Engaging with Europe: Turning Hope into Action: GS Misc 921

A Report from the Church of England's Europe Bishops' Panel

May 2009

Overview

This report by the Europe Bishops' Panel, provides an opportunity for the Panel to celebrate and share with others what has been achieved since its establishment in 2005. It also sets out the objectives for the years ahead and in so doing invites others to work with and through the Panel in securing these objectives.

Our History

The Europe Bishops' Panel was established in 2005 to help the Church of England's Archbishops' Council take forward the conclusions of the General Synod debate on Europe in July 2004. The report informing this debate, *The Church of England and Europe*, provided an overview of the Church of England's contribution to the ongoing debate as to the reform of the EU, as well as the myriad of relationships that the Church has with mainland Europe. This report and its recommendations offered a strategic framework for the Church's engagement in and with Europe (See Box 1). It was against this background that the House of Bishops' Standing Committee agreed the Panel's terms of reference (See Box 2).

Box 1

Extract from *The Church of England and Europe*, a report by the Mission and Public Affairs Council and the Council for Christian Unity, for the July 2004 General Synod

"The Council for Christian Unity and the Mission and Public Affairs Council invite the Church of England's General Synod to affirm the following aims for work at all levels of the Church in the Europe of the new century:

- to work locally, nationally and internationally with other churches to ensure the most effective presentation of the Gospel, to join in debate and action for the future of Europe, the harmony and values of its people, and the building of peace and social justice in this continent and beyond;
- to engage through all our work, explicitly and implicitly, in promoting the mission and unity of the Church, and to enthuse new generations for that work;
- through the diocese in Europe, in collaboration with other Anglican jurisdictions and our ecumenical partners, to support Anglican ministry in Europe;
- to continue to articulate the Christian voice in the shaping of the new Europe in fellowship with other partners, with particular emphasis upon sustainable development and tackling world poverty.

Inevitably, this work will proceed through avenues of opportunity which are either well established or are opening up with new and unforeseen challenges. The preceding chapters have highlighted the main areas of opportunity and challenge, which may be summarized as:

- the debate on the future of Europe, both within and outside the Union; constitutional issues; values, and how the churches can speak with a common voice on these issues;
- the changing role and challenges facing the Diocese in Europe and through the Diocese the role of the Church of England;
- the opportunities for common witness and joint mission presented by the European Anglican Provincial Consultation, the Partners in Mission Report agenda, and our ecclesial unity with Old Catholic and Porvoo Churches;
- the multiple opportunities emerging for the mission agencies in partnership with the Church's work of reconciliation and evangelization;
- the continued growth and development of our bilateral relationship or agreements with the Meissen and Reuilly churches, and our ongoing dialogue with the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and other churches across Europe;
- our commitment to the common mission of the churches through active membership of the Conference of European Churches and other bodies. To encourage a clear focus, good working practices and sound stewardship of resources in this work;
- to develop and strengthen the resources to oversee, coordinate and promote this work through the national church institutions, the dioceses and parishes."

The Panel and its Members

Following the retirement of the Bishop of St Albans, the Rt Revd Christopher Herbert, in 2008, the Panel has been chaired by the Bishop of Guildford, the Rt Revd Christopher Hill. The Bishop of Guildford is also the Chair of the Council for Christian Unity.

The Panel brings together a range of bishops who have expertise and responsibility in maintaining our bilateral (e.g. Porvoo and Meissen) and multilateral relationships (Conference of European Churches) with ecumenical partners in Europe. It also includes episcopal representatives from other Panels (e.g. Rural Bishops Panel and Urban Bishops Panel) and those bishops that have specific expertise in engaging in Europe and the EU institutions. The existing members of the Panel include the following bishops: Colchester, Croydon, Europe, Guildford, Hulme, London, Newcastle, Southwell and Nottingham, Portsmouth and Salisbury.

The Panel meets in the margins of existing meetings of the House of Bishops, College of Bishops and General Synod. In between meetings the Panel's work is taken forward by its Secretary. Other staff from across the National Church Institutions that have an interest or a responsibility for a particular aspect of the Church's engagement with Europe also attend the Panel's meetings.

Box 2

Our terms of reference

The Europe Bishops' Panel is a sub-committee of the House of Bishops. The Panel acts as a point of reference for items affecting the Church of England's relations with Europe and the European Union institutions which arise in the House of Bishops and the General Synod. The Panel is committed both to monitoring the EU institutions in so far as they affect Church life and practice.

