The New Europe and Church–State Relations: the Case of the Euro–Anglicans

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The changes associated with the current emergence of the European Union and the reopening of Eastern Europe provide an opportunity to explore a unique set of church–state relations, those involving chaplaincies of one state church operating within the territory of churches of other states. The emerging new Europe provides a very different context for the activities of various religious groups including Anglicans in Europe and for the Anglican Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe in particular. These opportunities are examined in the light of the peculiar problems faced by this diocese in terms of the perception its role in Europe in the light on the one hand of new opportunities for growth and on the other of maintaining good ecumenical relations with other religious groups, some of which are often seen as host churches. One way of examining the tensions involved in this new situation is to explore the dilemmas and strains produced by the call of the 1988 Lambeth Conference for a ‘Decade of Evangelism’ in the worldwide Anglican Communion. How does a chaplaincy of one state church respond to this call when it is geographically located within another state, and sometime within the parishes of another state church?

This paper first examines the implications for Euro-Anglicans of the new Europe, then examines the particular problems and opportunities faced by state churches and by those offering a ‘chaplaincy’ style of ministry in this context, and finally moves to an analysis of the situation of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

The New Europe

A new Europe is emerging. After centuries of internal warfare, by the middle of this century a form of international association was found which through two opposing groups of treated association among the nations (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and the threat of nuclear war kept a form of peace in Europe. In the 1950s moves began to take place to form an economic, social and political association of the nations of Europe into a community of some sort. The European Economic Community (EEC) has been a reality for some time. Further forms of international cooperation among the states of Europe are being negotiated which are making the European Union (EU) increasingly a reality. Although union is not complete and some sections of the new Europe are posing extreme challenges, Europe is very unlikely to return to a pre-1950 form of (dis)association.
The changes which have occurred so far have left Western Europe, and increas­ingly Eastern Europe as well, permanently changed. Some of these changes have significant implications for church–state relations and for the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

In the first place, the emerging EU has no state church. The EU is secular. In EU debates the arguments for and against any issue are primarily economic and secondarily humanitarian. The emerging EU is self-legitimating beyond this very basic point of reference. Although many of the constituent nations of the EU have state churches, freedom of trade, religious freedom and relative freedom of the movement of populations within the EU have undermined the vestigial remains of the claims of these state churches to exclusive priority in dealing with the religious needs of people within their boundaries. State churches may continue certain ceremonial and support functions with respect to various levels of local and regional government, but they will not have the same accepted claim to exclusivity or extra-legitimacy for Europe as a whole. This change in the relationships among the states of Europe and the lack of a single state church in the emerging EU mean that the churches of Europe will be learning new ways of living in each other’s presence. The fact that the EU will have no state church will change the relationships among existing state churches, including the relationships among the various national forms of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe.

Secondly, as Europeans move more freely about Europe with the opening of borders and the expansion of access to employment opportunities, there will be a wider sharing of cultural products of more local and regional origin, including religious experience and approaches to worship. In a sense this is a regional, i.e. European, example of the globalisation process. As a result of this increased interaction among religious groups, there will be a tendency toward denominationalism among the churches of Europe. In such a context the Anglican Church will become one player alongside others in the increasingly open religious marketplace of Europe, no longer having to be so careful to avoid charges of proselytising. Moreover, to the extent that the European population becomes more mobile across former national boundaries, more European state churches will experience what Anglican churches have long known – being called on to meet the religious needs of people from various national origins and backgrounds to worship in the traditions associated with those backgrounds. Some European state churches may be called upon to open ‘chaplaincies’ in other countries as well as make welcome in their parishes persons from other backgrounds. This happens whenever populations become mobile, or when there is substantial migration. The most visible signs of this development in Europe are the minarets of the mosques built by Muslim migrant workers in various countries. However, some of these increasingly mobile Europeans may be attracted to the Anglican Church when away from the church of their origins either by Anglican spirituality or by a community of people who are also migrants and are from a similar occupational group.

