

A new Archbishop of Canterbury, seeking the very best compromise or none?

The secretive Church of England, Crown Nominations Commission, has after three meetings apparently failed to agree as yet on a new Archbishop of Canterbury ... or its members may have agreed on their first choice but be divided over the statutory second name, or they may be starting all over again in their deliberations. Various journalists who claim, somewhat implausibly, to have the story, have reported each of these scenarios as fact.

It is strange that the Church of England should still appoint its bishops in a fashion that provides for just sixteen voting members of a semi-clandestine Commission to make a decision, which in the case of Canterbury at least, might have a profound outcome for the entire worldwide Anglican Communion.

Bishops chosen by larger and more public electoral bodies is the norm elsewhere in the world. Such processes are, of course, not without potentially serious flaws that do occur from time to time. Divining the will of the Holy Spirit for leadership qualities has always been difficult, ever since the disciples of our Lord entrusted themselves to the casting of lots (albeit after prayer) to replace one of their number.¹ It is probably time to revisit the process of selection for the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as that of English bishops.

Despite the failure, thus far, of the Crown Nominations Commission to deliver a name to a public and media awaiting the white smoke of a Downing Street press conference, this system remains the current means whereby a candidate will eventually emerge. This still leaves open the possibility of an Anglican style compromise candidate and theoretically, none of the frontrunners', so widely touted in the news, might finally emerge as successful candidates.

Such speculative ruminations will continue for as long as there is no announcement and in the same vein perhaps it would be no bad thing for the Crown Nominations Commission to continue its deliberations indefinitely? As has been frequently commented the job specification for any Archbishop of Canterbury is too big, too difficult, too potentially divisive and altogether too demanding for one person. In which case, it is worth asking whether the Anglican Communion or even the Church of England any longer needs such a figure at all?

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October 2012

¹ *Cleromancy* See Acts 1 v 23-26