

– *“serving the people and their parishes”* –

## **PARSON AND PARISH**

is published by

**THE ENGLISH CLERGY ASSOCIATION**

**PATRON: The Right Reverend & Right Honourable**

**The Lord Bishop of London**

Founded by the Rev'd EDWARD G. COURTMAN in 1938

**The Clergy Association has the following aims, revised in 1992:–**

The English Clergy Association, as the successor to the Parochial Clergy Association, exists to support in fellowship all Clerks in Holy Orders in their Vocation and Ministry within the Church of England as by law Established; to uphold the Parson's Freehold within the traditional understanding of the Church's life and witness; to oppose unnecessary bureaucracy in the Church; to monitor legislative and other processes of change; and to promote in every available way the good of English Parish and Cathedral Life and the welfare of the Clergy.

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# PARSON & PARISH

*the half-yearly magazine of the  
English Clergy Association*

— “*serving the people and their parishes*” —

Issue Number 163 Epiphany AD 2005

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# FROM OVER THE PARAPET

## Editorial

### *Closed until Epiphany*

“The diocesan offices,” announces the December mailing, “will be closed from 24<sup>th</sup> December until 4<sup>th</sup> January inclusive, whilst most diocesan central staff take their annual leave.” Lest we think this a trifle indulgent, it is impressed upon us that this “incorporates the three public holidays.” Ah. And the diocesan bishop’s office is off for even longer: closed until 6<sup>th</sup> January.

It goes without saying that during this diocesan closed season, for many of the parochial and cathedral clergy of our land it will have been business as normal. It is, as all clergy know, “your busy time, Vicar”. As diocesan staff pack up for their ten day break on Christmas Eve, the clergy, too, will have been feeling in need of a rest. All those school services have been conducted, carols sung at various nursing homes, communion taken to the sick, pastoral visits made and a further two funerals squeezed in at the crem. Then, while going down with a cold, helping in a busy household trying to prepare for the annual Feast, there are the sermons to prepare for Midnight Mass and that Sunday which irritatingly falls the very day after Christmas Day. In the days following Christmas Day there is the parish walk, the marking of feast days, a few days or part-days snatched with family and relatives, various phone calls from couples who in a spirit of New Year’s enthusiasm are asking about marriage, another funeral, the death of a former Vicar, requiring arrangements for a service at this his last parish church, and, of course, on St. Stephen’s Day, what quickly proves to be one of the most harrowing disasters in recent years: the earthquake and the resultant tsunamis in the region around Indonesia. This, too, calls for judgement, after discussion with churchwardens and others, about helping in the relief effort, offering appropriate intercessions and making some theological sense of the government’s call for silence to be observed....

This is the life our clerics have chosen, or the call to which they have responded. There may be the odd grumble, but generally they wouldn’t have it any other way. Many get £18,000 or £19,000 a year – with a tied cottage – for it: some do it for nothing. To support, encourage and give financial help to such clergy, this Association, with its Benefit Fund, exists, and a peaceable New Year is extended to all our members and readers of this magazine.

The diocesan offices reopened on 4<sup>th</sup> January. It is remarkable how we got on without them.

### ***Once again, the Freehold***

There is much talk today about mission. At this time each year, the parish clergy complete those forms, “Statistics for Mission” – some say “for Decline”. It is a “Mission-shaped Church”, though, and everything, rightly, is seen through the lens of mission. Some claim that the “parson’s freehold”, the upholding of which has been a vital concern to this Association, is a hindrance, rather than a help, to mission. It is time to revisit it for a moment, and we make no apology for dwelling on the freehold both here, and later in this issue, as the subject of our Chairman’s remarks.

We know that, for some, “freehold” brings to mind a Trollopian picture of absentee, lazy parsons, hiding behind the protection of “a job for life”. We perhaps remember Dr. Stanhope, away from his parish for years, collecting butterflies on the banks of Lake Como. There are, undoubtedly, today still one or two rotten apples in the barrel; most of us can think of clergy, including archdeacons and bishops, who are sometimes inefficient, but, in truth, how many incumbents really abuse the security that the so-called freehold gives them? Most parish priests work too many hours, sometimes to the detriment of family life – even in today’s climate where morale is often low amidst threatened reductions of parochial clergy and church buildings.

For over some fifty years now, there have been calls for the abolition, or modification, of the parson’s freehold. In 1947 Cyril Garbett, the Chairman of the Canon Law Commission, urged some limitation, so that the freehold would “no longer be a citadel in which the lazy and incompetent could take safe refuge.” Then we had the Paul Report in 1963, the Morley Commission of 1967, Tiller in ’83, and the second salvo of McClean’s *Review of Clergy Terms of Service* has just been released. It advocates the abolition of all freehold posts (although not retrospectively), and their replacement by “common tenure” – the same degree of security recommended for unbeneficed clergy in the Review Group’s report on the first phase of its work.

At the outset, it is probably helpful to clear up some of the misunderstandings that sometimes surface. First and foremost, “freehold” is not so much concerned with physical property as with an *office* – typically a benefice, a “living”, which describes a way in which a particular ecclesiastical position is held. The parish which attaches to the benefice and the benefice property which belongs to it (parsonage, church and

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churchyard) all flow from the office.

Secondly, “freehold” is not freehold as many would understand it; it is a shorthand expression. In both popular parlance, and in English land law, “freehold” is a form of tenure, a higher form than a term of years, the leasehold. So far so good. But when people say, in general, “freehold” they’re also speaking of an “estate”, as the law calls it – the “fee simple absolute in possession”. Subject to the theoretical ownership of all property by the Crown, this notion of “freehold” is a form of absolute ownership, implying the ability to dispose of it at will. Patently an incumbent has not got that, but possibly, and there is case law to support this, it was once something more in the nature of life interest. A living for life: that may have been the freehold for the parson at one time.

