

1. Introduction

The Scottish Episcopal Church is unusual among the Churches of the Anglican Communion in that it lacks any direct historical connection with the Church of England from which it differs in being a product not of the English but of the Scottish Reformation. [Stair, *Memorial Encyclopaedia of the Laws of Scotland*, ed. I. Guild, para. 1614.]

The Scottish Episcopal Church is one of the historic national Churches of this country, with a continuous succession of witness and faith since the days when the Church of Scotland was itself Episcopalian. It is also part of the world-wide Anglican Communion of Churches. It could be said that the Scottish Episcopal Church is the Founder of the Communion, because it consecrated the first bishop of an independent national Church (Seabury of Connecticut in 1784). [*Statement on the SEC in the Oban Cathedral Magazine*]

We begin with an overview, offering some historical background and introducing some of the characteristics of the SEC which will subsequently be expanded upon.

The SEC may be said to have the following set of distinguishing features: it has its own unique history, leading to its present state as a Church which is disestablished, Scottish, Anglican, and Episcopal: it has evolved its own characteristic approaches to ministry, and to mission; and it has its own unique approach to worship.

Two Historical Memories

The Scottish Episcopal Church has had a tradition of emphasising its history, both as an heir of the early Scottish Church, and of its time of recent persecution. The word 'iconic' has been much abused in recent years, but two pictures which were copied as oleographs in the 1930s for distribution round the SEC, and which became emblematic of the SEC's history, truly deserve that epithet. A picture of the Baptisms from Stonehaven jail in 1749 incorporating the faces of the members of the congregation, descendants of those persecuted, was dated 1864, while a picture of the Consecration of Bishop Seabury in 1784 was specially painted in 1934.

These two powerful images relate to seminal events in the life of the SEC. The first records an incident from the 'years of persecution' under the Penal Laws of 1746-92. These laws were imposed in the aftermath of the Jacobite uprisings, and prohibited Episcopalian priests from ministering to more than four people at a time, on pain of imprisonment. The second depicts an event which had great significance for the Anglican Church as a whole – the first consecration of a Bishop for a Province overseas. In 1784, when Dr Samuel Seabury, of what had formerly been the Church of England in America, came to Britain from Connecticut for consecration as a bishop of an independent church, the English bishops could not accede to this request, as they were not free agents following the recent peace settlement with the USA. Seabury then came to Aberdeen and was consecrated by the Scottish

bishops, thus founding a new and independent Episcopal Church. This event is often taken as the founding of the Anglican Communion of Churches, and it became from the start an important part of the self-understanding of the SEC, and her position within the Anglican Communion.

Both these events can be – and, indeed, have been – glossed in a variety of ways by historical commentators; but both exercise an ongoing role in the thinking of Scottish Episcopalians, and both say something important about the Church which remembers them. Our Church may be further characterised in more detail as follows.

A disestablished church

The Scottish Episcopal Church is the lineal descendant of the bishops, clergy and congregations, who were dispossessed by Act of Parliament in 1688/9, when the Presbyterian Church was established in its place (or, ‘when the Church of Scotland lost its bishops and became entirely Presbyterian’). In 1712 a Toleration Act gave protection to the Episcopalians, but during the first half of the eighteenth century they considered themselves as the ‘establishment in waiting’, since they expected to be re-instated when the exiled Stuart royal family returned to power. It was therefore a significant event when the ‘Repeal of the Scottish Episcopalian Relief Act of 1792’ was passed in 1977, because it finally lifted the long political shadow from the shoulders of the SEC.

The SEC considers itself, therefore, to be ‘disestablished’, rather than ‘non-conformist’, in a country where the Church of Scotland is the dominant and established Church. However, the bishops have retained the titles of the fourteen Scottish dioceses, and although they do not receive the ancient revenues, their one remaining endowment from the days of the establishment are the heraldic coats of arms (a property under Scots law) and these were confirmed to the SEC bishops. They have been displayed, with the more modern ones, on the familiar ‘Welcome’ sign outside Episcopal churches, since the early 1960s.

A Scottish Church

The Scottish Episcopal Church is a distinct and nation-wide Scottish Church, with liturgies in both English and Gaelic. However, its presence in Scotland could until recently cause either resentment or admiration. The media was not slow in categorising the SEC as an alien intruder during the 1950s and 1960s, at the time of the ‘Bishops in the Kirk’ controversy. However, some districts in Scotland, particularly in the North East and parts of the Highlands, have remained strongly Episcopalian with the Episcopal Church being ‘the church of the people’.

