

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

PARSON AND PARISH

is published by

THE ENGLISH CLERGY ASSOCIATION

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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

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

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FROM OVER THE PARAPET

Editorial

Quota and stipend

In July the Secretary of a diocese on the northern boundary of the Province of Canterbury wrote in the following, or similar, terms to a number of parish priests of the diocese:

“The Bishop and his staff reviewed yesterday the Parish Share receipts up to 30th June 2006. Given that at this point we would expect to have received 50% of Parish Share, there was great concern that your parish had been unable to pay anything at all.

I should be most grateful to have a letter or email by return to indicate how the parish plans to meet its Parish Share obligations of \$XX,XXX for 2006. The Diocese is currently meeting the costs of mission and ministry in your parish, including a regular monthly stipend payment, and this cannot continue without your contribution to these costs.

I look forward very much to hearing from you.”

We at the editorial desk, of course, know little of the background behind this rather threatening letter, but on the face of it, it displays a deplorable lack of understanding. First, it seems to forget that parishes *are* “the diocese”, and it seems strange that a diocesan office should be encouraging the notion of a disembodied abstraction “out there”. Secondly, a substantial part of the costs of parochial mission and ministry *are* met by the parish itself, and not least by the several thousands of pounds that many incumbents receive, as part of their stipend, by way of parochial and cemetery fees. Thirdly, the diocesan quota, or “parish share”, remains a voluntary contribution and any attempt to levy it in the style of a tax – which is the implication of a threat to impose sanctions - could well be unlawful.

Above all, what is most disturbing is the direct link being made between a PCC’s voluntary contribution and the payment of part of the priest’s stipend from the diocesan stipends fund, and the threat to sever that part. We could contemplate a situation in which the incumbent perhaps thoroughly supports the payment of the quota, but the rest of the entire PCC which he – or she - chairs, votes for some reason to reduce, or withhold, their contribution. Why should his or her full stipend be dependent upon the votes of others in a PCC?

But could a diocese withdraw payment of a stipend in the way threatened? True, as our own legal man, Alex Quibbler, has pointed out in a previous issue, the only part of the stipend which is inalienable is the guaranteed annuity (for those who have elected to retain it) and the fee income; the rest

of the stipend – that paid by the diocesan stipends fund – is discretionary. But once the stipend level has been determined and payment made then the cleric has a right to its continuance. We cannot envisage that a court would hold otherwise. The financial maintenance of the ordained stipendiary clergy, to enable them to fulfil their vocation and ministry, is a fundamental aspect of Church life; it is not something to be played with or used as a lever to threaten a parish.

In our last issue we caught a whiff of simony from another diocese north of Watford. There it was the ecclesiastical hierarchy considering a possible continued suspension of a living unless the parish gave an undertaking to be able to meet the projected quota increases over the next few years. In other words, a cleric was being encouraged to traffic in spiritual things in the sense of “buying”, through the PCC, an ecclesiastical benefice. The present circumstances are not, it seems, so different. Linking ability to continue in office to the parish’s payment of quota does rather strike us as somewhat simoniacal.

It is not this Association’s aim to encourage the non-payment of quota. We encourage the responsible payment of a just and voluntary contribution, coupled with a healthy scrutinising of all central and hierarchical costs. What we deplore is any attempt to threaten, bully, or penalise those parishes – and their clergy – who are unable to pay or who have reasonable and moral grounds not to make that contribution in full.

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PARISH, PATRON AND PALACE

The Marquess of Salisbury, in this year's Annual address, reveals his prejudices in relation to severing the tap-root of the Prayer Book, strangling the lifeblood of the parishes, and increasing the Church's bureaucracy.

I see that the Church of England with its usual foresight has issued a warning to anybody who occupies this position. For those of you who have not examined this pulpit, let me tell you that in front of me is the text, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (*John 12, v.21*). I hope that I will not do violence to those eminently sensible sentiments in the course of what I am about to say.

Naturally, I am honoured to be asked to speak to this distinguished company, although I must say I accepted with a strong sense of trepidation. In fact, as I woke up this morning it seemed to me that the only reason I *had* accepted was that my trepidation after accepting would really be very much less than my trepidation had I refused, at meeting either Margaret Laird or John Masding afterwards. And at least these feelings are in part attributable to the fact that I really can, in spite of what your Chairman has said, lay no claim whatsoever to specialised knowledge of either the theology or the administration of the Church of England.

So perhaps some of you may think that what you will get today is merely a voice from the past. It is a voice, it is true, that belongs to one who suffers from – perhaps actually *enjoys* would be a better word – what I fear most bishops, perhaps even priests, and certainly church bureaucrats would regard as old fashioned and even reactionary prejudices. I suggest therefore that you should be prepared to lay off a little for what follows. Perhaps I had better try and explain some of those prejudices.

They are rooted in a number of convictions. Liturgically, they are rooted in the *Book of Common Prayer*, which made this afternoon's Communion service such a pleasure. Organisationally, they are rooted in the belief that the parishes are the frontline where the Church of England should deploy its most important human and financial resources. And historically, they are rooted in the conviction that nations and organisations in decline come to be dominated by their bureaucracies at the expense of the lifeblood that sustains them.

Prayer Book prejudice

So let me try and elaborate a little on each of these prejudices, if I may. First the *Book of Common Prayer*. Some of you know – because I can see one or two familiar faces here – that I have the great honour to be the President of the Prayer Book Society. This is an organisation that has kept the beacon of the old liturgy alight during at least four decades of sustained attack. It is

an attack, I think, designed to consign one of the foundations of the English language to the museum. The language of the Prayer Book, we are told, is unintelligible, particularly to the young. Its sociology and theology are, it seems, at best questionable. And above all the *Book of Common Prayer* makes our Church look old-fashioned.

Now, you will not be surprised to know that I find these arguments less than persuasive. After all, the young are not as stupid or as relentlessly “hip” as the patronising old and middle-aged think them to be.