The Panel seeks to:

- stimulate theological reflection and dialogue on Europe in the context of its future spiritual, social, economic and political development;
- achieve a better understanding of influence of the bishops in the processes and policies shaping Britain's engagement with Europe;
- reflect on the role of English bishops in Europe through the sharing of experiences and insights;
- promote dialogue with government and other decision makers, at both a national and European level on matters of concern;
- encourage, promote and learn the lessons from the network of diocesan Europe officers and diocesan European links;
- reflect on the church's ecumenical relations in so far as they impact on the remit of the Panel.

Reviewing Our Existing Work

To date, our work has focused on three inter-related areas of work: contributing to public debates regarding the EU Reform Treaty; contributing to specific debates on the EU's climate change programme; assisting in the creation of the post of Church of England Representative to the EU Institutions and providing support thereafter.

From a Christian perspective, the history of the Constitutional Treaty has been characterised by heated public debate on whether the preamble should include some explicit reference to God or Christianity. Less notice has been given to those provisions within the Treaty for an open, regular and transparent dialogue between the EU and the churches. This provision challenges us to reflect both on the substance of any dialogue as well as the means by which we might engage with the EU institutions.

The decision to focus on climate change reflects both the corporate priority given to this issue by the Archbishops' Council and the recognition that the EU's climate change package of 2008 represented the most extensive piece of legislation that the European Commission has introduced since the Single European Act of 1986. Creating a representational office in Brussels in May 2008 provided the Church with a visible presence in Brussels and an opportunity to engage with EU decision makers on a regular basis on matters of import.

The following sections give a brief snapshot of our work. All of the documentation referred to below can be found on the Church of England's website.

The EU Reform Treaty

- In preparation for the envisaged British Referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, the Panel drafted a Teaching Document on Europe to assist voters engage with the issues from a Christian point of view. This document was converted into a briefing paper in 2005 following the referenda results in France and Holland.

- Modified versions of this 2005 briefing paper resourced the Lords Spiritual when participating in Parliamentary debates on the EU reform Treaty. The Bishop of Chichester, the Rt Revd John Hind, made his maiden speech in the House of Lords on the EU Reform Treaty on 1 April 2008, while the Bishop of Chester, the Rt Revd Peter Foster spoke in the Lords debate during the Committee stage of the Reform Treaty (Amendment) Bill on 20 May 2008. Finally, the Archbishop of York, His Grace the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Sentamu, made a robust intervention in the House of Lords debate, 11 June 2008.

- On 13 June 2008, the Republic of Ireland voted against the Lisbon Treaty. In response to this development the then Chair of the House of Bishops, the Rt Revd Christopher Herbert, wrote a letter to The Times, 18 June. The letter drew attention to the EU's democratic deficit and the necessity of making greater provision for participatory democracy not least through further reform of the EU's budget.

- Although the long term future of the EU's Reform Treaty remains far from certain, the focus of the Panel's work has shifted to engaging in particular aspects of the proposed Reform Treaty. Article 17, for instance, provides for "an open, transparent and regular dialogue" between the Churches and the EU institutions. The Panel hopes that by taking forward a particular piece of work on climate change, it might help to give some shape and depth to what this Article might mean in practice.

EU's Climate Change Programme

- In November 2007 the Panel organised a visit to Brussels with bishops from the Church of Sweden and the EKD. This visit was the catalyst for the joint climate change letter involving the Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Huber and the Archbishop of Sweden in November 2007 and again in December 2008. During this visit the Bishops successfully lobbied the Commission President's Office for the May 2008 dialogue meeting involving the EU institutions and religious leaders to focus on climate change. The Bishop[of Hue represented the Panel at this dialogue exchange. As a follow up to this meeting the Panel is pressing for a more permanent dialogue with the Commission on climate change through the creation of a Climate Change Contact Group. Although no decision has yet been taken by the Commission on this proposal, its decision to hold in June 2009 a one day expert climate change seminar with churches is encouraging.