In the nineteenth century the SEC developed congregations across the country, and in the twentieth century the whole of Scotland was divided geographically between these congregations. Although still in place, this system has largely gone by the board in the cities, where people opt for a church regardless of geography, often choosing one for its liturgical or musical attributes. Others choose the local church of a community – often the Church

of Scotland - rather than a more distant Episcopal church.

The SEC also has a distinctively Scottish title for its chief bishop. In the eighteenth century, with the difficulty of involving the 'King over the water' with Episcopal elections, it was decided not to continue to have Archbishops. Instead the bishops sat together equally in a 'college of bishops', with one, not necessarily the senior, being elected 'Primus', or 'Primus inter Pares'. This was a conscious return to ancient Scottish precedent, and the office of Primus has existed ever since as a uniquely Scottish ecclesiastical office. Despite its origins, in recent times the Primus, within the synodical system, has assumed a role little different from an Archbishop, and congregations all over Scotland now pray for 'our Primus'.

A sign of the national character of the SEC is the fact that the bishops, or Primus, from time to time speak out on matters as they concern the whole nation, and not just on those that concern the internal workings of the Episcopal Church.

A Mission-orientated Church

Its distinctive Scottish roots have not made the Scottish Episcopal Church introverted in nature. Indeed, it has a history of missionary activity, at home and abroad. This has led to the expansion of the Church in Scotland, particularly in the larger cities, and to close relationships with particular overseas dioceses. This area of the Church's activity over the last couple of centuries is explored in section 2 of the essay.

An Anglican Church

The Scottish Episcopal Church is part of the Anglican Communion of Churches, with strong links to the Church of England. For some people the SEC is simply the Scottish province of the Anglican Communion. Although the word 'province' came into use in this sense only in the 1960s, a complex history of interrelationship with the Church of England precedes that date. In 1744 the bishops declared that 'we are in full communion with the Church of England', but this was not reciprocated; and some English and Irish bishops ordained clergy for Scotland, as if the SEC did not exist. In fact, Parliament prohibited those in Scottish orders from holding a living in the Church of England until the 1860s. However the SEC consistently maintained that she was the Church of England's sister Church in Scotland.

The SEC's relationship with the Church of England entered a new phase when her clergy subscribed to the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England, following the Synod of Laurencekirk in 1804. Not only was this a requirement (which lasted until 1977) of the British Government in order to allow the SEC freedom to worship, but it also allowed the previously independent 'Anglican' chapels (often termed 'qualified chapels', because they were 'qualified' to function for public worship under the Toleration Act of 1712) to become part of the SEC. These congregations were the origin of the term 'English Church' being applied to the SEC, despite this clearly being a misnomer.

In 1867 the Scottish bishops were invited to the first Lambeth Conference, at which they represented a significant proportion of those present. The invitation boosted the self-esteem of the SEC. The SEC was pleased to emphasise its membership of the Anglican Communion, but with the rapid increase in numbers of overseas Anglican Churches, the SEC became one small part of a huge family. Even in Britain, the SEC is numerically a very small part of the Anglican witness.

Issues of wider Anglican identity are explored in section 3 of this essay.

The SEC may also be said to be classically Anglican in its approach to foundational matters of belief, accepting the Scriptures and Catholic creeds as normative and then largely articulating its faith through its canons and liturgies. In this approach it differs from those Churches which have evolved explicit doctrinal statements or 'confessions'. We explore the foundational teaching of the SEC further in section 4 of this essay.

A Church with Bishops and Synods

The SEC has maintained a three-fold ministry, of bishop, priest and deacon, quite distinct from the prevailing Presbyterianism of Scotland. By 1960, except in a few rural parishes, almost every congregation had their own priest and many urban congregations had a curate, who was initially a deacon. It reflected the practice of the Church of England; and it is a form that the congregations generally wished to maintain. Apart from any theological ideas, financial constraints have made this pattern far less common and, as far as curates are concerned, rare.

While the numbers of adherents to the SEC dropped by over a half through the twentieth century, the number of clergy has remained consistently at about 350. This is principally due to the introduction of non-stipendiary ministry, which has counteracted the fall in the number of stipendiary clergy.

Deaconesses were recognised by the Canons in 1929, but although the Lambeth Conference of 1968 recommended that they should be declared to be within the diaconate, the SEC did not act on this recommendation. It was not until 1986 that women were ordained deacon. By 1994 there were 66 women deacons. There was a longer debate about the ordination of women priests, but the momentum increased and in 1992 the General Synod voted in favour, albeit by a narrow margin in the house of laity. In 2003, the General Synod agreed, with very little debate, that the episcopate should also be open to women.

The present pattern of the Church's ordained and lay ministries is more fully discussed in section 5 of this essay.

