long view of the local context, because the patron does not often change while parishioners, bishops and clergy do come and go!

2. Duty of Care. Patrons' prime role and responsibility is one of a duty of care to the place of which they are patron. Good patrons can act as wise external advocates for the parish especially at times of change. Patrons have to be consulted during pastoral re-organisation and can often assist both parish and diocese if difficulties with handling change are being experienced.

3. Tripartite Partnership. The tripartite model shown left illustrates that patrons particularly help provide an important check and balance on the operation of power within the Church of England at times of parochial appointments. No one party can operate without the other in ecclesiastical appointments, and this hopefully provides a very significant, and public, model of good governance at the centre of ecclesiastical structures. To move to a binary, or even unitary, way of handling appointments is fraught with difficulty and open to the worst forms of the abuse of power and influence.

4. Anglican Broad Church. The Church of England prides itself on being a broad church, which encompasses and holds together in one place many theological traditions. Patrons, with their connection to traditions and foundations, offer a significant mechanism for the Church to retain its theological diversity in a healthy way. For example, patronage trusts often represent theological traditions and their contribution is one way that Anglicanism retains its broad theological definition.

Why is Patronage Significant for CPAS in the 21st Century Church?

The above explains the history, role and legal significance of patronage within the Church of England. For CPAS, (the biggest patron in the Church of England with around 700 parishes), there are other reasons why patronage is so foundational and important. These are to do with the evangelical heritage and the leadership focus of the organisation. The following points summarise these reasons:

1. Evangelicalism in the Church of England. The Church of England is a broad church. Evangelicalism is a significant movement within it. Evangelicals represent a major theological tradition linking to the reformed, protestant character of the Church. CPAS has played a key role in uniting Anglican evangelicals, and patronage is one legal and primary way in which CPAS invests in this by appointing evangelical ministers of the gospel. This contributes to the theological balance of the wider church and influences parishes and senior church structures to remain committed to the gospel as received in the Scriptures and interpreted by the Anglican formularies.

2. Mission and Evangelism. CPAS is a mission agency that exists to promote evangelism and creative missional work in the Church. It supports parishes with materials, resources and training so that the mission of the Church can grow. The CPAS patronage churches are an integral part of this work and CPAS looks to appoint incumbent leaders with a track record in mission and evangelism and a commitment to grow the Church in this generation. Whether a church is large, or small, rurally based, or in the city; whatever the context CPAS' aim in all appointments work is for evangelical leaders committed to mission. The focus is the same wherever an appointment is made.

3. Leadership. CPAS seeks to promote missional leadership, both lay and ordained. As a leadership focused organisation patronage work presents CPAS with a unique, real and tangible influence at the coal face of the Church of England's ministry to the nation. Involving appointments in every diocese, patronage work is highly strategic, and provides a platform for training and development over the long term, since patronage rarely changes. It also provides a springboard of supporting churches that share CPAS' vision and look to the organisation for evangelical leadership and support at a national level. CPAS works with clergy, parishes, dioceses, senior leaders and others in the knowledge that there is strong support base of patronage churches who share CPAS' aspirations and vision for the Church of God in the UK.

Conclusion. This paper has explained the origins, history and value of patronage as it operates within the Church of England at a parochial level. It also explains why the Church Pastoral Aid Society thinks that patronage is a significant and important part of its work and ministry in the modern-day church. To learn how the process to appoint vicars/rectors actually works in practise, CPAS makes available a short guide called the Patronage Resource Paper, which outlines things like preparing for and running a recruitment process. This is available from patronage at the CPAS office.

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