It is certainly not the position now, though. Clergy discipline legislation in various forms for over forty years has meant that an incumbent can be removed from office; since 1976 he had had to retire at 70 (or 72 at the outside), and by the Vacation of Benefices provisions a benefice can be declared vacant when there has been a serious pastoral breakdown or disability on the part of the incumbent. The erosion of a parson’s rights by these pieces of legislation alone means that even freehold in the sense of a freehold life interest is not accurate.

Given these limitations, not to mention being subject to the faculty jurisdiction and to all sorts of rights of others (rights of way across the churchyard, rights of burial, rights of ownership of monuments and tombstones), the word “freeholder” does seem a little far-fetched. It is, in fact, more accurate to describe the position of the incumbent as being that of trustee, a line which the great canonist Garth Moore took, but with seeds in earlier case law. In a word, the incumbent holds the office, the benefice, and the property belonging to it, in trust for the benefit of the parishioners, and for his or her successors – as, in a similar way, the churchwardens have the moveable items of the church vested in them in trust for the people.

Now, clearly in terms of the mission of the church, someone who holds a position as a trustee, is standing in a noble tradition of stewardship which, from the opening chapters of Genesis onwards, stands as a rich vein in the rock of our religion. Just as bishops are there, in part, to guard the gospel treasure of teaching doctrine and morality, so too the parson, as an office holder, plays a part as a guardian of an ancient office and of the people’s property belonging to it.

Yet we still hear the cry that the incumbent “has more security than many others in society”; that clergy should travel light, and live with insecurity. Very well, let us address this. In our rights-dominated culture, we tend to

play down, or ignore the duties. Incumbents, of course, *have to* live in the parsonage house provided —these days sometimes one of the smaller dwellings around the church, but for some a large building, and not one that they would necessarily choose. So yes, security, but security stemming from an acceptance of the discipline of taking what is provided, the givenness of life. Not perhaps a bad gospel principle. People know where you live, they can assault you at your doorstep, they can pester you, and there maybe a hundred and one things about the place that you wouldn't choose. No matter; the parson accepts that he, or she, has to live there; it comes, as they say, with the territory. Even in a united benefice with several parishes, or in a plurality of benefices held together by a scheme, the parson still has to live in one of them. Parish priests live, move, and have their being amongst the people they serve. Didn't Someone else do that when He walked the earth?

And what is this “security”, anyway? To a stipend? That is debatable. There is an absolute legal entitlement to the guaranteed annuity —no more than £1000, and then there's the fee income of the benefice, and any trust income, and, for that matter, the taxable Easter offering too. The rest is calculated by the diocesan stipends fund, and, although it would be difficult to withdraw it, what legal sanction would there be if they stopped it? As for house, the report of the clergy stipends review in 2001, *Generosity and Sacrifice*, said it was worth £9,428 per annum. Splendid, but when the Vicar retires, or dies, it is taken back almost immediately, leaving nothing for the parson or parson's family from the house. Unless another property has been bought before ordination, or funded by earnings from a spouse, then all may turn on testamentary hopes, or provision by the Pensions Board. In a word, the security of the “freehold” and of the “job for life” is perhaps a little overplayed!

What, then, of the alternative? Should our parsons be employees? Sometimes, when a cleric is operating at his or her most worldly best — taking a funeral without notes and remembering all the names of the family and details of the deceased and delivering the prayers and readings with as near as to 100% conviction and power as one can get, then presumably this may seem to be not far off a good actor, or a barrister in court. The fact that at the crematorium this attracts a statutory fee of £84.00 is irrelevant, since it forms part of the stipend, and whether or not fees are assigned makes no difference at this point. The reality is that a stipendiary incumbent gets, say £18,500 a year, working something like an 80-hour week. Not including the value of the having a house, and forgetting that council tax is paid, that works out at £4.45 per hour! How many good actors or barristers could be employed for that? And it is not just funerals; there

is difficult counselling, the chairing of some quite complex meetings, school assemblies, the preparation and delivering of sermons, leading prayer cells, assisting and guiding people through preparations for weddings, baptisms and memorial services... and all the rest of it. If parish clergy were under a contract of employment, on a salary reflecting the calibre and quality of their work, they would no longer be relying on charities such as our Association's Benefit Fund, while picking up erratic state handouts for their families. So perhaps the tiny bit of extra security – needed if bishops bully or archdeacons behave badly, as they sometimes do – should not be so begrudged.

Sometimes the thought of abolishing the freehold can seem attractive. Perhaps to many parsons, the employment alternative may also seem attractive —having a decent salary, being able to buy their teenagers the things they'd like, buying the house they would like, living away from their place of work, having church offices up to the latest standards of health and safety at work, with an employer who will always sort out cover for the clergy during annual leave or when off sick.... The Vicar, like the diocesan or bishop's offices, could even be closed until Epiphany. But what about when the bishop wants the cleric to move on; would he, or she, be any more deployable than with the freehold and the parsonage? And what about the gospel, and the mission of the Church; could we say that our new employed cleric is now travelling light and living vulnerably —in that anonymous executive house away from the tough setting of the church near that grim estate, with set working hours, statutory holidays, and all the other rights?

It is just conceivably possible that the parson in his or her tied cottage, with the security and the bundle of insecurities that it brings, may in fact be more of a help to the mission.

### ***And so to women bishops....***

What does the English Clergy Association think about women bishops and the suggestion of a further province of the Church of England for those with reservations about such a further development in Church order? This was one subject discussed recently by the Association's Council, in the light of the report *Consecrated Women?* published by Forward in Faith, with its proposed draft legislation providing for an additional province of the Church of England —a report closely followed by the official Church of England Report of the Rochester Commission itself.

