
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

"Putting Our House in Order" [1]

THE BISHOP OF NORWICH

By kind permission of "The Nineteenth Century and After."

A BOOK which is introduced by a Foreword signed by so large a number of Bishops and of others who carry weight in the counsels of the Church of England is obviously entitled to wide consideration. Those who have appended their signatures to the Foreword naturally do not commit themselves to agreement with all the proposals submitted: and anyone can see that some projects are superior to others. But the signatories do not take the line of one who is friendly but non-committal. It is often easy to win the support of those who pledge themselves to nothing in particular, but those who sign the Foreword go much further.

There are certain paragraphs to which they have all subscribed and it will make the issue clearer if these are printed in full.

> We, the undersigned, commend this book to the careful attention of the members of the Church.
>
> We agree with its contention that the Church should be in effective control of all ecclesiastical endowments.
>
> We agree with its contention that there should be a reasonable equality of stipends and that clergy should be remunerated according to their needs and the special claims of their appointments.
>
> We believe that a determined attempt to deal with such anomalies as overlarge houses, unrestricted freeholds and unworkable parishes is overdue, and that drastic reform on the general lines advocated herein must be carried through to enable the Church to meet the opportunities and demands of the post-war situation.
>
> We are therefore prepared to give our support to a movement in this direction now, without committing ourselves to agreement with all the proposals made herein.

It may be worth while to make some preliminary remarks on these agreed presuppositions of the Foreword.

(i.) "Ecclesiastical endowments" need some definition. So does "effective control of the Church." Ecclesiastical emoluments come from various sources (p. 75) and the phrase should relate to more than the payment of parochial clergy. Or is the word "endowment" the important word, restricting the reference to invested funds and landed property, etc.? Many grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners are made for a year at a time. Are these endowments? As to "effective control by the Church": what present authorities are to be ousted? Chapter VIII, while appreciative of the good work constantly done by the permanent staffs of the Ecclesiastical Commission and Queen Anne's Bounty, would like to reduce the "Erastian" element in them, and to connect them more closely with the Church Assembly. Measures can be passed and have been passed by the Church Assembly to give a freer hand to these two bodies in dealing with their funds. This is all to the good. But it is safer to leave the management in

[1] *Putting Our House in Order. A sequel to Men, Money and the Ministry.* (Longmans, 3*s.* 6*d.*)

the hands of existing authorities than to bring representatives of the Church Assembly into the regulation of administrative schemes. The Assembly is quite competent to debate the giving of new powers and the imposing of new requirements upon the Ecclesiastical Commission and Queen Anne's Bounty: but its members are less fitted, and less available from distant parts of the country, to share in the constant day by day activities of the Estates Committee and the Heads of Departments in either body.

One difficulty belonging to all the work of the Church Assembly is found in the fact that no one has yet devised a satisfactory scheme for keeping the Assembly in touch with diocesan opinion during the course of the progress of a proposed Measure through the Assembly. It is not easy to discover the right time and the right method of doing this. If the dioceses are consulted too early, they might express their attitude to a Measure which would later on, without their concurrence, be much modified. On the other hand, it is too late to consult them when every clause has been debated and the result accepted by the Assembly. A difficulty is found in the relation between the electing body in the dioceses and the members who represent them in the Assembly, either as Proctors in the House of Clergy, or as their Representatives in the House of Laity. We can have nothing corresponding to the close touch between an M.P. and his constituents. The M.P. generally deals with a smaller area than a diocese; he has money provided for his expenses. There is no central pool from which these church representatives can draw assistance. We are constantly confronted with the difficulties of raising money for administrative expenses, travelling and hotels, etc.