Let me give you an example of this, although not drawn from church life—and if you will forgive my slipping into my anecdotage. Many years ago I was the Member of Parliament for the remarkably beautiful and interesting constituency of South Dorset. And, like all members of Parliament who are sensible, I spent a certain amount of my time going round schools. One of the schools was the first school in a small and ancient village. I was concerned that the standards of the school were not as high as they should have been, and I went and visited the head teacher and asked whether I could sit at the back of the class and listen a bit to what was going on. She told me, “Yes, and why don’t you go into this particular class—85% of them, although they should be able to do their sums, are functionally innumerate.” Well, listening to the teacher, I was not altogether surprised by the level of boredom exhibited by the class, and I was particularly amused by the shenanigans being perpetrated by rather a lively small boy at the back. On further enquiry after the end of the session, the teacher told me that he was, without exception, the stupidest and the most innumerate of an innumerate class. Anyway, I caught up with him afterwards and engaged him in conversation. And during the course of our conversation it emerged that he did have a hobby, and his hobby was racing—horses. So I asked him, naturally enough, whether he bet. “Oh, yes,” he said, “certainly I bet.”

“Do you win?”

“Yes, I do.”

“How do you get the money on?”

“Well, my older brother does that although he’s under-age too, but he’s quite big.”

So I said, “I hope you don’t mind me asking you an impertinent question?”

“Fire away.”

“Well,” I said, “Do you know what a six horse yankee is?”

“Yeah!”

I said, “Well let me ask you an even more impertinent question. There are six horses, and their odds are 13 to 2, 15 to 8, 3 to 1, and so on. You’ve got a 10p stake. What do you win?”

He said, after about ten seconds, “Five hundred and ninety-two pounds, 13 pence.”

Now I have to tell you that my conclusion from this was not complimentary about the school’s teaching ability, but also was not very complimentary about the assumptions made by the authorities as to the level of understanding of which their charges were capable.

What about the other two prejudices about the Prayer Book? Well, as to theology and sociology, I have not noticed that the liturgy over the centuries has prevented the Church of England either evolving as a broad Church or from responding to changes in fashion and churchmanship. After all, the rather puritan fashions of the reign of Elizabeth I, going back a long way, yielded to the more elaborate and decorative churches and ritual of the reign of her successor without wholly wrecking the Church of England. And perhaps the same sort of observation could be said to apply to the upheavals of the nineteenth century. So I myself am entirely a purist, I am sorry to say, about the *Book of Common Prayer*.

However, I do concede that in an age of rapid technological – and therefore social – change, it is clear that the Church is right to experiment with other forms of liturgy and to think in particular about how to use technology so that worship can become once again part of people’s lives. What I fear is that this reaction is born of a defensive cast of mind and that this arises from defeatism and the evaporation of faith within the Church itself — a very different thing from what I think is one of the attractions of our Church which is the questioning and doubting nature of a lot of our intellectual activity and of our faith.

Anyone who travels to our inner cities – let alone to the Islamic world, where I have spent quite a lot of time in the last twenty years and where the populations are still very young – can see what an effect a self-confident and militant faith has on young minds. Young Muslims are not put off by having to learn the Koran by heart or by observing the tenets of their faith, exacting though these things might be. Now I deplore the tenets of militant Islam and the hypocrisy of many Islamics who present themselves as moderates to the West while practising extremism with their own people. However, I do think that we could learn from their conviction, when proclaiming our own gentler, and more convincing, message.

If we are not seen clearly to hold basic convictions ourselves, it seems to me that we are unlikely even to *interest*, let alone convince, others. You will remember that, in Evelyn Waugh’s *Decline and Fall*, Mr Prenderghast – after becoming a Church of England priest – began to experience doubts. Luckily for him he discovered in the nick of time a new sort of vicar called a “modern churchman”, who did not need to believe in anything at all.

Now I am sure that, as Willie Whitelaw once memorably observed of Archbishop Runcie to a BBC radio interviewer, every one of our bishops “is a deeply religious man.” Indeed those whom I am lucky enough to know unquestionably are. However, collectively, the leadership of our Church sometimes sounds more like Prenderghast than it should, if it is to inspire the rest of us, especially the young in a rootless age. Because a rootless age, in contrast to what the Church of England apparently thinks, appreciates people with roots and faith. And I think the *Book of Common Prayer* is our principal tap-root and it would be a mistake to sever it.

I should add that I have this week been tempted to think that this was perhaps a little bit of an unfair judgement. After all, the Church has been admirably firm in its opposition to Lord Joffe’s Mercy Killing Bill. And we should, of course, bear tribute to the Archbishops and the bishops for their leadership in what is a fundamental if difficult question. However, no sooner do we hear a reassuring story, than another less reassuring one seems to emerge. Am I alone in thinking it more than a little odd that the Deans and Chapters of both Winchester and Lincoln Cathedrals allowed the makers of the Da Vinci Code to film on their premises? The film is clearly an attack on Christianity which deliberately blurs fact and fiction. Can you imagine the row if Hollywood had ever summoned up the nerve to do something similar to Islam? There would have been riots in the streets all over the Western world. And I am sure that the Foreign Secretary would have been called upon to apologise, and that she would have obliged.

Parish prejudice

So what about my second prejudice — that parishes are the front line where the Church should deploy most of its resources? You will have noticed, I am sure, that there are parishes which enjoy a rude state of health and that that rude state of health in many cases has been an encouragingly recent phenomenon. Many of them, I am sorry to say, do not use the *Book of Common Prayer*! However, all of them, I suspect, do have something else in common. A leadership which radiates conviction, and which sees the Church as an integral part of the daily lives of their parishioners. Sadly, I have little experience of parishes of this sort, most of which are not to be found in what has been described as the “Agatha Christie villages of rural England”. However, I would not mind betting that their success does not stem from a dependence on the diocesan hierarchy and that their vigour and life is community and parish-based.

The Church of England is, as we know, a remarkable institution. Its priests are underpaid and their families increasingly find themselves subjected to stress, difficulty and – and do not underestimate this one – declining status.

