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On "Putting Our House in Order"

OR "LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF"

THE REV. A. B. JOHNSTON, M.A.

THE Church's house is not to be pictured as a one-storied bungalow, but rather—inadequately, of course—as a four-storied mansion; the first storey, or ground-floor, the Laity; the second storey, or first floor, the Clergy, the parochial clergy; the third storey, Dignitaries, deans, canons, archdeacons, etc.; the fourth storey, the Bishops and Archbishops.

"Putting Our House in Order" concentrates almost entirely upon the Parochial Clergy, of whom there are some 17,000, incumbents and curates. In "Men, Money and the Ministry" there was a chapter, chapter four, on Cathedrals and Diocesan Bishops, but instead of being enlarged and restated that has been eliminated. Thus there are no chapters dealing with the first, third, or fourth storey. The whole book concentrates on the first floor, or second storey, the parochial clergy. That is complimentary to them, as the heart of the position; but it does mean that the title is not an accurate description of the contents.

If I were planning a book with that title, with the idea of financial reform, I should get written by competent people at least two chapters on each storey; one as we see ourselves, or our own ideals, and the other as others see us or their ideals for us, e.g., chapter I, a layman on lay finance, and chapter II, a clergyman on lay finance. Chapter III, a parish clergyman on incumbents' incomes, rectories and vicarages, and how to reform them. Chapter IV, a layman on the same topic. Chapter V, a Dignitary on the financial reform of Dignitaries' emoluments and responsibilities. Chapter VI, a layman on the same topic. Chapter VII, a bishop on Episcopal finances and responsibilities and how to reform them. Chapter VIII, an official of the Ecclesias-

tical Commissioners on the same subject. Chapter IX, a summing up by Dean Inge, or some one—if possible—equally impartial and stimulating. Then we might have some idea of what was involved in putting our whole house in order.

Now let us consider the main theme of the book, P.O.H.I.O. for short, putting the parochial clergy in order.

In one of his novels, the American Winston Churchill says that Christianity is pure nitro-glycerine, high explosive. In the nineteenth century that simple but devastating principle, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” exploded slavery. To-day we clergy are realizing the splendid—or horrid—explosive power of that same principle. It is not just or loving that one group of clergy in one deanery should get £1,000 a year while another group doing the same kind and quality of work in another deanery get only £350. Or that the average income of one diocese should be £223, of another £350, of another £455.

It happened historically that parochial endowments were mainly individual gifts of individual people for individual incumbents. No one visualized how unequally things would work out over the whole nation. But it has worked out terribly unequally, and how shall we clergy love our neighbour as ourselves? Individualism works unequally. Can we achieve some salutary communism?

The postmen, the teachers, and the civil servants have nation-wide uniform schemes for salaries, increments, allowances, pensions, etc. These are modern organizations. Ought the clergy to modernize their hoary, antique finance and become an equal, uniform, ecclesiastical service? It would be a revolutionary change from local and infinitely variable endowments. Conscience, the conservative clerical and ecclesiastical conscience, is waking up: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

But what does that great principle imply? Does it mean (1) that all clergy should have the same salary for the same work, variable salaries for variable work? Who is to measure parish visiting or prayer or study, and how? Or (2) that they should have the same standard and style of living whatever the size or location of their parish? Or (3) that they should be paid according to academic qualifications? Should there be grades for M.A., B.D., D.D.; or for pass and honours degrees? Or (4) that they should be paid according

to the population of their parishes, and proportionate amount of work they may be supposed to do? Or (5) that they should be paid according to needs, to give them all an even standard of living? e.g., a basic stipend for a bachelor plus allowances for wife and children; for travelling expenses; for special needs and responsibilities in the Church's work (or personally)? Or (6) that their standard of living should vary with their parish, and the general parish standard of entertaining? Or (7) that their stipends should be based partly on needs, and partly on academic or practical merit or qualifications? Or (8) that there should be town allowances and country allowances? Which should be larger? Would anyone undertake to settle the question offhand and be confident that everyone else would agree with him?

(My sympathetic and faithful wife said, "There is something in that paper for every one to quarrel with.")