(ii) Chapter VI on "The Method of Payment" goes more fully into the subject raised in the second paragraph of the "agreements" set out in the Foreword and discusses a scaling of incomes to meet the adequate remuneration of the clergy for their work and the maintenance of their families and widows. This chapter declares that

> . . . the Church has the right to ask, and Parliament the power to sanction, the transference of parochial endowments to a common fund with due regard to life interests . . . the Ecclesiastical Commission would have to be empowered to take over and hold in trust the miscellaneous endowments and the secured incomes of every benefice, in addition to those it already holds. These ought to be allocated to a Diocesan Common Fund. The Diocesan Fund would have to be held and administered by a strong body of Commissioners appointed for the purpose. . . .

We must say outright and with sympathy that a thoughtful critic of this plan has urged that ". . . Many will regard these central authorities with a considerable measure of suspicion . . ." and condemn ". . . the growing tendency towards bureaucracy in the Church."

(iii.) When we refer to the points enumerated in the third paragraph which has been endorsed by this long list of eminent signatories, it appears to be rather confusedly articulated. The first lines of it mention such anomalies as the parson's freehold and overlarge parsonage houses. But the last lines generally endorse drastic reform in accordance with the whole scheme set out in the volume. It would perhaps have been a better arrangement if the limited subjects had

formed item (iii.) and the larger issue had been announced separately as an item (iv.).

In regard to the first lines of this third united recommendation, we may remark that more has been done than is sometimes supposed to deal with large houses. The Ecclesiastical Commission and Queen Anne's Bounty have successfully stirred themselves in the matter. This class of property is unsatisfactory, for these large parsonages offer little attraction to the ordinary purchaser. They are too large for the size of the premises attached which, besides, have no shooting or sporting opportunities in them : they are often too near the churchyard. Chapter IX describes a useful scheme now pursued in the diocese of York by which some of the endowment of the benefice is spent upon reducing the size of a large rectory and reconditioning the remainder or on dividing up the house and letting off a part of it.

It is a difficult matter to decide the scale of the house in which the parson is to live. The late Sir George Middleton thought that new houses were being built in too commodious a style : for the parson of the future would probably be a man whose means more closely corresponded with those of " the working classes," as they are called. His criticism no doubt chiefly applied to towns. On this whole question Chapter IX is worth study. In the country we are unlikely to get back to the days when the clergy needed large houses for the accommodation of their pupils. This way of augmenting incomes has for the most part passed. The same chapter deals with the question of management of glebe and raises the contentious issue whether it would be wise for the Ecclesiastical Commission, having a long policy, to take over all the glebe in the country, or whether such a step would have an undesirable reaction upon the parson's position.

Turning to " unrestricted freeholds " in the Church, we remark that the parson's freehold has already been invaded by Act of Parliament or Measure which makes it possible to remove ecclesiastical persons. The first few pages of Chapter VII set out some of the advantages of security of tenure. It is sometimes forgotten that the security is guaranteed not only against unworthy and domineering actions on the part of the parishioners, but also against the adverse attitude of ecclesiastical authorities. And it is said (p. 84) that this valuable heritage and privilege must not be wantonly abandoned, but in its essential characteristics preserved. It is, however, unsatisfactory to impair the freehold by declaring an incumbent a square man in a round hole. No phrase has been more frequently used in the Church Assembly ; but even if it were possible to assess a man's capacity and suitability along these lines, it would be a hard matter to move such a man from the round to the square, and to guarantee him a welcome from those to whom he would go. Further, it is a very grave thing to remove a man on the grounds of inacceptability, if there is no adequate provision at hand for him. Satisfactory pensions might somehow become available for aged incumbents past their work ; it is justly observed (p. 86) that " inadequacy of pension arrangements " prevents a large number from retiring. But can a man who is considered inefficient or ineffective expect to meet with a pension likely to be adequate ? The parson, be it remembered, is, by the Pluralities Act, debarred

from taking up certain lucrative employments. It would be thought a scandal if he were driven to seek Public Assistance.

The end of the chapter on security of tenure refers to diocesan officials, and it is urged that their fees—if they are still to be paid by fees and not by salary—should be paid into a central diocesan fund. The emoluments received are not thought excessive, especially when it is remembered that the legal officers (p. 89) provide bishops and clergy with free counsel and advice. "Both Bishop and incumbents may draw upon the services of Registrar and Chancellor without any cost to themselves."