Our Association, of course, has no "line" on such issues. Our concern is more with clerical profession than the integrity of the sacred Order of

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bishop, priest and deacon; we exist for pastoral and legal reasons, rather than sacramental and theological ones. If someone has been canonically ordained, under the provisions of the Church of England, then that is sufficient for us. We recognise that among clergy and laypeople at large, among our own membership, and among our officers, there may well be differences – sometimes deep differences – about the recognition of the Orders of some clerics, but thus far we have held together. Recently, one of our Association’s officers, a “traditionalist”, has been helping a female priest with some informal legal advice; that is as it should be. Doubtless women will, in the course of time, be admitted to the episcopate. We can only hope that such provisions as are made for those unconvinced by such a further development will be generous, realistic and respectful. If that means the creation of a further province, or some other structured solution, then the work of this Association and our Benefit Fund will simply continue.

**NOTICE**

**AGM Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May AD2005**

by kind permission of the Rector and Churchwardens  
in St.Giles-in-the-Fields, London WC1

**AGM at 12.30pm**

**Holy Communion at 1pm,**  
followed by a buffet lunch and the

**Annual Address at 2pm**

by Dr. Brian Hanson, CBE, DCL, LL.M.,  
Solicitor and Ecclesiastical Notary,  
Sometime Registrar and Legal Adviser to the General Synod  
of the Church of England;  
Chairman of the House of Laity, Diocese of Chichester

As in recent years, this event is also aimed to function  
as a conference for Churchwardens and Private Patrons  
and their Clergy.

## IN GOD AND NELSON

### *In the year of Trafalgar's bicentary, a reflection by John Masding*

When I was ordained forty years ago this summer, one of my fellow-ordinands was Nelson John Nelson, related, of course, to the Nelson whose fame is such that he needs neither prefix nor suffix, like the rest of us, albeit Admiral, Viscount Nelson and Duke of Bronte. It so happens that during the vacancy in the Rectory of Bristol, where I have been quite regularly officiating, I could hardly fail to have noticed the Arms of Southey on the door leading to the Vestries in Christ Church. Southey's portrait, and a message of greeting in his own hand, is on the mantlepiece in the Rector's Room. Now Robert Southey, baptised in Christ Church, wrote a *Life of Nelson* from which almost 200 years after Trafalgar one can learn much of that Christian Faith which then permeated the lives of our seamen, despite notorious lapses into sin, by undergirding a common human decency rooted in an awe of God nourished by the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, and gave to this country a unique character which she is now in grave danger of losing.

After the Battle of Aboukir Bay, Southey writes: *As soon as the conquest was completed, Nelson sent orders through the fleet to return thanksgiving in every ship for the victory with which Almighty God had blessed his majesty's arms. The French at Rosetta, who with miserable fear beheld the engagement, were at a loss to understand the stillness of the fleet during the performance of this solemn duty; but it seemed to affect many of the prisoners, officers as well as men; and graceless and godless as the officers were, some of them remarked that it was no wonder such order was Preserved in the British navy, when the minds of our men could be Impressed with such sentiments after so great a victory, and at a moment of such confusion.*

Later, when Nelson was engaged not without reluctance on behalf of the degenerate Neapolitan Royal Family against the Revolutionary French, Southey writes:

*The state of Naples may be described in few words. The king was one of the Spanish Bourbons. As the Caesars have shown us to what wickedness the moral nature of princes may be perverted, so in this family, the degradation to which their intellectual nature can be reduced has been not less conspicuously evinced. ....Of course a system of favouritism existed at court, and the vilest and most impudent corruption prevailed in every department of state, and in every branch of administration, from the highest to the lowest. It is only the institutions of Christianity, and the vicinity of better-regulated states, which prevent kingdoms, under such circumstances of misrule,*

*from sinking into a barbarism like that of Turkey. A sense of better things was kept alive in some of the Neapolitans by literature, and by their intercourse with happier countries....*

Nelson told the king, in plain terms, that he had his choice, either to advance, trusting to God for his blessing on a just cause, and prepared to die sword in hand, or to remain quiet, and be kicked out of his kingdom; one of these things must happen. The king made answer he would go on, and trust in God and Nelson; who suspected also, with reason, that the continuance of his fleet was so earnestly requested, because the royal family thought their persons would be safer, in case of any mishap, under the British flag, than under their own.

*"In God and Nelson"*: well, God may not strictly need us, but if they are to draw near to Him, the people of Bristol surely do, as they do in all the parishes of our land, the Church facing such challenges both to her established place in society and to her message to its people. We, as it were, present His credentials, by our lives, by our words – as Nelson's seamen did to the French. Long may Christ Church – and the Clergy Association – keep aloft that Banner of Christ and by steadfast witness to our historic integrity draw this nation back to God.

*J.W.M.*

**Have you visited the ECA's website?**

**[www.clergyassoc.co.uk](http://www.clergyassoc.co.uk)**

**contains details of the Association's news and events, our work among churchwardens and patrons, our charitable help to clergy through holiday grants, and the latest *Parson & Parish*.**

## **“3 O’CLOCK PLEASE, VICAR”**

### ***Roy Allen on baptismal preferences***

I wonder how many clergy like myself offer – and indeed prefer – baptisms on Sunday afternoons? Not many, I suspect. Maybe it is what I was brought up to: ordained in 1970 to a curacy in a large suburban parish with more baptisms than most, including that one, can aspire to today.

Many were the Sunday afternoons with six baptisms —the church packed with non-churchgoers, and the need to shout like a sergeant major because this was before sound systems. Sunday afternoon baptisms are not like that today; a rule of two babies, at the maximum, can easily be applied. But young couples appear to know an immense number of people, and even two baptism parties can fill the church. Which is why I favour that time, against the party line and pastoral guidelines.