The Scottish Episcopal Church has often been accused, in contrast to Presbyterianism, of being un-democratic, and even prelatical. While it is true that Episcopalians, understandably, revered their bishops, the Church has had a long history of lay involvement in the decision making areas of the Church – not least in the appointment of its bishops. The earliest Canons of

the SEC of 1727 related exclusively to the office and jurisdiction of the bishop. Bishops were to be chosen by the clergy of the diocese, and the appointment was to be confirmed by a majority of the existing bishops. Nearly 150 years later, the laity were admitted to a voice in elections, through a representative chosen from each congregation in the diocese, but the fundamental premises of choosing bishops remained for another century. These were:

- 1) The electoral body is diocesan, containing clergy and laity.
- 2) The electoral process is private and confidential.
- 3) The other bishops have the duty of confirming or setting aside an election.

However, by the 1980s, the experience of recent elections and the witness of other parts of the Anglican Communion led to a radical examination of the underlying principles of the election of the bishops. In 1993, after much thought, a new Canon was adopted which gave the wider church, in the form of representatives of the bishops and of the other dioceses, a say in the process by being involved in collecting the nominations, and making a selection from them, now made public, but leaving the actual election firmly with the diocese. In 2000 it was recognised that, as the SEC was now firmly a synodical church, with authority at a diocesan level lying with the 'bishop in synod', the diocesan synod should itself be the elector of its own bishop.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the central governance of the Church lay with three groups, the Episcopal Synod, the Provincial Synod, and the Representative Church Council. The Episcopal Synod, made up of the bishops, was largely concerned with appeals. The Provincial Synod was concerned with the Canons, and consisted of the bishops and a representative number of clergy, but it was assisted by a Consultative Council, which included lay people, who were later incorporated in an enlarged Synod. The Representative Church Council was largely concerned with finance, and consisted of the bishops, the clergy and a representative from every congregation. Only in a Church as small as the SEC was it possible for each congregation to be directly represented at a national level, and it was a much valued aspect of the SEC, which appeared to bring a unity to the whole Church. This arrangement was mirrored at diocesan level.

After a long consultation, and much influenced by the practice of other parts of the Anglican Communion, in 1982 a system of Synodical government was introduced into the SEC, which both streamlined the decision-making process and made it clear that everyone, clerical or lay, was responsible for the whole Church, its beliefs, order, finance and good practice. Many people regretted the loss of direct representation which had had the hidden bonus that the representatives seemed less elitist, and truly to represent the 'person in the pew'. However, in a time of new priorities and visions, the General Synod became the vehicle by which all the recent changes were introduced in a mature and reasonably harmonious manner. This new arrangement was also mirrored at diocesan level.

However at the parish level, the old system survives whereby each congregation elects members to a Vestry (for a set term, not for life, like an

eldership), usually chaired by the Rector. We may also note that recent changes to the Canons have required Vestries to be more than committees managing the church's property and money. They must now 'co-operate with and generally assist the Rector or Priest-in-charge in all matters relating to the spiritual welfare of the congregation and the mission of the whole Church'.

Further reflection on these developments and some potential implications is offered in section 6 of this essay.

An Ecumenically-Minded Church

The Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1920 issued 'An Appeal to all Christian People for Reunion', associated with the 'Lambeth Quadrilateral', which included as one of its tenets (alongside Scripture, the Creeds and the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist), 'the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God in the unity of His Church'. It may have been in the light of this appeal, that in 1929 the Canons of the SEC gave very cautious permission for representatives of other Churches to give addresses to Episcopal congregations both at funerals and in furtherance of some 'project of Reunion'.

The whole twentieth century was witness to a loosening of old divisions, starting with the formation of the Scottish Churches' Council in 1924, and working gradually towards the founding in 1990 of Action of Churches Together in Scotland, which included the Roman Catholic Church. In general, however, ecumenical endeavours, like the Livingston Ecumenical Parish and the Local Ecumenical Partnerships in various parts of Scotland, have been made apart from the formal conversations, and since the 1980s (at least in Ecumenical Partnerships) the mutual recognition of orders, and inter-communion, have become an accepted part of the life of the SEC.

The extent of this sea-change can be seen by considering a document 'issued with the approval of the Scottish Bishops' in 1960, the fourth centenary of the Reformation. After making a short statement about the need for a Reformation, it mentioned the tragedy of the resulting divisions, and concluded: 'After careful consideration the Scottish Bishops have decided that our right course is to refrain from participation in the official celebrations of the events that took place in 1560, because such participation would seem to indicate a denial of or indifference to those very elements of historic Christianity and the undivided Church which we exist to preserve and uphold and under God to restore.' By 1980 it would have been inconceivable that the bishops would either have been particularly interested in such an anniversary or have made such a stand on the issue. In the intervening period a profound change had come over the SEC, which has been well described by Professor Duncan Forrester. 'A Church which had, not undeservedly, for long been regarded as "spiky" and defensive, high church in a rather old-fashioned way and resistant to change, found a new role for itself in Scotland, in many places setting the pace in ecumenical developments, pioneering new patterns of ministry, and treating the problems facing the denomination as opportunities rather than threats.'