The question of "unworkable parishes" with unsatisfactory bounds and relations comes up for consideration in the main chapters of the book.

At the end (pp.118-20) are set out ten propositions for reform, and some readers will find it a help to begin at the end in this respect, more especially as the book unfortunately has no index. Having read the ten propositions he can go back and read the arguments upon which they are based, but he may be surprised to find it stated in the Epilogue that the reform, though it has several parts, must be put into operation as a whole, if it is to effect its purpose, while discussion of it will be piecemeal. The Epilogue is not quite clear on this matter; apparently it means that the reform must be accepted *in toto* at once, though it is allowed twenty or thirty years gradually to be put into operation. This is not the form of procedure which comes naturally to the English mind, which shrinks from discarding one system before another has gradually been built up to supersede it. The strength of tradition and the respect for the old paths in England make it impossible to set to work upon reform without due regard for the past. Too often now in ecclesiastical matters persons or groups set to work as if they were sitting round a table devising rules for the working or for the better working of a club. For that matter, in a club which has an honourable past, an impatient and academic reform would raise justifiable opposition.

The chapter on the Church in the city is well worth study, for there the parochial bond between the people and the Church is not so strong as in the country, and clergy are needed to take up wider fields of usefulness than merely parochial ministrations. There is important pastoral work that is non-parochial. Many will regard this chapter, of which the authorship is attributed to the late Canon Thompson-Elliott, as the best in the book.

The previous chapter deals with the Church in the country and here again there is a broad survey of changes in country life and of the arrival of new interests and organisations in it. Many good things which were originated by the Church and constantly fostered by it, have passed into the hands of new statutory or voluntary bodies. The clergyman in the country must join up with these efforts (p. 33), and if he is a wise man there is no reason why his sympathy should be regarded as interference. He must not stand aloof. In many cases the new authorities will welcome his influence, whether he actually serves upon their committees or merely supports and improves their work. He still has special opportunities with the children. If he has a Church school in his parish he can either teach in it if he has

the aptitude, which many lack, or he can at least enter it, and make it plain that he cares. If he has a provided school he can make a live thing of the Sunday school and there show his interest in the highest welfare of the children. This is the more important now when in small villages the schoolmaster and schoolmistress, who often exercised a splendid influence, have been withdrawn with the grouping of schools. The parish priest can also aid the very important Mother's Union, trying to broaden its outlook so that it may create in his own area a spiritual comradeship between *all* the mothers of the parish; he will see that it does not become too rigid and exclusive and that it fosters wholesome family life throughout the parish, as has been its generous habit, and that its own ideas about divorce do not take up a disproportionate amount of its attention.

It is true that what in old days the Church did directly, must now be done in a more indirect manner. Nevertheless, the Church, which includes both the fabric and the fellowship, still can be made the focus of the parish life, and when big things are happening, it is to the Church, "our Church," that the people turn.

It is not easy to prophesy about the future of rural life, and whether recent changes, the dispersal of industries, the introduction of town children into the country and the reconstruction of agriculture, will lessen the "steady depopulation of the countryside" (p. 25). The outlook in this respect will be made clearer in the five or ten years following the end of the war: changes come *and* go. We need not reconstitute the whole system, if parochial boundaries require some readjustments. It can be more simply accomplished. There is no reason why absurdities and obvious errors should not be rectified by existing machinery.