When parents arrange to “have the baby done” at my Monday evening surgery, they are offered the choice between the Parish Communion and Sunday afternoon. Almost invariably, their reply is in the words of my title. Full preparation is given, of course, but the liturgical part is pretty straightforward. First, there is an insistence that the child is brought to the Parish Communion on a Sunday of the parents’ choice and the Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child is used. The congregation is always most welcoming to the families. Secondly, there is a rehearsal of the baptism with the parents and godparents present (but preferably not the child because they will be messing with him or her and not paying attention to what is being said). Finally, the Sunday afternoon baptism. Clearly church families will choose the Parish Communion and will be steered to do so.

It is my experience that when a baptism is in the afternoon far more people are present than when it is at the Parish Communion. Therefore many people can be given a Christian message and have the meaning of baptism simply explained to them. The service lasts less than twenty minutes which is ideal; other children, of which there are usually many, and, of course, young men in church, have a short attention span and this is plenty. At the Parish Communion one finds a smaller number of supporters, probably because of the time of day. And when baptisms are at that time there are decisions to be made which other clergy might find easier than I. Do you preach about baptism every time, making your regulars pretty fed up, or do you stick to the readings for the day, which the minds of the baptism party will not be on, and which are unlikely to have any relevance to baptism at all? And how do you avoid the dichotomy of the fact that, to the baptism party, that is the main event, whilst to the congregation it is a warm-up act before the Eucharist? Indeed, I have seen people, men in the main, slither out for a smoke at the Peace and never come back. To them the business

of the day is over. I think we all overestimate the effect of a full blown Parish Communion with Baptism on the young non-churchgoer. It is not a positive experience.

Of course, if a parish which conducts all baptisms at the morning service gives families the day they want, it causes a lot of disruption to the church programme —and if they set aside certain Sundays, the regular congregation may take the opportunity for a Sunday off. At least I would if I were a lay person; I have seen too many Parish Communion services wrecked at my own churches, and others, to attend one if I were not being paid for it. Only recently a very pleasant young couple who are beginning to attend my church explained why they were not there on Sunday: “We went to a christening that morning —it lasted an hour and a half and it was awful.”

I accept that part of my feeling about this matter is that I don’t want to baptise on Sunday mornings, and therefore come up with all the reasons why I should not, but at the same time I do receive comments from Sunday afternoon congregations along the lines of: “How nice it was to be here on a Sunday afternoon. The last one we went to was in the morning and we felt we didn’t belong. This service was designed just for us.”

Finally, on the subject of baptism, it would be good to have readers’ comments about the baptism of adults. My diocese insists that an unbaptised confirmation candidate should be baptised at the confirmation service by the presiding bishop. Frankly, I resent this, and feel that if I and my colleagues have brought this person in and given the preparation, then we should have that privilege. There are few more dramatic moments in life than baptising an adult, and I have not done it very often. On what basis do bishops remove this from us? I would be interested to know. It is another example of not consulting the customer, and these adults invariably say, “I would rather you had done it,” particularly when the confirmation is not at this church. Please don’t say “the bishop represents the Church universal.” I know he does; so do I, and I am capable of explaining this to the candidate. I would also like to hear from clergy like me – if there are any left – who prefer to baptise at a time when non-churchgoers are likely to be up on a Sunday, which is not 10 a.m.

*The Reverend Roy Allen is the Vicar of Marston Green in the Diocese of Birmingham.*

(The correspondence columns are always open in this magazine for useful discussion about the pastoral offices. *Ed.*)

## IN ALL THINGS LAWFUL AND HONEST

*Alex Quibbler, Parson & Parish's legal agony uncle,  
responds to some recent questions arising in parish life*

**QUESTION:** I'm a member of the laity and, probably because no one else wanted to do it, I have found myself appointed by the rest of our Parochial Church Council to be one of our representatives in a "cluster group". I don't really know much about how the Church of England works, but I have heard that other dioceses have "clusters" too. In our diocese here it seems to be a group of parishes, each parish having two or three representatives on a group which meets to discuss ways forward for the cluster to arrive at a plan with fewer clergy and church buildings. My own particular concern is that our "cluster", which we were just told about from on high, doesn't really fit in with the geography and population centres of the locality. Also, our own parish is very similar – in style, liturgy and churchmanship – to another one right over on the far side of the deanery, and I wondered whether we could have "clustered" with that. Can you tell me, please, what clusters are, and where they fit into the scheme of things?

"Clusters" have no official status or legal significance at all. They are simply informal groupings for informal discussions, and they cannot replace the normal channels and mechanisms (deanery and diocesan pastoral committees, and parochial church councils, for a start) when looking at pastoral reorganisation. I have had one or two similar questions from people on this same subject, and it does seem that, in some dioceses, thinking and planning for the future is being forced into a "clusters" straightjacket. As you suggest, the "cluster" may not fit in with life on the ground, and your parish may well share much in common with another. I do think you should make this point, to whomsoever is chairing or convening your "cluster", as well as to your rural dean and archdeacon. Perhaps you could draw their attention to the Toyne Report ("A Measure for Measures: in Mission and Ministry" GS 1528) which has been reviewing, amongst other legislation, the Pastoral Measure 1983. Its authors are keen to stress that the present Measure is not always used as creatively as it might be, and much diocesan thinking does seem to be too territorial and rather caught up with the idea that parish units have to be contiguous. At para. 3.17, complete with illustrations, the Report shows how a benefice could comprise, say, five completely detached (ie, non-contiguous) parishes, spanning different parts of the deanery. All this is possible under existing provisions, and the fear is, as you suggest, that "cluster" arrangements may be blind to a more radical and wider vision. Be bold, speak up, and tell them about "new ways of being Church" under the "old" provisions!