Yet, astonishingly, able men and women continue to hear the call. As the patron of a number of livings who tries to take an interest in their affairs, I am constantly encouraged by the people who apply to become incumbents. However, I am also aware that, as, sadly, the Church retreats, the burden on the parishes is increasing —financially, morally and organisationally. Financially the quota is becoming a ludicrously heavy burden. Morally, with the questions of homosexuality and other sexual matters, and the question of women priests not yet wholly resolved, and of multi-culturalism, induce a feeling of constant revolution almost Maoist in the way it unsettles. And organisationally the continual amalgamations destroy the parish's function as the focus of the community. They also increase, I think, the power of the diocese at the expense of both the incumbent and the PCC – and, dare I add – patron. It all amounts, I think, in the view of this man in the pew, to a feeling that, to the Church of England, the parish is less important than the synod and the bureaucracy, and that the important balance between parish and the rest is being destroyed.

Bureaucratic prejudice

Now this handily brings me to my third prejudice: that nations and organisations in decline come to be dominated by their bureaucracies at the expense of their very lifeblood. In that respect the comparison with cancer is an unpleasant but an exact one. You will be aware that this is not really a recent phenomenon. I seem, for instance, to remember a particularly diverting passage in Gibbon, in which the entire administration of the Byzantine Empire spends about three months discussing the future administration of two provinces which had been lost to the Seljuk Turks several years before. There are, of course, plenty of less extreme examples. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Spain are obvious ones, where the villain of the piece was a church, in that instance: the Church of Rome. Nearer our own age, we only have to look to our own dear Whitehall or the shaming incompetence and corruption of the increasingly dominant Brussels bureaucracy to see that this is a disease latent in the human condition which emerges when initial vigour begins to wear off.

So may I venture to suggest that, to the outsider at least, the Church of England emits signals that it is suffering a little from the same disease. All bureaucracies in my experience love uniformity for its own sake. Sir Humphrey Appleby felt uneasy with Parliament which by its nature is administratively untidy, and felt much more comfortable with a powerful administration which prized tidiness, and which was under the control of an administrative elite: in his case, the senior Civil Service. Like the Colbertian and Napoleonic enarchs of France, Sir Humphrey aspires to government by highly, if narrowly, educated elites, rather than government by Civil Servants

who through their ministers are held to account by a Parliament of untrained ordinary people. Our tradition, of course, is to prefer a Parliament of fools, whom you and I can sack at least every five years, to a permanent elite of able men and women, officials and judges whom we cannot.

It always seems to me that the trouble with such an elite, who are a necessary part of an organisation, is that very rapidly if they become the masters, they come to resemble Sloane the great creator of General Motors who famously observed that what was good for General Motors was good for America. In the elite's case, they think that what is good for them is good for the country and they rapidly develop a contempt for you and me as a result. I hope this does not apply to our bishops but during my time, now some years ago, as a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, I did sometimes find it difficult to avoid the impression that some of the Church's own officials might have succumbed to the temptation.

Concluding prejudice

So, in conclusion, let me, perhaps not too provocatively, pose a few questions which I have asked occasionally of bishops, administrators, and of others interested in the Church, both privately and occasionally semi-publicly, and which I have found them reluctant, at the very least, to answer.

First of all, how would the diocese, in these days of synodical government, react to the idea of each diocesan synod setting up more powerful machinery than exists at present to monitor the cost-effectiveness of diocesan expenditure? —a diocesan equivalent of the Public Accounts Committee in the House of Commons, if you like. After all, our parish quotas are extracted from us and, in all equity, we should be able to appoint a grand inquisitor or a group of grand inquisitors, with not only plenary powers but the inclination to investigate how our money is spent and to report back to us. In the event of incompetence, the committee should have the right to demand the removal from office of those responsible.

Second, it would be interesting to know across the board, in spite of the extraordinary variety of work-habits and personalities of our bishops, how much time they spend in administrative rather than pastoral and other church activities. Certainly, when I have talked to bishops – and this is no more than anecdotal evidence – they always seem to be complaining about how much time they spend in administration. Perhaps they should farm it out or join with other dioceses to buy it from an administrative contractor. That is what increasingly happens in business. There are plenty of models to draw from in our new Information Technology age. But this is perhaps an unworthy thought; no doubt their Lordships have already examined it.

A third thought. How many ordained priests are administrators or form part of the staff of Church bureaucracies? It is a question to which I find it very difficult to get an answer, so I am reduced to my – no doubt unworthy – suspicions. I may be of course – probably am – completely wrong in this, but keeping close to the fount of patronage is always a rapid route to preferment. So with an increasingly centralised administration it would be odd if the Church differed from other bureaucracies in this respect. If indeed I am right there must be some scope at least to redeploy a fairly high proportion of such able people where they are needed —which, it seems to me, is above all in the parishes which should form our front line.

Fourth. Is the abolition of the parson's freehold really necessary? Of course, there is no doubt that it makes parish reorganisation a great deal easier. It is also true that the freehold makes it difficult to remove a priest who has become an embarrassment. This, though, luckily only applies I think in a very small minority of cases. However, in the relations between diocese and parish, abolishing the freehold represents a substantial increase in the power of the diocese at the parish's expense. As we know, there is nothing more fickle than administrative fashion. Therefore we also know parishes need some institutional rights as a defence against a powerful bureaucracy. If, like me, you believe that the Church can only survive and prosper through its roots *in the parishes* this seems an odd time to attack their rights and to add to the power of the bishops.

Fifth – and you must forgive a particular case of special pleading here – why are the bishops so against the patronage? Is it because the patronage is an antediluvian institution redolent of an Erastian past which, like the hereditary House of Lords, should have long ago been consigned to history? Or is it because the patronage, if carefully exercised in consultation with the parish, represents another line of defence against diocesan diktat? In considering this question, I am irresistibly tempted back into my anecdote so please forgive me. Years ago, again when I was an MP, I was co-opted onto a group which regularly met representatives of the bishops, led by David Say then Bishop of Rochester and sometime Rector of Hatfield. It was a remarkable group of MPs and it included, among others, Frank Field, John Gummer, Enoch Powell, and that most delightful of socialists, Eric Heffer. There were others as well, but they were the “usual suspects” if you like. And I remember, in one of our early meetings, on the agenda was a discussion on the future of patronage. I think it was called the Paul Report, was it not? And everybody, for some reason I cannot begin to imagine, began to look at me to take the lead for the parliamentary side. However, before I could open my mouth, Eric jumped in. “Now look here, Bishop,” he said, “I want you to know that I think abolishing the patronage is a very stupid thing to do.” He said, “I want to give you an example. There's a very good socialist

who's been an incumbent in a church in Liverpool, and if I hadn't been able to secure his appointment through the holder of the patronage, which was a local Liverpool institution, we wouldn't have had a good socialist there. You've got to keep the patronage. It keeps variety."