But now and in the years to come the parish will hold its own and the country parson will be, if he is wise, the centre of neighbourliness as well as the minister of the gospel. He needs encouragement, for he is often the victim of unfeeling criticism. Sometimes he is looked upon as a man who has only one day's work in the week. This is a mistake. If we take him at his best, he is never off duty. It is harder for him than for his town brother to secure a substitute for any task. He must always be on the spot. He may sometimes look careless, but the people refer to him and refer again, for advice and help, and he is the servant of everybody. He is the family friend. His position is much more intimate than that of the town clergyman; he knows all the children and the children know him. The people and he live close together in this smaller society. Indeed if he is foolish enough to quarrel with one set of people the others hear of it and turn against him. Stories about him fly quickly. The present writer remembers saying in the House of Lords during the last war how great was the debt owed to the country clergymen who interpreted the war to the people, broke the bad news to them, or comforted them in their sorrows, and calmed their complaints. No one can give such personal help as he can, and these are the opportunities which bring joy to his life. Let us be careful not to lose the good in the old in a search for something better in the new.

In the background of the consideration of all these proposals it must not be forgotten that the Church of England has been built up

upon the parochial system. It is only quite recently, for example, that it has become possible to leave money to the Church of England as a whole. Each benefice is still a separate entity and, however unreasonably, it is still resented by the parishioners when money that belongs to their benefice is alienated. The union of benefices has for a long time been possible under a cumbrous system. We owe it largely to the late Lord Birkenhead that, just before the Church Assembly came into existence, an Act was passed through Parliament, providing a much more workable scheme. This Act is the foundation of subsequent Measures of the Assembly, which deal with this important piece of administration.

It might be prudent that if money is to be taken from one benefice in order to be paid to another, it should pass through a central diocesan fund, as commended (p. 91) for diocesan fees, and from it distributed to another parish or parishes. It would remove resentment and reduce any feeling of rivalry among parishes, if transference of income were made in this more impersonal manner, and the recipient parish were not named at the outset : several parishes would constantly be helped from the general pool.

It is doubtful whether in the country the plan that might be suitable in towns would work, namely that there should be one central church, and adjacent parishes should be served from a common staff associated with it. In the country the parochial feeling is naturally stronger than in the town. Nor is there much good in saying that the second church in a united benefice should be served by a curate attached to the incumbent of the more important church. There is no saving in man power in such a scheme and probably very little on the financial side : the resident curate will need a house to live in and an adequate stipend. In all these discussions the clergy must not be treated as if they were civil servants answerable to some central authority established at Whitehall. In the first number of *The Parson and Parish* a contributor uses these words,

> . . . I am greatly perturbed at the gradual undermining of the authority of the parish priest and the general lowering of the status and prestige of the clergy which have undoubtedly taken place during the past twenty years. I should oppose by every means in my power any legislation which tended further in this perilous direction. . . .

In any new scheme our first consideration must be the spiritual vocation and opportunities of the clergy. They receive their commission from Above and in all questions of finance we must still keep this spiritual side uppermost in our minds. It is not a question of the personal dignity of an individual clergyman, but of securing that no plan should be made on the material side that does not safeguard and if possible enhance the grace of Orders which belongs to him. The Bishop of Gloucester has written concerning the scheme of this book that he believes that,

> . . . its main effect . . . would be to destroy the whole character of the Church of England without increasing appreciably the amount that any clergyman would receive. . . . In return for this generous treatment, the parish priest is to be turned into a salaried official removable at will and has to lose all the advantages of the status that he now enjoys. . . .

No one can deny that there is a big question in front of us. For various reasons which have been indicated, the parochial system as it stands,

together with the number of churches in the country, needs careful consideration. The lighting and warming and upkeep of these churches is often beyond the means of those who worship in them, and only too frequently the stipends of the clergy who minister in them are quite inadequate. It is becoming more and more difficult to fill vacancies as they arise, and it will be still harder when the present generation of older incumbents passes away. Many of the clergy are elderly and we are deeply indebted to them. But this is no reason for any kind of panic or pedantic reform. The spirit of the whole book is against delay and minor adjustments. But the Church is a Society and Institution which deeply touches human life in England, and it is not to be handled in excited or ill-judged enthusiasm and haste.