**QUESTION:** I know this may sound rather strange, but I've been hearing rumours that we, as incumbents, need to register, at the Land Registry, our title to all property belonging to the benefice: my vicarage, church and churchyard. Do I really need to do this? Although my vicarage is modern and a street or two away from the church, the church itself is a mediaeval building – with foundations, so I gather, going back much earlier – and the churchyard is vast, with huge monuments and a path going through it used by many of the villagers to get to the green. Do you have any advice, please?

Relax. The parsonage itself has probably been registered already, with the registered proprietor at the Land Registry being listed as the incumbent for the time being; that's you, of course, as a corporation sole. Your deed of institution/collation will be evidence of the all the rights of the benefice having been vested in you – both the spiritualities and the temporalities. There will be other entries on the Register to protect the interests of others without whose consent the parsonage cannot be sold: the Church Commissioners and the diocesan parsonages board. With regard to the church itself, and the churchyard, you would be advised, I think, to leave well alone. A good chancery lawyer has advised me that the only rights which must be registered – and may be it is this that has given rise to the rumours which you have heard – are “Aston Cantlow” rights. This simply refers to that well publicised recent case where freehold owners of a Warwickshire farm found that they were lay rectors and were therefore liable for necessary repairs to the chancel. If anyone is aware of such a right/liability then this does need to be registered – within ten years, I am told —and I would assume that your diocesan registrar would help you there. There is, though, no such obligation upon you to register title to the church and the churchyard itself, as far as I can gather. It could, of course, prove a particularly immense task, especially with much ecclesiastical property and consecrated land having a history extending over centuries, not to mention being subject, as you indicate, to easements and ownership rights of monuments and tombstones. I cannot help wondering, if the rumours you have picked up do suggest that such registrations are being encouraged, whether this is not driven by a diocesan idea for tidiness in what some diocesan offices appear to regard as “their” portfolio. As they say, “don't go there.”

*Readers are invited to continue sending in their questions about parish law and practice to the Quibbler in forthcoming issues of the magazine. All names and addresses are, of course, withheld. Whilst every effort is made by Alex to ensure the accuracy of his responses, advice should be taken before action is implemented or refrained from in specific cases.*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### *The Pastoral Measure – fears, security and abuse*

*From a serving parish priest:*

Sir,

Thank you for the latest edition of *Parson & Parish*.

I have been ordained for 27 years and have seen the Pastoral Measure(s) applied in quite a range of circumstances—some good and some very poor. I have held leasehold appointments where the review period led to some deep tensions about the renewal of the licence and when particular people were being “nudged” to move on. I have seen some people holding freehold being intransigent over some very modest pastoral adjustments. (The judgement about what is modest is naturally subjective.) I have wanted the security which freehold offers both priest and parish. But I do want to be willing to be more adaptable (within a reasonable timescale) than our present structures have offered us.

I am amongst the many who, in entering the ordained ministry, gave up the security of my own house and home. Each time we have moved has involved considerable uprooting for my wife and family. I have held long term misgivings about the security of a priest-in-charge post for fear that my family might be uprooted at short notice. This fear may be more theoretical than real, for I have not seen close up a colleague quickly “pushed out” or “moved on”. However, I have seen pressures applied.

Some months ago, within the course of a ministerial review with my diocesan bishop, the possibility of moving on from my present post was discussed. I would want to say at once that my diocesan bishop has been supportive and has not applied undue pressure. Having served here for a good number of years, I have another ten or more to go before retirement, and it would quite possibly be “right” to serve that in another place. In looking at my options I have said that I would be prepared to consider a priest-in-charge post where pastoral reorganisation is actively being pursued.

But I have seen details of a number of places where the boundaries of the Pastoral Measure are being stretched a long way. In some of these the suspension of presentation is just to allow some future flexibility, as yet undefined. In one place neither bishop, nor archdeacon, nor rural dean, had an proposals for development (not even “pipe dreams”)—yet the living was suspended. It seemed that they wanted to expand the job description and bring more work to the office holder once he was in post. The prospect



of “common tenure” was held out as giving some job security some time in the future. I am not opposed to common tenure but I am a little anxious about the loss of independence. Who sets the agenda for ministry and mission—and how?

I have given my life in ministry and service first to the Lord and then in ordination to the Church. In servant leadership I seek to move forward, aware of my own failings, but also those of the Church I serve. Do we care for one another as servants of the Church? Is it in the nature of the calling to be used and abused?

Thank you for the support of the English Clergy Association.

Yours, etc.

(NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED)

## **PARSON & PARISH**

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***While the magazine seeks to uphold the aims of the English Clergy Association, the views of the contributors are, of course, entirely their own, and do not necessarily represent those of the Association, its Editorial Committee, its Council, or its members in general.***

# BOOK REVIEWS

## **The Poetry of Prayer**

Roger Nash

Edgeways Books, AD 2004

ISBN 0 90783 983 5, Paperback, 96pp. \$4.80

Monsieur Jourdain, as Moliere tells us, made the great discovery that he had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it! Professor Nash gives us a timely reminder of the critical link between prayer and poetry.

Can it be that when we pray we are creating poetry? Since the meaning of poetry is making, it is significant that in the Letter to the Romans Paul establishes a link between our inarticulate groanings and creation in terms that are both realistic and poetic:

“We do not know how to pray as we ought but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

This follows his assertion that, “...the whole creation is groaning in labour pains.”

Professor Nash does not quote St Paul but he does take to task those, “...who in ignoring the poetry of prayer miss the nature of both.” What follows is a series of essays, written over a number of years, exploring the idea of religious faith. Being a philosopher, poet and a synagogue cantor, he is well equipped to do this. He is well aware of the conflict which can arise when the search for explanation in theology apparently rules out the validity of responsiveness to beauty in the language of worship.