Thirdly, the expansion of the mobile managerial class of people associated with the emerging EU has already increased the participation and involvement in Europe of English-speaking people. As a result it can be expected that the number of expatriate British and of those from other parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations living in Europe will increase. While the British are not notorious for high levels of church participation, their levels exceed those found in some parts of Europe. Moreover, Canada, New Zealand and Australia each have attendance rates about double that found in England. In addition, there is a marked tendency for the
religiosity of migrants to increase as they use the social group of the church to form a social base in their new community of residence. Where there is a church which relates to the culture of their origins and operates in their native language, this increase in religiosity works to increase the size and resource base of that church. Thus the fact that the emerging EU means that more and more British and people from the Commonwealth will be living and working in Europe for extended periods of time also means that there will be more potential members for the chaplaincies of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

Fourthly, the emerging EU is linked with England by the Channel Tunnel which will increase the numbers of British living in Europe, particularly in the northwest of France. A predictable proportion of these people will be church-attending and attracted to Anglican churches should they be available. That proportion is likely to be at least 10 per cent greater than the proportion of the age group attending Anglican churches in England because these people are migrants.

Fifthly, the emerging EU is attracting a larger number and broader range of retired British citizens. For several centuries some wealthy Britons have gone to the Continent to retire. Now more and more are doing so as it becomes possible for many who have been in business, the professions or the civil service. Many of these, especially males, increase their religious involvement upon retirement as they seek new avenues of service and ways of using their skills.

Finally, the emerging EU is likely to be less secular than its predecessors. This statement may seem to contradict the first point made above. Yes, the EU is secular in that it recognises officially no particular religious group. However, the anticlericalism and antichurch attitudes often associated with socialism and with a Marxist socio-political ideology are waning. Moreover, in the rest of the world there is a marked increase in interest in things religious, including Christianity. There is every reason to expect some manifestation of this in Europe.

Each of these six changes indicates a likely increase in the numbers of those living in Europe who may find Anglican congregations suit their religious needs. With the decline in hegemonic domination of territories by state churches, Anglicans will not only be able to reach out to the increasing numbers of British citizens living in Europe but will also be able to act as one denomination alongside others in providing religious services to those interested, whether of British or other backgrounds. However, state churches face particular problems in operating in this new context. I will outline these problems before examining the case of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

‘State Churches’ and Planned Growth

Because it is both a state church and a ‘church’ in the sociological sense the Church of England has always found ‘evangelism’, in the sense of planned growth – trying to motivate individuals to associate themselves with the church as ‘members’, or to increase their commitment to the church as an organisation, or to a set of beliefs, or to a particular life style – to be a problematic concept and activity. This is nowhere clearer than in discussions about the nature of evangelism following the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism. However, both the problem of evangelism and the means by which it is pursued take on particular interesting and problematic twists in the context of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe. It is the fact that the Church of England is a ‘state church’ in this case operating beyond the bounds of its state and within the bounds of other states which provokes the contentious issues and the
newly emerging EU which provides new opportunities for growth. The following section of the paper explores these complexities.

‘State’ churches are those religious organisations which are or have been ‘established’ churches: that is, those which have been the official religion of the state and enjoy (or once enjoyed) the financial and legal support of the state as well as official endorsement. Historically the relationship of the Catholic Church to the states in which it has been found in Europe has been like that of the state churches. In the fullest form of this relationship between church and state all people at birth have automatically been counted both as citizens of the realm and as members of the church. In some contemporary forms of this arrangement the clergy are paid employees of the state and bishops are appointed by the head of state. The church prays for the head of state and his or her government, its policies and its role in international events. Needless to say, this arrangement in various forms has characterised the Church of England.

The ‘state church’ gives fullest empirical expression to the sociological category of ‘church’ in the ‘church–sect continuum’ of types of ecclesiastical organisation. ‘Sects’, at the opposite extreme of this continuum, are voluntary associations of people who choose to join and are allowed to remain members conditionally upon their meeting certain belief and behaviour standards established by the community. Whereas ‘churches’ tend to be fundamentally inclined to accept the conditions in which they operate, ‘sects’ are usually at odds with and highly judgmental of their social and cultural contexts. While any particular ecclesiastical organisation will demonstrate some ‘church-like’ and some ‘sect-like’ characteristics, one of these orientations will tend to dominate and define its general orientation toward its mission and its relationship with both other ecclesiastical organisations and its social and cultural context.