An attack from that quarter was the last thing that the Bishop of Rochester expected, and he passed rapidly on to another subject —much to my amusement. I suspect that one of the lessons of this tale is that we should prize diversity in appointments as well as diversity in other things. As we know, the Sir Humphreys of bureaucracies find anything but uniformity uncomfortable. And sadly one incumbent with a dozen parish churches does more to increase his or her mileage, I suspect, than the numbers in the congregations. I just wonder when confronted with an increasing shortage of clergy and some very difficult decisions, whether sometimes it would not be better to concentrate on one church in an area as the centre of a bigger, effective parish leaving the other churches either to be used for other purposes or to the imagination of the communities they once serviced. I am particularly encouraged to ask this question because my wife is a Roman Catholic and there are very few Roman Catholic churches in our part of Dorset. But she travels ten miles to church on a Sunday and she reports that the Roman Catholic churches in Wimborne or Fordingbridge across the Hampshire frontier are packed. That might be a lesson for others of us.

I could go on, but I think I have tried your patience more than enough. I just want to say that it has been a great honour to have been asked to speak to you today, just as it is an honour to be a Vice-President of the English Clergy Association. The Association, I know, is the voice of the parish priest who, it seems to me, should be the teeth rather than the tail of the Church of England. As you have heard, I do wonder whether, like the army, another great British Institution under threat, the Church's teeth are not being starved in order to feed the tail. It is always difficult to extricate institutions from such a situation and perhaps the only people who can perform the task are the parish priests and their own parishioners. And if you will allow me one other mischievous thought as an *envoi*: we *do* provide the quota. As Parliament found in dealing with the King, perhaps power over at least some of the Church's finances should give us, the parishes, some additional influence with the palace.

This address was given to the Association and members of the Patrons Consultative Group on 15th May 2006 in the Church of St.Giles-in-the-Fields.

FRESH EXPRESSIONS —AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS?

Paul Kent explores Mission Initiatives

Throughout the history of the Church of England stirrings have arisen spontaneously from within, and from time to time, to respond to the pressures of the world at large. In the present circumstances of growing secularisation of society in the United Kingdom, the Church encounters progressive problems in presenting its message to a public often ill-informed and unresponsive to the spiritual. Secular considerations, if not secular values, appear to be becoming the general norm. It is understandable that in such a world, fresh ways of supporting the traditional Church and reaching out to the sceptical and indifferent should be explored.

In the last ten years a number of new concepts have crept into common use. We are urged to think of ourselves as a “mission-shaped Church” generating “mission initiatives”, and to be an “emerging Church” with “fresh expressions”. It is therefore timely to try to discover what these concepts involve, how they operate and what implications they may entail for Anglican belief and practice and in parish life.

More recently – mid 2006 – all this has gained more momentum as now draft measures are being considered by the Revision Committee of the General Synod with a view to giving recognition to these mission ventures but without strictly defined parameters; only a “light touch” is to be applied.

Principles and Objectives

To arrive at an impartial assessment of the possible value of these ventures is scarcely achievable at this stage on account of the lack of definition of the terms in use, the fluidity of the operating conditions and the sheer profusion of ideas. This article thus deals with matters still in a formative stage.

Overall, it is largely agreed that the object of these mission ventures is that of introducing the Christian message, broadly stated, to non-churchgoers wherever they may be found. It is envisaged that this can be achieved by a wide diversity of social devices, complementary to traditional church and parish life.

The Cray Report, published in 2004, entitled *Mission Shaped Church*, drew attention to ageing church congregations, failing parishes, and a growing public ignorance in times of falling moral standards, a decline in understanding of religious issues and an upsurge in drugs, drink, crime and yob-culture.

Archbishop Rowan Williams has appealed for the Church of the twenty-first century to become a “mixed economy” —“We need traditional churches alongside many different expressions of church.” This appeal rang a bell

not only in some Anglican circles but also amongst some non-conformists, and especially the Methodists.

In essence, already in earlier years there have been attempts at mission ventures. It is arguable that the YMCA and YWCA church planting, the Alpha course and the Sheffield “9 o’clock” gathering were all such. Now, in a bid to co-ordinate the present ventures of Mission Initiatives or Fresh Expressions nationally the Reverend Dr Steven Croft has been appointed as Archbishops’ Missioner to advise and oversee progress.

Mission Action

In general, Fresh Expressions takes the form of gathering lay people together in groups with a leader (who may be a trained lay person or an ordained priest) and of meeting *where people are* (not necessarily on church premises though this is not excluded). Meetings can take place on a regular basis, for example, in cafes, public houses (at times after hours), working people’s clubs or private homes.

The content of meetings may have a theme around what most interests the group, whether it be sport, discussion, eating together or just socialising—in fact, almost anything provided that it is friendly, welcoming and has a Christian flavour. It is assumed that opportunities will be made for meditation, prayer, and questioning. All this could be regarded as ways of “doing Church”.

With such a widespread coverage and informality, it is foreseeable that a network of regular gatherings will arise, drawn from members of the public of all or every sort, and transcending parish boundaries and even diocesan lines, without dependence on the parish structure or its clergy. It is to be hoped nevertheless that there would be constructive co-operation between parishes and groups.

The openness of Fresh Expressions groups must be a characteristic feature; it is not intended that groups should foster particular ecclesiologies such as fundamentalists, charismatics, the born-again, or the liturgically-minded, but rather that they be available to any who want to know or who recognise a need. This is not without hazard in just producing a “feel-good factor” in a sort of Christian clubland.