- On 31 March 2008 the House of Bishops' Europe Panel made a submission to the European Commission's review of the EU Budget. The submission argued that the budget should be restructured in such a way as to encourage the transition to a low carbon but competitive economy. The Commission released the findings of this exercise in a stakeholders' conference in Brussels, 11-12 November 2008. As part of its communications strategy for this conference, the European Commission produced a DVD, which included an in-depth interview with the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham. In the opening remarks to the November 2008 conference, Dalia Grybauskaitie, the European Commissioner Responsible for Financial Programming and the Budget, paid particular attention to the Bishops' submission noting that the Bishops were right to remind Europe that the reform of the EU

budget was as much a moral imperative as it was a political one. Canon Dr Gary Wilton, the Church of England's Representative to the EU attended this two day conference on behalf of the Panel..

- In May 2008 the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) issued a consultation document on the proposed EU Emissions Trading System from 2013. Created in 2005, the Emission Trading Scheme is the jewel in the crown of the EU's climate change programme. Its environmental impact to date has, however, been limited. The House of Bishops' Europe Panel made a detailed submission to this consultation in July 2008. The submission argued that the Commission's proposals needed to be judged from the perspective of environmental effectiveness and the degree to which a reformed trading scheme stimulated the innovation necessary to achieve a low carbon and sustainable economy. The commonality of concerns between the Panel and others led the Panel to make a more general joint submission to the same Defra consultation document with the following organisations: Christian Aid, The Green Alliance, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Green Peace and WWF. Defra published the Government's response to the consultation in November 2008 noting that it would take careful note of the points respondents made when entering into discussions with its European counterparts in the negotiations on the Emissions Trading Scheme Directive.

- On 2 June 2008 the Panel made a submission to the House of Lords' Select Committee on Economic Affairs inquiry into 'The Economics of Renewable Energy'. The Committee's report of 25 November 2008 (HL Paper 195-I) drew attention to the Bishops' concern that higher energy prices arising from renewable energy would lead to more people facing fuel poverty. The Committee's report noted that the Government, when framing its policies towards fuel poverty, would need to note the high correlation between fuel poverty and poorly insulated homes.

- On 10 June 2008 the Panel made a submission to Sub-Committee D (Environment and Agriculture) of the House of Lords European Union Select Committee's inquiry into the European Commission's proposals to reform the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme. This submission reiterated many of the points made by the Panel in its May 2008 Defra submission. The Committee's report (HL Paper 197), published on 10 December 2008, was broadly supportive of the Panel's submission with a number of direct references being made to the Panel's analysis to support the Committee's own conclusions.

- On 12 October 2008 the Panel made a detailed and comprehensive submission to the European Commission's Consultation paper concerning the EU's negotiating strategy for a post-2012 climate change agreement. The results of this consultation were released as a Commission Communication to the European Council and European Parliament on 29 January 2009. Following an expert ecumenical seminar in Brussels in early February 2009, organised by Canon Dr Gary Wilton, the Church of England's Representative to the EU, the Panel's Chair wrote, as part of an orchestrated pan-Europe wide campaign, to the Prime Minister expressing concern that the Communication failed to set out clear proposals for a comprehensive, ambitious and equitable new global agreement on climate change and how it might be financed. The Prime Minister responded on 14 May 2009 setting out his hope for a close and constructive dialogue with the Church ahead of Copenhagen. Although the PM stated that the EU will finance its share of climate change action to enable developing countries reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change he did not specify what was meant by "fair share".

- On 10 December 2008, on the eve of the European Council negotiations revising the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme, the Panel's Chair wrote to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Ed Millband, setting out some of the Panel's key messages on the this matter. In particular, the Chair pressed for a specific reference be included in the Directive ensuring that the revenues accrued from the auction of emission rights be earmarked to tackle climate change. In his reply of February 2009, the Secretary of State noted that although the final package fell short of what the Panel had been pressing for, the Council did adopt a political declaration indicating Member States' willingness to spend at least half of the revenues raised to tackle climate change both in the EU and in developing countries.

Box 3

A year in the life of the Church of England's representative to the EU

Licensed by the Bishop in Europe on 4th May 2008 at the Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity, Brussels, this first year in the post has been immensely challenging, stimulating and rewarding. Early tasks involved:

- developing independent relationships with key personnel in the European Commission and the European Parliament;
- developing relationships with members of Holy Trinity who work in the EU institutions;
- defining and developing appropriate ecumenical relationships both in relationships with the Conference of European Churches and bilaterally;
- gaining a critical understanding of EU policy processes – in the first instance in relation to climate change.