The utility of this continuous typology of ecclesiastical organisation becomes very clear when issues of church growth and evangelism are discussed. Both these terms have their origins in ‘sect-type’ ecclesiastical organisation. ‘Church-type’ churches and especially state churches simply grow and decline as the host population changes as a result of changes in the birth, death and migration rates since all people in the realm are automatically part of the church by birth and baptism. According to this sociological model of ecclesiastical life ‘sects’, in contrast to ‘churches’, grow as they attract more people to decide to become members, and hence are usually very concerned with the recruitment of new members (also known as evangelism). sects are also much more focussed on the commitment, beliefs and behaviour of the individual. The personal salvation of individual Christians and the reworking of their beliefs and behaviour is a sectarian focus. Churches, on the other hand, typically relate to the whole social order: whole states, tribes, cities, families, groups and societies participate, but much greater variation is allowed in the nature of individual commitment, participation and belief.

In the historical European and British state-church arrangements, the second way in which the ‘church-type’ ecclesiastical organisation expands and grows is as the territory of the state which it serves grows. All residents in newly-acquired territories were presumed, invited or at times coerced to be members. In some cases the expansion of the territory of the state brought contact with those who were not Christian. Usually attempts were made to christianise these groups, although occasionally there was some discussion as to whether certain groups of people were human enough to be included, for example Australian Aborigines. Since state churches did not see themselves providing an ‘export religion’, evangelism in the sense of growth in
numbers of Christians and the spread of the empire were inextricably linked in fact, rather than in policy, as populations hitherto non-Christian were brought into the realm of a Christian empire.

In the expansion of overseas empires the role of the church was seen by the state to be the pacification of the natives and the provision of conditions for the orderly living of the occupation forces, whose efforts the church legitimated, whose losses the church mourned and whose battle-soiled flags festooned the church buildings. The church was part of the pacification process and instrumental in aligning allegiances with the newly imposed order. Treaties between the state and newly subject peoples often had clauses related to the role and position of the church and religion in the newly claimed territories. A typical example is the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand.

As respect for other Christian denominations and for other religions grew, the role of the ‘state church’ became that of the most legitimate, the most normal denomination of the Christian religion. Both ‘churches’ and ‘sects’ have tended over time to move towards a form of ecclesiastical organisation and relationship with the social and cultural environment which is now referred to as that of the ‘denomination’. Swatos has described and documented this set of changes for American Episcopalians. For ‘churches’ this transition involves increased acceptance of the legitimacy of other religious groups. The softening of Rome’s position toward those outside the Roman Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council is an example. This transition from ‘church’ to ‘denomination’ also, in time, usually involves a new and growing concern with evangelism as a means of maintaining or increasing the proportion of a population claiming to be ‘members’ or identified with the church. This concern often coincides with the withdrawal of state funding for personnel and fabric, which forces the church to seek a different kind of commitment from those associated with it in order to maintain itself. It becomes more sectlike. It even engages in evangelism.

Any state church experiences difficulties in taking a deliberate orientation to church growth. These difficulties are compounded for some churches by the fact that they have been associated with the empire-building of some European nations, often for centuries. State churches which were part of the spread of empires supported the status quo and the military, and were seen at the centre of garrison and trading towns. This is particularly true of the Anglican Church in the spread of the British Empire. This pattern continued for Anglicans throughout the Empire as the trend toward denominational ecclesiastical organisation increased through the nineteenth century. Anglican churches overseas provided a service to those serving overseas in various capacities, initially to the military (and, in Australia, the prison management) and local representatives of the Crown, then increasingly to commercial and resident populations.