It remains to be discovered what may be the educational role of Fresh Expressions. This may be achievable less by formal instruction than by personal contacts and shared experiences. For the ventures to have lasting effect in serving the uninformed public, some transmission of Christian principles will be essential.

“How Anglican is all this?” one might ask—a question which has, it seems

not yet been fully explored. It appears that though Fresh Expressions are not to be regarded as recruiting drives to fill empty pews in empty churches, some connection with the sacramental life of the Church – especially Baptism, the Eucharist and other channels of grace – must evolve. Christian living may come before belief but both living and belief are encompassed fully within the Church community.

Fresh Expressions: organisation

It is clear that much will depend on the personalities of the leaders and on their training, as well as on the support which they receive from the dioceses. One current proposal allows for a one year part time course for groups of potential leaders, from parishes (and possibly from Methodist circuits) which will include two Saturdays, a residential weekend, ten evening sessions and home study. It is hoped to start this at various centres early in 2007.

Group leaders, it is envisaged, will be appointed, and their activities regulated by the bishops. Notwithstanding the “light touch” and informality of these astonishingly diverse mission ventures some degree of oversight cannot be avoided lest inappropriate situations were to arise. What would happen if the mission-shaped Church turns pear-shaped and if Fresh Expressions stale? —one might enquire.

At the ground roots

In the face of all these generalities, it may be relevant to enquire how groups actually operate on the ground. In these early days there is comparatively little detailed information available and such as there is should not be taken as typical.

Mission Initiatives are already in being, and the leaders of two in the Oxford area have kindly provided some details. The first group, operating in an urban area, meets in a variety of places on a weekly basis for an evening meal, discussion and prayer. The attendance is between 20 and 35, with an age range of 20 to 30. The leader’s salary (a three year appointment) comes from the diocese and his living accommodation is rented by the group.

The second group, also in an urban area, meets in a school with an average weekly attendance of about 60 of all ages. This group appears to attract, in particular, newcomers to the area, and the lonely. The activities include a meal (usually breakfast), Bible study (with a special programme for children) and prayer, all open for discussion and questions. This group appears to function more like an adult Sunday School, one might think.

Few groups seem to function in precisely the same way and none may

be considered typical —such is the variety of endeavours. This is well illustrated in a DVD entitled *Expressions 1. Stories of church for a changing culture* (Church House Publishing) and in a newsheet +*Expressions* from the same publishers. Up and down England groups are to be found engagingly titling themselves—for example “LegacyX5” (Benfleet), “B1” (Birmingham), “Sanctus” (Manchester), “Maybe” (Oxford), “Messy church” (Portsmouth), and “Church in the Kitchen” (Oxford).

Long-term considerations

To bring about effective and lasting strengthening of the Church it would appear essential for mission ventures of the sort described to allow for growth in outlook and co-operation with all types of tradition in the Church of England. Some groups may be destined only to have a butterfly existence before passing away or transmuting into some other form, some think. Other groups may seek some form of continuity in a more defined form. It would be thought questionable if groups became so self-sufficient and self-providing as to hive off into yet other inward-turned affairs, and in these respects also much will depend on bishops and leading diocesan figures and how many of them will actively participate in mission group activities.

Apart from parishes and their clergy, Fresh Expressions or Mission Initiatives have wider implications for those such as churchwardens and patrons. The existence of a supra-parochial mission initiative may well create difficulties for patrons in filling vacant benefices. The role of mission ventures may well be different in rural areas in contrast to highly urbanised districts, especially where there may be extensive ethnic minorities.

In other ways, the Church of the twenty-first century is assailed by the insidious influence of clever and plausible militant atheists. The Emerging Church sees itself as an advancing influence borne through history and destined for the future. Militant atheism modulates its case to meet the technology, materialism and social condition of the present, and in as few as fifty years hence, the socio-material world will be very different—a world away from today.

Overall, mission ventures may provide a challenge to the Church to regain standing in public life and reawaken the spiritual dimension in ordinary individuals.

Dr Paul Kent is Chairman of the Patrons Consultative Group. The author wishes to thank those who have kindly provided information and advice, especially the Revd Dr. Steven Croft and the Revd Dr. Gerald Hegarty, but adds that any opinions, inferences and any unintentional shortcomings are solely due to the author. The article is based on a presentation given by the author at Ascot Priory on 28th September 2006 to a conference of some patronage trusts.

“BACHELOR” and “SPINSTER” update

A singular issue for marriage registration

In our last issue, we recorded the Council of English Clergy Association’s profound discomfort about the amendment to the Registration of Marriages Regulations 1986 (a statutory instrument made under the authority of the Marriage Act 1949) requiring that, instead of the words “bachelor” and “spinster”, the term “single” be used by clerks in Holy Orders upon registration of marriages. One or two – perhaps more – registrars of births, deaths and marriages are now beginning to apply pressure on clerics to come into line.

This Association has a very high regard for the law of the land, but this particular legislative amendment has placed many clergy – both within and without our membership – in a very difficult position indeed. Despite the stance of the Archbishop’s Faculty Office, expressed in its letter sent to all diocesan registrars in February 2006 – that these Regulations “do not conflict with either the teaching of the Church or ecclesiastical law” – many are of a different view.

Our Council, which includes a number of canon lawyers, is one such body which also begs to differ. For there is, manifestly, a conflict. The Church of England’s canonical position on Holy Matrimony is found in the Book of Common Prayer, where there is nothing to suggest that a union between two people of the same sex is in any way equivalent to marriage. We cannot stress too highly that the “condition” column in marriage registers concerns *marital* condition. And by demanding that clerks write the word “single” (with its new legal meaning, in effect, of “neither already married nor in a civil partnership”) there is more than a suggestion of equivalence between marriage and civil partnerships.

We accept that being in a civil partnership is a legal impediment to marriage, just as being within the prohibited degrees of affinity or consanguinity is an impediment to marriage, and proper inquiry, by the cleric, at the time of application for marriage, elicits a response to these matters. But the *registration* of a marriage does not contain any reference to being within prohibited degrees or not. Why, then, should it refer to civil partnerships? There can only be another agenda at work here – that, despite the Government’s protestations to the contrary, the Civil Partnership Act is nodding towards same sex marriage (not least, by precluding, for example, from its provisions two mutually dependent elderly sisters sharing a household together) and those promoting it want public recognition on the marriage register.