It must be emphasised that much new money would be required. There are proposals in the field for securing now a large access to voluntary subscriptions. But unfortunately there will be the competition of funds being raised at once to meet the insistent needs of the war. The huge sums collected for war savings offer no parallel and no encouragement: these war savings are almost entirely in the nature of investment. New money obtained for the Church will come from unreturnable gifts. It is important that the Church should not appear to place appeals for finance before its own spiritual appeal: many are deterred from it by the suspicion of such an attitude. To claim money from all whose names are on the electoral rolls might reduce the rolls themselves! Pooling of incomes, if accepted, would not go far. The Editor of Crockford for 1941 writes,

> . . . Plans for a "new order" in the Church are naturally being framed in some circles. They do not appear to differ much in principle from their prototypes which are being pursued elsewhere. . . . It is not unreasonable to hold that changed circumstances may from time to time make some redistribution of endowments desirable, but many people are probably unaware how much has been done in this respect already. . . . The revenues of the Church of England are derived from a very large number of separate sources scattered all over the kingdom. To pool them will mean the creation of a large army of collectors, clerks and other lay-officials, whose salaries and pensions will be the first charge on any money passing through their hands. The clergy will get what is left over; which will certainly be in the aggregate less than they get now. . . .

Perhaps we shall be wiser to defer making detailed arrangements for the spending of money till the day when it is available. This need for new money is firmly recognised in the book. We read (p. 53) that

> . . . this would require a great deal of money. At present too much diocesan money is spent on plant that would be better scrapped. The Church would be more likely to get new money if men saw it was using its present resources to the best advantage. At the moment these developments are greatly hampered and thwarted because, very largely, they must be financed by voluntary monies which are not forthcoming. . . .

We must interject that it is doubtful whether the number of people who, though ready to subscribe to Church funds, are deterred because they think the Church is badly administered as a financial concern, is very large.

The crux of the recommendations is: how shall they obtain these voluntary monies? Is there a prospect of doing so? On this point the book is singularly unconvincing.

Not much is said about the training of ordination candidates, though there is an allusion on p. 30. This is a large subject and perhaps it is deferred for separate treatment. The theological colleges have been doing good work for many years. Naturally their training chiefly provides a vocational course. If a man has been at a resident university, meeting all kinds of people and preferably not studying theology but some other subjects, his disciplined time at a theological college will be of great value to him. If, however, he has not been at a university, the theological college taken by itself may rear him chiefly along professional lines, which, if he has no background, may cramp his outlook in dealing with all sorts and conditions of men and women. Certainly let us avoid among our clergy anything like a caste, formal and stereotyped. We need those who are men and not only clergymen, as this book hints. Everyone must have been impressed by the way in which our Lord was at home in every company and made all sincere people at home and at ease with Him. Every godly type, that can accept the position of the Church of England, must be represented in its ministry, and, it may be added, not least in its highest offices : the Church must be on its guard lest the ranks of the bishops should be filled with men of one style of churchmanship and outlook. Archbishop Tait once said that it was a great testimony to the wide vision of the Church of England that it drew into its episcopate such a man as the great Bishop Thirlwall. We shall always require among our bishops some men who are not primarily competent administrators, or specially reared in the style of Anglicanism in vogue at the particular time, but some powerful men, borne on the large flowing tradition of our great English divines, even though their names would not have occurred to the mind of " the ecclesiastical layman," if the choice were in his hands. The Anglicanism of the moment led a competent and energetic parish priest to exclaim to the writer, " This is not the Church into whose ministry I was ordained." I think he meant that in his opinion, if the Church had gained its precision, it had lost in its breadth of heart and human sympathy and width of appeal.

If the Church is better to use its spiritual opportunities in the years in front of us, it must, as in some points this book suggests, keep near to the ordinary lives of ordinary folk. It must bring a divine touch upon them. And though little is said here about Bible teaching, the Church must come to the people with the Bible in its hand. The Bible, written in the language of life, comes freshly to every generation. If some are repelled from it, this is often due not to its difficulties, real or supposed and frequently taken at second hand from others, but to its standard. The Bible touches the heart of the sincere seeker because it shows God dealing with human lives, and finally coming to men through a human and divine life lived out among men and given for them and to them. The Bible, especially among Englishmen since the day when they received it open in their own language, has and must have a primary place. Sacramental teaching (not least concerning the present time) must not crowd out the Bible. The clergy must bear in mind that Christianity, or shall we say discipleship to Christ, is something larger than any Church system or organisation.