The first essay, entitled “God and Beauty”, explores some of these issues and draws some interesting analogies between aesthetic and religious experience, but he is at his most compelling when he gives some examples in which the general reader can share in depth. Starting with the Psalms, he claims that to read them as poetry can indeed throw light on their nature:

“But unless they are read as prayer too, prayer that poetry helps make, not poetry alone the light will distort as much as it reveals.”

The third essay, which was my favourite, is a detailed examination of the Twenty-Third Psalm; a shepherd in need. Far from presenting the part played by the sheep as purely passive, the psalmist shows a loving shepherd seeking a response from his sheep:

“It is particularly appropriate that a God whose majesty is not tyranny, who needs and seeks our willing participation in furthering divine ends, should speak to the believer in the language of poetry.”

From the Twenty-Third Psalm we are given an analysis of Caedmon's Hymn. From the beginning this has had an important place in the growth of the Church in England. It exists in seventeen copies dating from the eighth to the fifteenth century. In comparison, other English poems have survived mostly in one copy, even Beowulf. Professor Nash compares and contrasts the light shed on this poem by Bede and T.S. Eliot and prefers Bede as having the greater insight.

The penultimate essay takes us back to the Bible and the poetry of Job, in particular to creation and wonder. The link here again reminded me of St Paul's eighth chapter in the letter to the Romans. Job is, of course, far from inarticulate, but recognises finally his need for repentance in the context of creation.

The final chapter, entitled "The Demonology of Verse", examines the nature of inspiration itself. The author quotes the view of Plato, "that a poet in his sane compositions never reaches perfection but are utterly eclipsed by the performance of the inspired madman." As we would expect, he does not allow this view to go unchallenged and seeks to widen the notion of what constitutes inspiration, making it clear that madness is not to be confused with irrationality.

He is clear from the reader's viewpoint that what makes something inspiring is the compulsion it exerts on the reader to return to the work again and again:

"For the reader understanding great poetry will include the need to re-read, to revise and deepen one's understanding indefinitely. We can always find more in a great poem."

The importance of this for public prayer and liturgy has often been overlooked. Those who find some modern attempts and indeed some not so modern attempts, at creating liturgy to be lacking because of the poor quality of language, should perhaps look at the lack of poetry. It is not sufficient just to make theological expressions and hope that somehow these will lift the hearts and the imaginations of the worshippers. As Professor Nash reminds us, about the herdsman Caedmon at the monastery at Whitby:

"Now he, taking all that he could learn by hearing, retained it in his mind, and turning it over like a clean beast ruminating, converted it into the sweetest poetry."

*The Reverend Charles Stallard, Honorary Almoner of the Association.*

**Know the Truth: A Memoir**

George Carey

HarperCollins, AD 2004

ISBN 0 00712 030 3, Paperback, 468pp.

George Carey will enter the gates of heaven far ahead of your reviewer. From the graphic picture of the young recruit praying by his bedside in the National Service dormitory to the fervent evangelism of episcopal parish missions in Bath and Wells, and Canterbury, this is the story of a Christ-centred life, with every step tested against the bench mark of God's will, as revealed in Scripture. It is the story of a man who, for the sake of the gospel, has not spared himself, and who can say with St. Paul, "I have fought the fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Every page also underlines that Eileen Carey shared in this work as an equal partner, a couple united in the Lord and in his service.

Unfortunately, one of the ironies of faith is that a straightforward unvarnished tale of a holy life does not often make for compulsive reading—more so when the story is told in a bland and anodyne way, and in a style that is less than gripping. On one occasion, Frank Field, knowing that the press was hounding the Archbishop, told him, "Don't let the buggers get you down." Dr. Carey writes, "Feeling that this ought to be played with a straight bat but with a smile, I replied, 'Thank you very much indeed. I shall bear that in mind'—as I have endeavoured to do ever since." There are many more pages in the same vein.

There is another major problem. Most of the text is a detailed and accurate account of the events during his watch at Lambeth. While little of significance is added to knowledge already in the public arena, the whole story appears to aim at delivering the message, "George was a success." It was largely through his influence that Synod accepted women as priests; he battled at great personal cost to "hold the line" against rampant liberalism in the Church, particularly in sexual morality; he saw the Church Commissioners 1992 "crash" as a God given opportunity to re-model management structures and to encourage the people in the pews to pay their way; he proved a faithful parish priest to the Royal Family in their time of need; his endless journeys in support of the Anglican communion bore fruit; the Lambeth Conference of 2000 was "a great achievement"; he took historic steps to begin inter-faith dialogue. He is particular proud of his interventions in the political sphere, and writes, "I would later remind Prime Ministers of both major parties that I saw it as my duty to confront them if they embarked on policies which I felt undermined the nation in any way."

Apart from the fact that others will have a different slant on these events, this constant self-praise is a distraction to the reader. It is also strange coming from one of patently strong faith and deep humility. Why? Many passages dwell on his humble origins, and his legitimate pride in “making good” in a spectacular way. I suspect he is determined to show that he was as effective in office as any of his socially superior predecessors. But he works too hard at what is an unnecessary project. In testing times, George Carey was a solid and faithful Archbishop: he has no need to prove it.