As we have stated before, the reasoning, the intrusiveness and the unconscionable position into which this legislative amendment places a good number of clergy is to be lamented. We are still trying to find

who represented the Church's interests when this amendment was being discussed. Perhaps there is simply an embarrassed shuffling of feet by those at the centre of national Church life. Nonetheless, we hope that those with authority and influence in the right places will work to reverse this flawed piece of over-regulation. Meanwhile this Association will do all it can to support clergy finding themselves subjected to pressure on this matter – whether from civil registrars, diocesan registrars, rural deans, archdeacons or diocesan bishops. The prison population is nearly at breaking point already. Surely we don't want to add to it all those criminous clerks who continue to write "bachelor" and "spinster" in their registers.

BOOK REVIEW

“Worship without dumbing down —Knowing God through Liturgy”

by Peter Toon ISBN 0-907839-90-8

Preservation Press and Edgeways Books 2005

“Worship without Dumbing-down” with its subtitle “Knowing God through Liturgy” will resonate with many readers of *Parson & Parish* who, like Peter Toon, revere the *Book of Common Prayer*. In my opinion Dr Toon's book works better through its subtitle than through its main title. He has much of interest to say in relating theology to liturgy and rightly points out the *Book of Common Prayer's* great strength in understanding the transcendence of God and the need to reflect this in stirring liturgy. He illustrates well how liturgy which starts from the opposite perspective, that of immediate human experience and emotion, can easily become trite, shallow or misleading. Yet the polemic title about “dumbing down” belies the belief of the book that virtually all modern liturgy is defective and the Aunt Sally presented is rather too easy to knock down. I am reminded of that great principle expounded by the nineteenth century theologian F D Maurice that “men are frequently right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny”. Dr Toon has done us a valuable service in expounding the treasures of the Prayer Book from a theological perspective. Given his experience in the USA it is perhaps not surprising that he is drawn to polemic. Yet for the parson at the altar or the person in the pew in our land there is perhaps a need to be more sympathetic to the desire to present a modern liturgy. *Common Worship* has some real achievements in reflecting both a deeper and more God-centred theology and also a greater richness of language than earlier attempts at liturgical experiment. If the modern situation is not as dire as Fr Toon would have us believe he still does us a great service by reminding us that all good liturgy is about knowing God and that is where we should start.

Derek Earis

STATISTICS TO DISCOURAGE MISSION

Derek Earis asks, “Where has all the money gone?”

Picture the scene. It is the first Sunday in October and a rather careworn couple appear for the first time in the parish church. The Vicar spots them and introduces himself and finds out a bit about them. “We’ve come because we’ve heard that this is a welcoming church. We’ve had a rough time recently, both of us have lost our jobs but it’s made us think again about our lives.” “I’m afraid you’re going to cost us a lot of money,” says the Vicar, “£792 to be precise. You see, each October we have to count those in the pew at a normal service and then we are levied £396 per person for our parish share. Now I have the necessary forms here – would you like to pay it off in one go or pay weekly? Oh and gift aiding is a very good idea. Alternatively would you mind not coming back for a few weeks – at any rate until the first Sunday in November?”

I don’t suppose there is a parson in the country who would be quite so pastorally insensitive, although that is the brutal logic of “Statistics for Mission” in many dioceses. Under the guise of collecting statistics for the purpose of mission it is a tax on every adult in the pew on a normal Sunday. It particularly hits hard at churches in towns, suburbs and cities who are welcoming and have a big “fringe”. What about those casual worshippers who come once in a while – is it realistic to charge for them – after all is not the Church of England there for everyone and not just the committed? It has often been pointed out that the last part even of the committed to be converted is the wallet. Can you really levy a rate from day one of appearing and on everyone? What of churches who have many poor or elderly parishioners on fixed incomes? What about the many elderly retired couples on one pension —is it reasonable to charge them individually? The local authority may give them concessions, free bus passes and the like, but the church is remorseless in its demands to pay up.

The fully paid-up congregational model was not always the approved model for the Church of England. The cost of ministry used to involve no parish share at all because each parish or benefice had its own income. The system of glebe and tithes may have had many problems but it did produce stability and support large numbers of full-time clergy. Take my own deanery as an example. There are now seven stipendiary clergy of incumbent status. A recently acquired treasure, *Nisbet’s Church Directory* of 1911, records that there were thirty-eight. In less than 100 years thirty- one full time clergy have been lost. The *Directory* helpfully gives the income of each. Taking a few examples and grossing them up using the level of inflation since 1911 showed that even the poorest benefices were not dissimilar to today’s stipend. Of course incumbents then had no pension and maintained their own parsonages but they did keep their fees.

Add to the savings of thirty-one stipends, the sale of thirty-one parsonages, most of which are expensive mansions by modern standards, and the question has to be asked “Where have all these resources gone?” Add to this the amount now collected by parish share, which roughly covers all clergy stipends and simply didn’t exist in the old system, collections being taken just for “alms for the poor”. So the church in this deanery supports 85% fewer clergy but has had the management of resources vastly in excess in relative terms of that which was available to support thirty-one more.

It would take a better financial mind than mine to understand it and it would be good if someone had the time, energy and resources to do some proper research. I would conjecture that, accepting the welcome addition of pensions, a good part of the answer must come from the burgeoning bureaucracy. It was thought eminently sensible in the latter part of the 20th century finally to abolish parochial responsibility for glebe. “Leave it to the experts,” we were told, and “equalise all stipends”. The cost of those experts, all with their civil servant pensions was never factored in, nor the apparently insatiable growth of diocesan structures some admittedly made necessary by our increasingly regulated world.