The good parish priest will not appeal, as some are content to do,

to a small and select body. Nor must he repel a larger number by laying all the stress upon outward rites and rituals. He must be, to all, a herald of glad tidings showing the better way and the right manner of reaching it. Worship is due to God, and it is the inspiration of service to man. But strange and unfamiliar *forms* of worship do not appeal to the common folk. When these are introduced into a country parish by an unwise or frigid parish priest, many of the ordinary people avoid the Church. And this is not so much from a fear of alien churchmanship, but because they are suspicious, and as they would put it, "We do not know what he is after."

On a general review, this volume, which is nicely produced, merits notice, for it clearly states some important questions in the life of the Church. It states them, but it does not really solve them. It is too eager to do everything at once. We must not expect much from any wholesale reorganisation of system. The writers advocate "clean sweep" methods, some of them built on insecure foundations. To weigh each of these proposals and others propounded elsewhere for political or ecclesiastical improvements on their individual merits, and to go forward through experimental stages, is emphatically not a policy of unenterprising acquiescence with things as they are. Sure advance is achieved through steady consideration with widespread and informed examination. The prolific legislation of the Church Assembly has its warnings. So has the Act of Parliament which erected the Assembly. It is wise to scrutinise very carefully any legislation introduced during the course of war which does not immediately concern the prosecution of the war on which public attention is concentrated; few prominent men have time to spare from its demands. Both Houses of Parliament, being pre-occupied, are tempted to assent, without accurate investigation, to proposals put before them by the enthusiasts who are the ardent supporters of some reform whatever it may be. In regard to the Church of England, all who are concerned with its welfare should be free to have their say, and both in the Lords and the Commons we need the discrimination of men of acute and detached judgment.

This book is comprehensive and forcible, but is it all wise? And could spiritual life in England stand up to such a *mass* of simultaneous reforms? *Vis consili expers mole ruit sua*: *Vim temperatam di quoque provehunt in majus.*

Our review may be permitted to conclude with a few words taken from a Visitation Charge recently delivered by the writer (published by Messrs Jarrold under the title *Christ the Centre*).

. . . It is easy to sketch what the world ought then to be like and to put forward amateur schemes. There is value when friends meet and quietly discuss their views; so judgment matures. This is a very different thing from seeking to give to such views any official or administrative sanction. Consideration is wise; not so pronouncements at this stage. (From this point of view the book under review is an important volume.) There is no doubt that what the world will really want in days of peace is what it now wants, namely to put God and the things of God in the first place. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." We echo the Psalmist's words, wisely looking back to the Old Testament, that wonderful record of the way in which God trained a whole nation. There we read the outward history with the divine commentary written concurrently upon it. . . . I remember well as a Bishop during the last war how often I heard people speaking of the new order that was in front of us

All kinds of rhetorical and vague phrases were used about the new world to which we were leading up. But it did not appear. No sooner had the victory come than it was succeeded by self-indulgence and a full-fledged selfishness on all sides, from which we had by no means recovered when the clarion sounded again. Such is human nature and it does not change. We shall find it the same after this war, and we shall have to deal with those tendencies again, though the scene will be set on a larger stage. Certainly the scale will be very different. For chaotic tendencies will be abroad in the whole world, and suffering millions will abound in many countries. But in speaking or writing to you I have not raised my eyes to those wider horizons, and I have not hesitated to confine my remarks to your own present work which provided the subject for our Visitation discussions and reports. . . . The new order if it is to come in a form worth having will have God as its centre. It will not be imposed externally. It will come through men's hearts surrendered to God and so spread to their conduct, and influence them as citizens. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." New men first and then a new order of their relations to one another. . . .