*The Very Reverend Michael Higgins, Dean Emeritus of Ely.*

### **A Leather Dog Collar**

Charles Stallard

Dinas, AD 2004

ISBN 0 86243 740 7, Paperback, 111pp. £5.95

Parish life in the benefices Charles Stallard has held has been enlivened by his lovable and intelligent Dachshund dogs. They have been his faithful companions, and Jubilee has gone with him into deepest Wales, rather different from the Midlands where he ministered for so long. I have known him for over forty years, but until I read this charming book, most attractively illustrated with line drawings, I had not appreciated how much his notorious humour ran to whimsy. We all knew he was funny, and an actor to boot: come a bishop’s retirement presentation, and there Charles would be with the best of them, introducing a new character into the current sketch (those were expansionist days) as “The New Diocesan Adviser on Advisers”. But all the satire in this book is gentle, tongue-in-cheek stuff, expressed as if the Dachshunds were putting paw to paper (or claw to key), and first Dennis (remember *Toytown*? Mr. Growser finds no place in a book such as this), and then after the rather moving description of his last moments in the garden, young Jubilee. The pages were published in their first form as monthly episodes in the Parish Magazine—none the worse for that, as Charles Dickens declares.

I chortled gently at the picture of my old friend trundling an empty leather dog collar behind him through the streets, the day Dennis slipped his lead, and getting some very peculiar stares from passers-by.....or the mental picture of a dog bred for badger-hunting giving the school class a demonstration of his tunnelling genes by running under their desks.....he

knows Ecclesiastes (my retirement text, it was), “A living dog is better than a dead lion”, although (Charles Stallard loves ghastly puns —how do you like “Bark! The Herald Angels sing”?) he had to survive a Fête Worse Than Death, and did. But Dennis and Jubilee can be heroes, as when Dennis found the bishop’s lost pectoral cross (speed humps had jolted it off the roof of his car before he had gone too far); and Jubilee alerted the family to a burglarious attempt at breaking-and-entering through the study window.

“He had been asked to preach on ‘Animals’! Before he left, he came over to me and I felt his hands giving me a reassuring stroke and pat. ‘You’ll be all right, Dennis!’

When he had gone.....the Rector’s wife, sensing....my difficulty, picked me up in her arms – ever so gently – and carried me down to the bottom of the garden by the old damson tree. My legs were very shaky.....She went back to the kitchen, leaving me to follow when I was ready, as I always did. This time there was no need. I simply stood under the damson tree in the garden I know so well. In my younger days I have chased cats away from the pond where the goldfish are. I know every tree and bush, with its own particular smell. Here I have buried delicious bones, like St. Paul’s preaching, both in season and out of season.

But all these things are passing, as they must. The Master is calling. Another garden? ‘You’ll be all right, Dennis!’”

Jubilee shall have the last word: “The reason a dog has so many friends — is that his tail wags instead of his tongue!”

*J.W.M.*

# CHAIRPIECE

## *The freehold again*

Freehold is guaranteed in a property-owning democracy. As long ago as Magna Carta, King John had to promise at the outset (line 6, I think) *ecclesia anglicana libera sit*,<sup>1</sup> and the Great Charter, confirmed by Edward I., and ever since held high upon both sides of the Atlantic as a foundation of our liberties, declares roundly and unambiguously:

No Freeman shall be taken, or imprisoned, or be disseised of his Freehold, or Liberties, or free Customs, or be outlawed, or exiled, or any otherwise destroyed; nor will we pass upon him, nor condemn him, but by lawful Judgment of his Peers, or by the Law of the Land.

King William III., then Prince of Orange, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1688 addressed a gathering of Lords Spiritual and Temporal in the Queen's Presence Chamber in St. James's to seek advice "how to pursue the end of my *Declaration*", as he declared, "in calling a free parliament for the preservation of the Protestant religion, and returning the rights and liberties of the Kingdom, and settling the same, that they may not be in danger of being again subverted."

There was then read, by the Lords' order, the Prince's *Declaration*, given at The Hague on 10<sup>th</sup> October, in the course of whose nine pages (in the edition before me) His Highness makes this fundamental observation, critical of the Commissioners of King James II., and by contrast with their actions "under the specious pretence of moderation" and truly following the spirit of Magna Carta:

The said Commissioners have suspended the Bishop of London, only because he refused to obey an order that was sent to him to suspend a worthy divine<sup>2</sup> without so much as citing him to make his own defence, or observing the common form of process. They have turned out a President chosen by the Fellows of Magdalen<sup>3</sup> College, and afterwards all the Fellows of that College, without so much as citing them before any court that could take legal cognizance of that affair, or obtaining any sentence against them by a competent judge. And the only reason that was given for their turning them out was their refusing to choose for their President a person that was recommended to them by the instigation of those evil counselors, though the right of free election belonged undoubtedly to them. But they were turned out of their freeholds, contrary to law, and to that express provision of Magna Charta, that no man shall lose his life, or goods, but by the law of the land. And now those evil counselors have put the said

College wholly into the hands of Papists, though, as it is abovesaid, they are incapable of all such employments, both by the law of the land and by the statutes of the College.

The Archbishops' Council set up a Group to review Clergy Terms of Service in December 2002, under the chairmanship of the very distinguished lawyer, Professor David McClean, Q.C., Chancellor of Sheffield, Chancellor of Newcastle, ironically himself a Magdalen man.<sup>4</sup> Now, we learn, the Group proposes to the General Synod that the Freehold be abolished in parish life—the freehold of office, and the freehold of property.

Why? And why not?

The Clergy Association has since 1938 sought to maintain the integrity of English “parish life” as basic to the Church of England. It is that which is threatened. We sound the tocsin, then, as we must. Others may be seduced by the promises of specious moderation; but we shall endure any opprobrium, and the blatant trumpet-blare of the hard cases that make such bad law as now threatens our hard-won ecclesiastical establishment, simply because at bottom the issue is the freedom of the English people.