A key task has been to define the distinctive role of the Church of England Representative' given that I am priest with pastoral and spiritual responsibilities alongside and inevitably permeating the representative role. The role is also made distinctive because of the positive profile the Church of England and the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury within political and ecumenical contexts.

Within Brussels there is a wide spectrum of ways of working – from pastoral chaplaincy to aggressive political activity by lobbyists who jet in and out of the city. The Reform Treaty invites the churches to become partners in open, transparent and regular dialogue. I am thus developing an understanding of my role as a 'spiritual partner to people involved in policy and political processes'. As a priest, I am able to cross the boundaries as a 'safe person', who is motivated by the sacred, entrusted with the personal and allowed to speak on a policy matter all in the same conversation. This holistic approach has been characterised by:

Prayer: I belong to a weekly prayer group in the Parliament. I am concerned that the Church of England's Representative is know as someone who prays for the common good.

Presence: The institutions are secular public spaces, so I regularly wear my clerical collar in order that my presence is noticed. It is important to demonstrate visibly that the Church has not vacated this space. A visible Church presence is a noticed and welcomed by Christians and other officials. Staff in DG Environment/Climate Change have commented that I have been the first priest to engage with them or even visit their offices.

Partnership: This has involved organising two ecumenical briefings on climate change involving a range of stakeholders from the EU institutions and civil society. These briefings were designed to enable the churches to make representations to their governments and to relevant EU bodies encouraging the EU to take a more robust stance in advance of the UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen, December 2009.

Participation: This has involved attending Commission and Parliament consultation events on Budget Reform and climate change and with the Panel's Secretary on the bishops' contribution to the Commission's post-2012 consultation. The Church's presence at the Budget Reform conference in September 2008 gained attention among Council/UKREP personnel as well as public comment from the Commissioner herself.

Providing information: Here I have piloted a number of approaches: regular contributions to the CCU Update; Confidential Notes to the Panel and more general briefings on climate change. These have been well received. In addition, I organised a conference programme in European Parliament in Brussels for the Bishops' Chaplains – this is likely to lead to further fact-finding visits from other strategic groups within the Church.

The first year close with the prospective of working with more closely with the dioceses and the relevant regional offices in Brussels with the intention of making links with the 2010 Year to Combat Social Exclusion d Poverty. It also ends with the likelihoods of working more closely with the Diocese in Europe and the Intercontinental Church Society on a number of projects designed to strengthen the Church of England's profile in Brussels.

Canon Dr Gary Wilton
April 2009
Brussels

Church of England Representative to the EU Institutions

- From its inception in 2005 to May 2008, the Panel provided a space in which consideration was given to the creation of a new post, namely that of Church of England Representative to the EU institutions. Since Canon Dr Gary Wilton's appointment to this post in May 2008, the Panel has provide an anchor to the EU post's work by ensuring the post holder's representation and participation in Panel meetings. The Panel's Chair is responsible for providing pastoral and professional oversight of this post.

- Much of the work undertaken in 2007 and 2008 has been aimed at resourcing/substantiating the EU post. From October 2007 through to May 2008 the Panel produced three briefing papers on differing aspects of the EU's climate change programme. All of the submissions made by the Panel in 2008 have helped resource Canon Gary Wilton taking forward the dialogue with the EU institutions and other ecumenical partners in Brussels. For example, the Panel's June 2008 submission on the European Commission's proposals to reform the Emissions Trading Scheme was sent to all UK MEPs as well as relevant European Parliamentary Committees (eg the Temporary Climate Change Committee and the Committee for Industry, Energy and Research), with a covering letter introducing Canon Dr Gary Wilton.

In looking back over the past few years, the Panel can point to some real achievements that bode well for the future. It has enabled the Church to move from talking about the importance of Europe as a strategic priority for the Church, to enabling it to undertake a range of activity which has raised the Church's profile with its partners and target constituencies both here and across Europe more broadly. This work has been done by recourse to Parliamentary and Government submissions, by occasional visits to Brussels and direct contact with relevant officials, Parliamentarians, Ministers and Commissioners. For the most part, however, the value of the Panel rests in providing a space in which connections can be made and work coordinated. In that sense at least the Panel has played a constructive role in meeting its terms of reference and some of the aims and objectives set by the General Synod in 2004.