The change of emphasis had been growing slowly, starting in the 'To Serve Thee Better' Campaign of 1964, which encouraged the Church to respond to the Gospel in developing its capacities for 'Worship, Mission, Service and Offering, and each of these in the context of ultimate Christian unity'. It took up the theme of the 1963 Anglican Congress in Toronto of 'Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ'. However the financial constraints of the 1970s, and the subsequent review of the SEC's resources, also contributed largely to the changes of emphasis.

Many Scottish Episcopalians still think of their church as a kind of bridge, between on the one hand the Roman Catholic Church and, on the other, the Church of Scotland. This reflects a conviction about the nature of our church, that it is both Catholic and Reformed, believing in Evangelical Truth and Apostolic Order (as stated on the familiar 'pub' sign outside all our Churches). In addition to this quite generally diffused assumption, the Episcopal Church has since the 1950s been very active in efforts to form a reunited Church in Scotland which, on the basis of a modified episcopacy, would incorporate and celebrate the distinctive traditions of most non-Roman Catholic churches in the country. The latest version of these discussions, known as SCIFU (the Scottish Church Initiative for Union) would have led to the setting up of new united parishes throughout Scotland and to the adoption of a modified form of episcopacy in the united church. It was decisively rejected by the Church of Scotland before the Episcopal Church could express its mind in General Synod. Conversations continue with the remaining partners, but the dream of a united Church of Scotland for the whole nation with bishops in some form is, at the beginning of the 21st century, just that: a dream, far from realisation.

Without doubt the Tractarian legacy of the nineteenth century, which emphasised Confirmation by a Bishop as being essential to full membership of the Church, kept membership of the SEC distinctive. By the mid 1960s, even at Trinity College, Glenalmond (the SEC's own 'Public School'), the number choosing to be Confirmed was dropping rapidly, and this was reflected also in local charges. Changing attitudes within the SEC were evident in 1965 when bishops were allowed to use their discretion as to who could receive Communion, especially in an ecumenical context; but that discretion was also used to allow young children to receive Communion. This became an important matter in the light of children attending the Eucharist every week, and of the growing recognition that Baptism gave a person full membership of the Church. In the context of this latter point, the Canons were altered to allow any baptised person to receive Holy Communion, and also so that a communicant in another Church need not be confirmed in order to become a member of the SEC. These changes diluted the exclusiveness of the SEC, which for so long had been one of its distinctive characteristics. Inclusiveness is now much more central to the church's self-understanding.

A Liturgical Church

Apart from the episcopate, the defining aspect for most people of being an Anglican was the use of the Book of Common Prayer, and it was universal

in the Scottish Episcopal Church. A poll of Scottish Episcopalians, as part of the Partners in Mission Campaign in 1982 showed that most people's attachment to the SEC was due to its manner of worship. This remains true in the first decade of the 21st century, with Episcopalians valuing the experience of 'participation' in worship and the ordered and settled wording of our liturgies.

In the early twentieth century, the SEC not only produced a new Scottish Prayer Book (that of 1929), along the lines of other Anglican revisions: it also became intensely proud of it, both as regards its theology and its usefulness. By the late 1960s, and the change to a weekly Eucharist as the norm for worship, the Scottish Liturgy in the Prayer Book was increasingly recognised as unsuitable as the sole or main form of worship. Initial tinkering with the words and order of the old service – exemplified by the still popular 1970 Liturgy, or 'Grey Book' – was inadequate for many people, and the Liturgy Committee was asked to prepare a new service in modern English. The committee decided to start afresh, and the resulting Scottish Liturgy, finally authorised in 1982 – the 'Blue Book' – has in itself become a jewel of the SEC. Alongside it, new services have been prepared for Daily Prayer, Funerals and Initiation, as well as a reworking of the Ordinal in 1984 that reflects new understandings and perceptions of the ordained ministry. At the General Synod of 2006 indications were given that the SEC might now proceed to the publication of a new Prayer Book. However, it is noteworthy that the SEC congregations that have the largest congregations, and which are growing fastest, are those that hardly ever use a liturgical service!

Further discussion of the SEC's liturgies as a distinctive feature of its life is offered in section 7 of this essay.