The rector or vicar “owns” in so far as anyone does the parish church and parsonage. His is the freehold, not only of his office as rector or vicar, but also of the property of the benefice, in crude language, “of what he is Vicar of”. He holds the freehold, like a householder, although with even more pieces of law applying to the property—and he is the holder effectively as a kind of trustee for the parishioners, for whom church and parsonage exist, and by whom they were often paid for and built, if not by a local patron. When there is no rector or vicar there is no owner—the freehold is in abeyance, one might say. The bishop has a type of guardianship during a vacancy. (If the vicarage were in the hands of the local church they could be tempted to sell it, and capitalize on the value: so the bishop is the man entitled to do so, not they, and he ought to be a protection for the property from short-sighted sale.) He may appoint, and often does, when the patron’s right of presentation and nomination to a benefice is suspended, a priest-in-charge; but a priest-in-chargeship is still a vacancy in law so far as property is concerned, and so it is the bishop not the clergyman who is able to sell in such circumstances. Can a man be guardian in his own interests? As Juvenal said, “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? —Who shall guard the guardians?*” It cannot be right that upon a sale the diocese should scoop the proceeds of local parish property—the vacant benefice needs an independent guardian, as this Association has said before, and the law needs changing to respect the interests of the parishioners—whose church it really is. We call for a national list of truly independent guardians (appointed by the Lord Chancellor), two unconnected with the area or



diocese being selected by lot for each vacancy, and no sale to proceed without the consent of both. If the good bishop wanted to sell off property that was truly redundant and surplus to requirements, he could have nothing to fear from such objectivity, and, not judge in his own cause, would gain the protection of impartial arbiters and guardians. Bishops need such protection badly. Under our modest proposals, it would be hard for anybody to be as aggrieved as people too often are now. Independent judgment is convincing (to all but the obdurate) and the law needs changing to respect the interests of the parishioners—whose church it really is. Bishops may be good men. I do not doubt it. They have an oversight which is proper and necessary. I affirm it. But the sheep are kept by a shepherd, not a wolf. And the problem with the passing of the ownership of the freehold into diocesan hands is that it tends to get “wolfed down” (or is thought to have been, which is almost as bad)—and we see exposed to our contending prayers the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the hard life of a bishop.

On the one hand, the Church of England is struggling on the edge of financial cataclysm, and may at any time fall into that pit whose spiral walls admit of no easy ascent. *Facilis descensus Averno*.<sup>5</sup> So it will be said that we must stop at nothing<sup>6</sup> to survive; that the coming crisis justifies centralization of power and resources. It is an attractive thesis. It will have good men and true among its supporters. We heard something a little like it with the founding of the original Ecclesiastical Commission.

But what is life, if there is there subsisting no *soul*?

So we shall say, to the contrary, that whatever the dangers of dissolution of the fabric of its parishes, the Church of England must not abandon its roots. When the roots are dead, poisoned, perhaps, then the tree, however grand and lofty, perishes. It withers. It dies. It is good for nothing but to be cast on the fire and burnt. The tree can draw nothing from the soil that surrounds it, upon which its leaves have softly fallen, without its roots—and the dew of heaven.

Hard cases do make bad law. There are clergy, even beneficed incumbents, who ought to be removed from their freeholds—by due process of law, as Americans say, with their particular echo of Magna Carta. However, such cankered clergy afford no reason for bringing the house down about the ears of us all. And while it is true that small local councils or trusts sometimes fail in their duties, and properties are ill-cared-for or badly run, shall the ninety-and-nine be destroyed for the one that is lost? That is not what the Good Lord said. Curious that the remedy offered to the diocesan shepherd is not to leave the ninety-and-nine who are managing well, and go after that which fails; but rather to abandon the failing and the stragglers,

---

and to grab the living lest they too come to a like fate? That is the world's prudence: it is not the way of the Shepherd and bishop of our souls.

If there are too many parishes, there are too many dioceses. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.<sup>7</sup> Of the saving of money and the correction of men there is no end. It is like unto the do-it-yourself householder, who would balance his table upon an uneven floor by sawing a little off each leg in turn, beginning again where he left off, and finding in the end no table but a footstool—and that a wobbly one. He needed a Carpenter. Cutting bits off here and there *ad hoc* is no way to balance a table, or to balance the books.

*J.W.M.*

<sup>1</sup> That the Church of England shall be free....

<sup>2</sup> Dr. John Sharpe, Rector of St. Giles-in-the-Fields and Dean of Norwich.

<sup>3</sup> The *Declaration* spells it Magdalene, as today at Another Place.

<sup>4</sup> We were fellow-undergraduates, and confirmed together. It's a class with a 100% still-active rate! He has had a most distinguished career, and exerts great influence in Church affairs. But looking back to those distant days, as Demy I hugely enjoyed the commemorative fun of the annual Restoration Dinner, when the College Foundations celebrate their return from the wilderness of eviction, drinking each to the other in the Loving Cup, to the words, *Ius suum cuique* — to each his right.

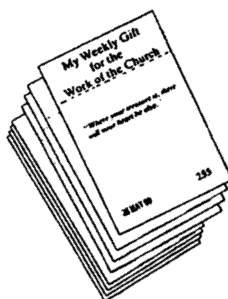
<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, vi.126 — the same Book in which he sees the Tiber foaming with much blood. In Charles Williams' awesome and chilling novel, *Descent into Hell*, the anti-hero willingly steps off his ladder of self-betraying descent to trot off into the darkness of unknowing, to lose his own self, as Jesus puts it.

<sup>6</sup> By nothing I mean of course nothing *legal*.

<sup>7</sup> The Church of Ireland seems to have two dioceses which each contain just a single parish! Sensibly the Irish, seeing the writing on the wall, have amalgamated many of their dioceses; and bishops and even deans may have several cathedrals as a consequence. But the pretence of grandeur has long been given up. The Church of Ireland is realistic in this, if not in some other things.

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