Our Future Strategic Objectives

The Panel's achievements to date provide it with a secure and solid foundation upon which to build for the future. Over the course of the last 12 months the Panel has engaged in a wide consultation with key stakeholders as to the Panel's future strategic objectives. This consultation exercise has enabled the Panel to review its existing work programme and identify future trends in Europe that might impact upon the Panel's work. Against this background, we have identified three inter-related areas around which to focus over the next five years:

1. develop and sustain the Panel as being the key point of reference for items affecting the Church of England's relations with Europe and the EU institutions;
2. encourage a system of enhanced ecumenical cooperation on European issues in a way that helps to support our common mission through a reconfigured Conference of European Churches;
3. stimulate theological refection and dialogue on Europe in the context of its future spiritual, social economic and political development with a view to strengthening and deepening our engagement with the EU institutions and ecumenical partners.

Each year we will set ourselves clear goals against which we can measure our success in delivering on these objectives. In so doing, we will show whether we are using our resources efficiently and demonstrate that our work is making a measurable difference.

Objective 1
Develop and sustain the Panel as being the key point of reference for items affecting the Church of England's relations with Europe and the EU institutions.

This may be achieved by:

- raising the EBP's profile with internal and external stakeholders through the production of high quality analysis and work;

- encouraging others to use the EBP as a vehicle and a resource to add value to their work in Europe and with the EU institutions;
- bringing to the attention of the Archbishop's Council those issues and developments arising in Europe that might impact upon the Church's long term engagement with Europe;
- providing opportunities for bishops to share experiences and resources;
- maintaining strong relations with other ecumenical and secular actors working on European issues.

Specific Goals for 2009/10:

1.1 reformat the Panel's membership to make it more representative of the wider work of the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council;
1.2 establish a Europe Strategy Group to help provide strategic focus and direction to the EBP's work;
1.3 produce an annual report to assist with the communications of the EBP's work with internal and external stakeholders;
1.4 develop further the early warning radar system of EU legislation introduced by the Church of England's Representative to the EU.

Objective 2
Encourage a system of enhanced ecumenical cooperation on European issues in a way that helps to support our common mission through a reconfigured Conference of European Churches.

This may be achieved by:

- raising awareness with our European ecumenical partners on issues of concern;
- ensuring that wherever possible any representation that the EBP does in Brussels is done in partnership with others;
- sharing with our ecumenical partners at an early stage our work programme and remaining open to new partnership agreements on specific projects of mutual concern;
- encouraging our ecumenical partners to share information and resource material so that a body of knowledge can be built up;
- working closely with and having regular communication with regional ecumenical organisations engaged in European issues;
- working towards a reconfiguration of regional ecumenical structures in Europe in a way that enables it to add value to our work.

Specific goals for 2009/10:

2.1 use the preparation time for the CEC Lyon Assembly to convey to our ecumenical partners our objectives of moving towards a system of enhanced cooperation on European issues;
2.2 arrange meetings in the margins of the Lyon Assembly where we can explore in greater detail with ecumenical partners the mechanisms that might be needed to sustain relationships of enhanced cooperation;
2.3 setting out clearly ahead of the Lyon Assembly our vision of a reformed Conference of European Churches and identifying ecumenical partners sympathetic to this position.

Objective 3
Stimulate theological refection and dialogue on Europe in the context of its future spiritual, social economic and political development with a view to strengthening and deepening our engagement with the EU institutions and ecumenical partners.

This may be achieved by:

- commissioning or writing reports or briefing papers on specific EU issues;
- monitoring the EU legislative process and making submissions to relevant consultations or parliamentary inquiries;
- prioritising a particular issue or range of issues over a three to five year period around which the Panel can develop some comparative expertise;
- operationalising those aspects of the Lisbon Treaty that provide for a regular, open and transparent dialogue between the churches and the EU institutions

- effective resourcing of Panel members to participate in public and ecumenical debates on the future of Europe.

Specific goals for 2009/10:

3.1 produce through the office of the Church of England's Representative to the EU a teaching document on Europe to coincide with the 60th Anniversary of the Schuman Declaration in May 2010;

3.2 broaden out the EBP's existing work on climate change to include issues related to sustainable development;

3.3 to formulate clear recommendations regarding what a regular, open and transparent dialogue between the Churches and the EU institutions might mean in practice and to then bring these recommendations to the attention of others;

3.4 to facilitate through the office of the Church of England's Representative to the EU a Church response to the European Year to combat Social Exclusion and Poverty in 2010.