The “Statistics for Mission” exercise acts as a catalyst to reducing clergy numbers and increases the tendency to free-fall. This is not just because decline and low numbers are rewarded and growth and higher numbers are penalised. It also leads to great instability in that it is quite possible for say a town church with a congregation of 160 to decline in numbers slightly to 155 but face a £20,000 increase because other churches in the deanery have declined far more dramatically. More and more is asked of less and less and for less and less in terms of parochial clergy. Bob Jackson’s book *The Road to Growth* illustrates how churches with larger congregations are particularly hard hit and discouraged. So, the very churches and sources of income which are most crucial are heavily taxed and discouraged and only eventually relieved when their numbers fall sufficiently. Once again clergy numbers are cut and here we go again. More and more asked for less and less. What a crazy system and how disastrous for mission and any real future growth.

Is there any way out? We are faced with a situation when the historic resources to provide for the parochial clergy have been used for so many different purposes that they can scarcely now cope with the pensions of the retired clergy. What can now be done when all the most influential voices of the Church of England seem to have a vested interest in perpetuating this? They even told us back in the 90s when the Church Commissioners lost £800 million on ill-advised stock market and property deals that this was a paper loss only and we should not worry.

It would be good if benefices started to support themselves and their clergy with some sort of new endowment to free them from this vicious circle of spiralling costs which is out of their control. But how possible or practical is this? Many different solutions need to be examined and, again, Bob Jackson has been creative and works on the sound scriptural principle of voluntary giving and support rather than a quasi compulsory tax. The promise of a well run and beneficent central administration has turned into a nightmare. In 1911 when there were thirty-eight paid clergy in my deanery, Church House would be run by the proverbial two men and a dog. Now with 85% less clergy there are vastly more central posts and who is going to vote to change things? Far off days when I studied economics come back to mind. In the end, as Mrs Thatcher said, “you can’t buck the market”. Finance *will* change things. It already has as the reduction of thirty-eight clergy to seven shows. When the seven gets down to one will things be done differently? Perhaps “Statistics for Mission” may yet speak more eloquently than to implement the one growth the exercise achieves at present – that of dramatically increasing the parish share for any church which tries to grow.

The Reverend Derek Earis encourages Mission as Vicar of North Walsham and Priest-in-Charge of Edingthorpe in the Diocese of Norwich.

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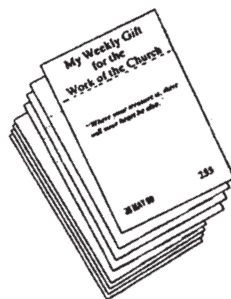
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IN ALL THINGS LAWFUL AND HONEST

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

QUESTION: I've been priest-in-charge in this parish for a year or so now, and recently I have been raising a question with the diocese about a priest from a neighbouring parish coming into "my" parish and ministering here. The diocesan registrar has advised me that as a priest-in-charge I only have the "cure of souls" in a restricted, lesser, sense than an incumbent – because of the difference in the way the "temporalities" are held – and that I have less reason for objection should another priest intrude in the parish. Is this really the case?

Well, I have not heard this one before! Usually, the diocesan line is that a priest-in-charge and an incumbent are the same in all but name, apart from a few "legal niceties", and often the service at the licensing of a priest-in-charge is dressed up to look like a "real" institution, while the bishop will assure people, "Yes, of course you may call your new priest 'Vicar.'" There are, of course, significant differences, and your registrar is right to refer to the temporalities – when, at an induction, an incumbent takes "real, actual and corporeal possession... with all the rights, members and appurtenances thereunto belonging." The result is that you do not enjoy any proprietary interest; your control over the use and closure of the church is not the same as an incumbent's; you cannot designate a particular burial plot on your authority; and you cannot initiate civil or criminal proceedings against a trespasser or someone who has committed a civil wrong or criminal act. Above all, you do not have the security of tenure of the "freehold". All that said, however, it is, in my view, very difficult to claim that your "cure of souls" is somehow inferior to the cure of an incumbent. True, the "spiritualities" (the bishop's instituting or collating a priest to the cure) cannot be divorced from the "temporalities", but at many licensings of priests-in-charge these days, the words "Receive the cure of souls" are actually used. Your licensing has conferred upon you the cure of souls, and if it were to be subject to intrusion by another, then it would expressly say so. This question is largely answered by Canon C8 *Of ministers exercising their ministry*—and by "minister" here, as on many other occasions, is meant priests-in-charge as much as incumbents. Paragraph 3 of this Canon confirms that your authority to minister is conferred by virtue of the bishop's licence. The Canon does not cater for a "two-tier" approach to a cure of souls; your authority to minister, and your ability to grant or refuse permission to another minister seeking to exercise his ministry within "your" parish (unless, of course, it is in relation to the home of someone on that minister's "home" electoral roll, or an extra-parochial place of ministry, or a crematorium or cemetery chapel located in your parish) flows from that. I suspect that I have not been given the full story here, and I am left wondering whether, perhaps, darker forces are at work!

QUESTION: I was elected to the General Synod – House of Laity – in 2005 which, as I understood it, meant having to choose which of the two PCCs I would serve on *ex officio* as I'm on the church electoral roll of two parishes (parish "A" and parish "B"). This, I gather, is the effect of Rule 1(4) of the Church Representation Rules. I chose to serve on PCC "A". However in PCC "B" the Treasurer suddenly resigned, I agreed to take the job on, and the PCC co-opted me. I now find the Archdeacon writing to me rather patronisingly, perfectly understanding my wish to be helpful, and all that, and then proceeding to lecture me about the Rules, which, says the Archdeacon – with almost a triumphal flourish – quite clearly set out that I can't be on two PCCs and that I can't therefore be Treasurer in PCC "B". Is that right?