In the first instance colonial Anglican churches offered primarily a ‘chaplaincy’ religion. As the nineteenth century progressed, other religious groups were tolerated, some of which also provided chaplains. ‘Chaplaincy religion’ is best exemplified by contemporary military, hospital and school chaplains. These chaplains are usually provided at no direct cost to those persons who receive their ministry. Although the chaplain services a particular target population, for example Anglican patients in a hospital, all who wish to may receive the ministry of the chaplain. The chaplain is a benign presence providing help, serves to ensure that the purpose of the funding organisation is advanced and legitimated (this is particularly true of military and school chaplains), and boosts the morale of those in doubt.
Chaplaincy religion is definitely characterised by 'church'-type orientations to ecclesiastical organisation. Much mission work takes on a chaplaincy air. The only negative side to chaplaincy is that it does not usually engender habits of contributing money to the church or organisation which supplies the chaplain. From the perspective of evangelism the chaplain is not concerned to increase membership, but rather to focus on a ministry of presence. The chaplain is on tap when a particular need arises but otherwise stays benignly in the background.

Out of these 'garrison chaplaincies' have grown many of what are today parishes, dioceses and provinces of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Others (largely in Africa) have grown out of missionary activities among the non-Christian native populations of other states, but our attention here is focused on those which have grown out of chaplaincy efforts. Most were originally known as the Church of England (sometimes 'in' this or that place). Most of these were never established churches in the states within which they are now located, since most of these states were formed after the renegotiation of the establishment of the Church of England in the 1820s and 1830s or, as in the case of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, broke their establishment ties as a result of a revolution or the republicanisation of the state. As the new states gradually emerged, they did so largely as officially secular, in the sense of having no one established religion and tolerating an increasingly wide variety of religious organisation, belief and practice. In each of these states an 'export' form of British society, including an 'export' form of the Church of England, emerged. No two of these are exactly like each other or like England. The term 'Anglican Communion' refers usually to these churches derived at various times from what is still known as the Church of England. It is important to remember the distinction between 'Anglican' and 'Church of England' in any discussion of either of these today. This distinction has particular relevance to the situation of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

The legacy of having been the 'established church' of a colonial power has both hindered and helped the role of these provinces of the Anglican Church. The 'chaplaincy' style of religious organisation is an important background to the development of Anglican churches in various parts of what was the British Empire. This legacy is very much a two-edged sword. It makes the church susceptible to the current critique of the excesses of empire and colonialism. The church, like the colonial state, is made to take the blame for whatever undesirable things are happening now, and rarely given credit for any desirable features of contemporary life. For example, Revd Samuel Marsden is blamed for much of what is seen to be wrong with the church in Australia (where he is referred to as 'the whipping parson' since he was also the magistrate who imposed sentences of the lash and death) and is blamed for some of what is right about church life in Aotearoa/New Zealand today (where he was instrumental in the conversion of the Maori to Anglicanism). On the other hand, its special relationship to the history of the new states makes the former state church a valued link with traditions and heritage. As the contemporary link with the established church of the past, the Anglican churches enjoy an aura of legitimacy, history and power which many, but not all, find attractive as they actively search out a church to attend.

As representatives of the state church, Anglican chaplaincies carried with them the wide diversity of styles of spirituality found at any time in the Church of England, including the 'via media' aspect of Anglican life which seeks to hold within itself both the genius of the Reformation and that of historical Catholicism and the contemporary vitality of both. Anglican chaplains also had an understanding of the
nature of the relation between church and state that was helpful in relating to Roman Catholic chaplaincies, particularly in Catholic countries.

Finally, the long history of chaplaincy-style ministry has left a positive legacy among many people. They see the Anglican church as a place which has served their families for generations and one to which they can go expecting to be welcomed and served and not to be subjected to inquisitive probing of lifestyle or tests of theological orthodoxy. However, this expectation does not square with the expectations of those Anglican clergy who wish to set standards for people seeking their services. According to the sociological model of ecclesiastical organisation standard-setting of this kind is a sectarian impulse, whether it is found among those of ‘high church’ or ‘low-church’ liturgical orientations. Great is the shock and disappointment of those who approach an Anglican church expecting a warm welcome only to find clergy making requirements of them before they will consent to baptise children or perform marriages. Many have been turned away and embittered by this treatment. On the other hand, those people seeking a more ‘sect-like’ religious organisation (that is, one ‘with standards’, or one consisting of a select group of the more committed, the orthodox, or better behaved) find toeing the line set a positive experience. One of the great challenges to the Anglican Church worldwide is how to cope with the real and very great differences between those of its clergy and people of a more ‘church-like’ orientation and those of a more ‘sect-like’ orientation.

The Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe

The Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe comprises over 200 chaplaincies (worshipping communities) throughout Europe. The presence of English congregations in Europe commenced before the Reformation, during which there was considerable theological and liturgical commerce between England and Europe. From 1633 English congregations in Europe have been under episcopal oversight provided first by the bishop of London. The Diocese of Gibraltar was founded in 1842 to oversee chaplaincies and congregations in Southern Europe and Turkey. In 1883 the bishop of London appointed a suffragan, the bishop of Fulham, to look after Northern and Central Europe. Following a decline in the number and size of chaplaincies and congregations during and after the Second World War a process of consolidation of responsibilities produced in 1980 the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe with oversight over all Anglican activities in Europe. This diocese works in cooperation with churches in Europe belonging to the Episcopal Church of the United States of America.

The presence of the Church of England in Europe presents a particularly interesting case through which to analyse changes in church–state relations in the new Europe and their implications for evangelism and church growth. English churches, chaplaincies and congregations in Europe (which will be referred to simply under their current organisational title, the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe) have not been the religious arm of an occupying, conquering, or colonising state (except in Gibraltar, Malta and, after the Second World War, possibly some chaplaincies in Germany). The Diocese has primarily provided an Anglican presence for British consular and other government officials living in Europe and for those British and other English-speaking people working, studying, or living in holiday and retirement communities in Europe. The entire diocese has been focused on the provision of what I have termed chaplaincy religion: it refers to its clergy as chaplains and to most of its parishes as chaplaincies.

‘Chaplaincy’ is much more than a mere matter of clerical nomenclature, however.
It is a deliberate way of life for the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe, reflecting the fact that in most of the states of Europe Anglicans have been 'guests' of these states, and in a sense of their churches too since, particularly in earlier times, if the churches had objected the chaplaincies could have been suppressed. By not referring to its churches as parishes this diocese demonstrates its respect for the territorial jurisdiction of the existing state churches whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran or other.

In the first instance, then, the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe ministers to those who if they were living in their nation of origin, or home, would be attending parishes of the Church of England or its variants in former British colonies. The desire to worship both in the traditions with which they are familiar and in their language of origin is common among migrants.13 The presupposition of impermanence of residence ‘excuses’ expatriot Britons from becoming part of the state church, or some other denomination, in their country of residence. Some also use it as an excuse not to become part of the society in which they live.

This respect for the existing state churches of the nations within which the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe works is also reflected in a deliberate policy against proselytising. It would probably be more accurate to describe this policy as ‘no active seeking of new members among the non-English-speaking population’. This is otherwise known as ‘no sheep stealing’ and represents ecclesiastical good manners. However, this diocese takes the policy much more seriously than mere concern for good manners would warrant. There would almost be embarrassment if, for example, a French Catholic were to decide to worship regularly in an Anglican chaplaincy. The fear is for damage to good ecumenical relations rather than concern for the care of a particular soul (a very ‘church-like’ orientation).

As a result of this respect for the local ecclesiastical establishments of the nations within which it works the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe has enjoyed admirable ecumenical relations with the various Christian churches in Europe. It is very likely that the policy against proselytising has been instrumental in securing the cooperation of local government and church officials in the work of the Diocese. In addition, the involvement of Anglican laity and clergy in several places in the formation and promotion of ecumenical groups and activities has positively enhanced ecumenical relationships between Anglicans and others.

However, it seems necessary to ask how well this ecumenical cooperation and policy of non-proselytising sits with the ‘Decade of Evangelism’ as proclaimed for the 1990s. On the one hand, the special European context of this Diocese can be used to excuse it from potentially disruptive evangelistic activities, inappropriate for chaplaincies, which could interfere with its longstanding good ecumenical relations with host state churches. On the other hand, a careful reassessment of recent changes in this ‘special European’ context may mean the opening of the way to an acceptable shift toward an appropriate form of evangelism in the Diocese. In this context, what does the Anglican Church have to offer the new Europe?

