

Significant minority of Anglican clergy favour disestablishment

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A new YouGov poll conducted among Anglican clergy shows a significant minority of them would support separating the Church from the state. An even larger minority supported the idea of the Church "partially separating", while retaining the most valuable privileges.

The poll - conducted for the Religion and Society programme at Lancaster University - showed that overall one in seven clerics would support full disestablishment of the Church of England and three in 10 said it should retain only "some aspects" of its current status with formal ties to the state.

Fifty-four per cent of those polled said the Church of England should "retain its current established status", which includes having the Queen as head of the institution and 26 bishops in the House of Lords.

The research also showed that just over half of serving Anglican clergy subscribe to the idea that Christians are being 'discriminated against' by being required to abide by the equality laws.

The research also shows significant support for the idea of the Church of England separating from the worldwide Anglican Communion over differences of approach to issues such as homosexuality and biblical interpretation. There is even some support for the Church of England itself splitting down liberal and conservative lines.

Prof Linda Woodhead, director of the Religion and Society programme, said that the research indicated that many in the church want to "pick and choose" what elements of establishment are retained.

"They like some parts, they like the privileges it gives, the status and voice in society – including literally in Parliament," Ms Woodhead [told](#) the *Daily Telegraph*. "But you can see from the question about persecution, the feeling that Christians are being discriminated against by the Government, that they are also very suspicious of government."

She went on: "I think Anglicans want to have their cake and eat it – to be 'prophetic', as they would say, while still being part of the establishment. Non-Anglican Christians would say that that is just not on. They are effectively saying 'we want to represent the whole of England but we don't want to be subject to the law'. That is very difficult for a state church to do. If you are a state church, many would say you should more closely articulate the democratic view."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "What is most obvious from this research is that many Anglican clergy have come to the conclusion that the established status of the Church is unsustainable. Some have reached that conclusion because they see the injustice of one small Christian denomination having such disproportionate privilege, others think they would have a better chance to revive the Church if it were free from its ties to the state."

Mr Sanderson said that there was a sustained campaign among many sections of Christianity to promote the idea that 'people of faith' are disadvantaged by the equality laws.

"The mythology of Christian persecution under the equality laws is deeply embedded, even though it has no grounding in reality. We can see many initiatives at present – including the [Woolf Commission](#) - which are seeking to convince the Government that changes are needed in the law to accommodate religious prejudice. Indeed, Lancaster University itself is [funding](#) another such initiative."

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