Honestly, who trains archdeacons these days? He – or maybe she (as you have cunningly concealed the venerable office-holder's sex, as well as your parishes' identities) – is wrong for two reasons. First, a treasurer does not actually have to be a member of the PCC at all. This is set out in the Representation Rules, Appendix II, paragraph 1(e) where it says that the office of treasurer, if the PCC cannot appoint one from its own membership, is to be discharged either by the churchwarden/s or "by some other fit person who shall not thereby become a member of the council, provided that such person may be co-opted..." Now, I think it wise and sensible – in the interests of accountability and corporate responsibility – for a treasurer to be on the PCC, but it is not actually required. Where your archdeacon is also mistaken is about rule 1(4) and the point about choosing which PCC to be on if you are on several electoral rolls. What that rule in fact says is that you have to choose which parish you are in for the purpose of PCC membership "under rule 14(1)(f)". I realise this is rather a paper-chase, but if your archdeacon had looked at rule 14(1)(f) then he, or she, would have seen that that sub-paragraph is about people being on the PCC who are also on deanery, diocesan or General Synod; in other words, for the purpose of holding an *ex officio* place on a PCC by virtue of having been elected to a synod, then, if you are on more than one electoral roll, you have to choose *for that basis of membership* which parish you are in. But it does not in the slightest preclude your being on another PCC under another basis of membership, whether by election or co-option. So, even though a treasurer does not need, strictly, to be a member of a PCC, your PCC "B" was perfectly entitled to co-opt you, under rule 14(1)(h), provided the co-opted members do not exceed one fifth of elected members.

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.

CHAIRPIECE

John Masding on a Church of England with Women Bishops

The English Clergy Association takes no position on the ordination or consecration of women bishops. We have several women priests in our membership. So I make it plain at the outset that this Chairpiece represents my personal view, the view of one who thinks that we shall inevitably have women consecrated as bishops, and probably should have. I say “probably” because as a committed Church of England man I could hardly stomach anything that tore us apart. Some may well leave in any event, but I personally must hope that the eventual legislation will be as fair to all sides as it can possibly be – and offer a superior solution to the present “flying bishops” who have to make the best of a bad job. I would be voting accordingly at deanery and diocesan level.

Jurisdiction is, for me, the key issue. Whatever I campaign for has to be lawful – if I want to be Church of England, I have to maintain the position of the Queen and the Parliamentary sovereignty with our inheritance of faith, and I would be wise not to meddle with long-sorted-out positions like the rights, say, of the two Archbishops, settled after much hassle in the Middle Ages by Innocent VI. – for example, each prelate was to carry his metropolitan cross in the province of the other, and if they were together their cross-bearers should walk abreast.

So I have come up with this outline, and happily offer it to you, even should you wish to be rather critical, within my stated context of loyalty. I claim no originality for the concepts I express – indeed, there are times when I look at them and find them self-evident. But not everyone sees things like that. So here we go.

The Church of England, as the established Church of this realm, has to remain under the sovereignty of the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty as Supreme Governor, one Church, under one law. Measures to be submitted to Parliament through the Ecclesiastical Committee for enactment would continue to be as passed by the one General Synod, and there would continue to be a single body of Canons Ecclesiastical made thereby with Her Majesty’s approbation and assent. The ecclesiastical laws of this realm would remain one body of law.

But there would need now to be three provinces: however, the ancient rights of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York throughout England would remain. The Third Province would have a primate and metropolitan styled Bishop-President, who would exercise his ministry (except by lawful invitation) only within his own Province, and not, unlike the Archbishops, throughout England. Bishops within the Province would owe him canonical obedience. He and they would each be diocesan bishops with the same rights to sit in the House of Lords as other diocesan bishops in England

by seniority. The Bishop-President would rank equally with the two Archbishops in General Synod, and, *ceteris paribus*, would *mutatis mutandis* take his part in the operation of existing legislation as if it had also referred to him. Perhaps, like the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, legislation would apply to the new Province when in some way adopted by it – perhaps by its Convocation (nevertheless a constituent of the General Synod), let us say, and diocesan synods.

A diocese within the Province would comprise those parishes which had lawfully opted to join the Province, each belonging to one of three or more dioceses, as may be lawfully provided, and very much dioceses of the Church of England. A diocese would have boundaries defined by the boundaries of the parishes which had opted into the Province and been assigned by provincial authority to that Diocese. It would be possible within a diocese to designate an existing church as the cathedral, with such patronage, Crown or otherwise, as in each case might be arranged consistently with law and with the consent of the existing patron. Parishes would as elsewhere in England belong to archdeaconries and rural deaneries to be established as required and determined.

Law would provide that certain legal and canonical provisions relating to the ministry of women lawfully ordained as bishops, priests or deacons would not apply within the Third Province, or any of its dioceses or parishes, except with the consent of those to whom jurisdiction and authority would have been committed.

The rights of patrons of benefices would remain unaltered. A patron who could not in conscience appoint a man opposed to the ordained ministry of women could be enabled to exchange his patronage, to give that patronage to another person or society, or to appoint someone to exercise it on his behalf for that turn only. But where the bishop of an existing diocese was patron, the patronage would transfer when a parish opted into the Third Province to the bishop of the receiving diocese as if it had been his in right of his see.

Parishes and cathedral parishes which might later wish to leave the Province would be able to do so, subject to certain safeguards and necessary consents, in which cases each would revert to its previous status, diocese and province.

I draw your attention to the Motion, as amended, passed by General Synod this July.

That this Synod, endorsing Resolution III.2 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 “that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans” and

believing that the implications of admitting women to the episcopate will best be discerned by continuing to explore in detail the practical and legislative arrangements:

(a) invite dioceses, deaneries and parishes to continue serious debate and reflection on the theological, practical, ecumenical and missiological aspects of the issue;

(b) invite the Archbishops' Council, in consultation with the Standing Committee of the House of Bishops and the Appointments Committee, to secure the early appointment of a legislative drafting group, which will aim to include a significant representation of women in the spirit of Resolution 13/31 of the Anglican Consultative Council passed in July 2005, charged with:

(i) preparing the draft measure and amending canon necessary to remove the legal obstacles to the consecration of women to the office of bishop;

(ii) preparing a draft of possible additional legal provision consistent with Canon A4 to establish arrangements that would seek to maintain the highest possible degree of communion with those conscientiously unable to receive the ministry of women bishops;

(iii) submitting the results of its work to the House of Bishops for consideration and submission to Synod; and

(c) instruct the Business Committee to make time available, before first consideration of the draft legislation, for the Synod to consider, in the light of any views expressed by the House of Bishops, the arrangements proposed in the drafting group's report.

What I have written is intended as a very modest contribution to this ongoing and testingly difficult process, which I believe must in fairness to each other engage us all.

J.W.M.

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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*.

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