What do Anglicans Offer Europe?

The Anglican churches in Europe have provided a major service to British and other English-speaking people living on the Continent. Given the increase in the numbers of such people the normal target market for the Anglican churches is increasing. Moreover, as the vitality of these churches increases they can be expected to draw to them people who were not originally from this ‘normal target market’. These may be
people who have also migrated to their current place of residence, or others who for whatever reason are drawn to an Anglican pattern of worship and church order. There are several features of Anglicanism which may appear to those Europeans looking for a church to be valuable and distinctive.

First of all, some will be attracted to the style of worship offered by the Anglican Church: non-Roman, liturgical, dignified and yet contemporary, grounded in great Christian traditions, yet celebrating both its own unique history and the possibility of sharing in recent developments in spirituality and worship.

Secondly, most Anglican clergy are more open to accepting and remarrying (or blessing the marriages of) those who have been divorced than are most other churches in Europe. Certainly the Roman Catholics continue to alienate many who would like to worship but whose marital status makes them officially unacceptable. The evangelical churches can also be unwelcoming in this respect. Over one-third of all marriages in Australia, Britain and New Zealand are remarriages, and it is safe to presume that roughly the same is true in Europe. The Anglican chaplaincies will find a ready supply of people who need and who will respond well to care and affirmation.

Thirdly, Anglican churches are more open than many other churches to the ministry of women, including their priestly ministry. This not only broadens the base of priestly talent available to the Diocese but also enables the church more effectively to address the needs of all people. Some see the issue of women’s ministry as a hindrance to ecumenical relations; but this has not been the case elsewhere in the world among the Anglican churches which have been ordaining women to the priesthood for nearly 20 years. In particular, women may be in positions to provide exactly the leadership required in some of the transitionally viable chaplaincies as they move from seasonal to year-round activities.

Conclusion

As the new Europe emerges there will be implications for the way state churches and other churches operate. The new Europe presents an opportunity to examine changes in church–state relations and their effects. An interesting case is that of the Anglicans in Europe who although they are local representatives of a foreign state church are likely to see that church growing, for several reasons. Firstly, there has been a significant increase in the number of English-speaking temporary and permanent residents in Europe. Secondly, Anglicans have a range of approaches to Christian worship and faith which are likely to have wide appeal among non-English-speaking Europeans. Generally speaking, constitutional and demographic changes will affect both the way in which the Diocese of Gibraltar perceives its role and the ways in which the Christian churches in Europe relate to each other and to the state.

Notes and References

3 ‘Denominations’ are relatively equally valid, mutually accept each other’s validity, and
tend to operate in a market economy of religious preferences in a given society. The term originated in the United States where many religious organisations which were state churches in the homelands of migrants became one church among others. ‘Denominations’ are different from ‘sects’ primarily in that they accept each other as valid expressions of Christianity, whereas sects tend to see themselves as the only true expression. ‘Denominations’ are different from ‘churches’ in that they represent only their membership and not larger social realities.


I do not refer to those coming from the USA, some of whom will be attracted to Anglican chaplaincies in Europe. They are officially cared for by the Episcopal Church in Europe centred in Paris. In various parts of Europe they often join Anglicans for worship (even as, no doubt, some Anglicans in Europe choose to worship with the Episcopalians).


I deliberately use the term Anglican to refer to those ecclesiastical bodies deriving from the Church of England but which are outside England. I argue that it is the generic of which there are variations including the Church of England.

For a more detailed development of this concept see Gary D. Bouma, Religion: Meaning, Transcendence and Community in Australia (Longman, Melbourne, 1992), pp. 151 ff.

For an account of this process in Australia see Ian Breward, A History of the Australian Churches (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993).

‘Real’ in the sense that these differences will not go away, cannot be transcended and have significant consequences for policy and personnel in the Anglican Church.

As one Greek migrant to Australia put it, ‘I speak English at work, I speak English to my children, but when I want to tell my wife I love her, when I want to express what is in my heart, what is most important to me, then I speak Greek.’