Again, how does the principle of loving your neighbour as yourself apply to the clergy and laity? Should the clergy have the same standard of living and income as the British workman, or as professional men (doctors, teachers), the civil services, army and navy officers? If we assume that it should be the standard of a professional man, what should that standard be? Several people have prudently declined to answer the question. In secondary schools under Government a non-graduate in the provinces begins at £186, and the maximum for a graduate in London is £528.

The clergy have exceptionally large houses and grounds to keep up. Their wives are expected to do work in the parish. They require, therefore, more domestic help. What should the clergy standard be? It has to be thought out to make concrete proposals for a goal to aim at. But it will be easier to start from what is arithmetically possible.

In P.O.H.I.O. many reforms are suggested as necessary or desirable. I propose to glance at the general schemes and then concentrate on finance.

What are the reforms desired? The book mentions:

- (1) *Financial*: (a) More even stipends or allowances for incumbents, pensions, widows' annuities, the same allowances for non-beneficed clergy; (b) the reconditioning of vicarages and rectories; the handing over of them to the Diocese and Q.A.B. and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners; (c) glebe reforms; (d) reform of Bishops'

and Capitular Bodies' Stipends ; (e) wider latitude in using Church trust funds.

- (2) *Patronage* : The reduction or abolition of private patronage ; the substitution of Diocesan and Centralized Boards of Patronage.
- (3) *Larger Units* : especially in towns ; and more specialized posts.
- (4) Provision for new housing areas ; adjustment of parochial boundaries ; disposing of redundant churches and their endowments.
- (5) Changes in conditions of tenure of livings ; no parson's freehold ; increased voluntary mobility of the clergy ; compulsory mobility of the clergy under Diocesan committees : e.g., possibly an average term of seven years ; voluntary mobility after four years ; compulsory change after ten years.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

Are all these problems and proposals to be taken up together, simultaneously, and embodied in one comprehensive bill ? Or should they be arranged in some order of succession, and taken up in a series of smaller and simpler measures, one by one ; say one every three or five years ? Perhaps a number of separate bills might be more practicable, e.g. :

- (i) A scheme for the revision of all clerical stipends ; and for the reconditioning, etc., of vicarages, rectories, etc. ; gardens and glebe to be dealt with also.
- (ii) A revision of patronage ; accompanied by a revision of the parson's freehold.
- (iii) A scheme for the disposing of redundant churches and their endowments ; and for the provision of churches in new populous areas. [This might perhaps come first of all in connection with war damage to churches.]
- (iv) A scheme for larger units in towns ; and any other changes in organisation in town or country.
- (v) A scheme for reorganizing the emoluments and responsibilities of dignitaries and bishops of the Church.

It is perhaps well to note that financial reforms need not necessarily be associated with changes in the parson's tenure or changes of patronage. Too many issues simultaneously may prevent straight and sincere voting.

It would, of course, have a tremendous psychological effect if some fifty bishops set an example to the Church by putting the top storey in order. It may be remembered that "Told in Figures" (p. 20) says that (in 1926) the average income of bishops was £4,547, but "the expenses are so great that only men with good private means can hold them." That "should dispel for ever the nonsense talked about the wealth of bishops." It does; but it does more than that; it seems also a reflection on their intelligence and practical wisdom that they allow such a deplorable state of affairs to continue. There seem a few loose bolts and nuts in the fourth storey of our house, which need to be put in order. Those problems, too, are rooted in centuries of history and an infinite variety of endowments and responsibilities.

It would also be inspiring if some three hundred canons, deans and dignitaries put the third storey in order. That seems an easier problem than putting 17,000 clergy and 13,000 benefices in order.

But let us concentrate now on the first floor, the parochial clergy, on whom P.O.H.I.O. spends nearly all its space, time and energy.

Chapters five and six of P.O.H.I.O. deal with the argument of Men, Money and the Ministry, and restate it. The chief point made in chapter five is that the life of the Church should express the Gospel it preaches, but it does not because of four great hindrances:

- (1) The resources of the Church both in men and money are inadequate. (The book makes no real attempt to plan for any serious increase in either. It only proposes the redistribution of existing resources.)
- (2) The use of the existing economic resources is wasteful, inefficient and corrupting. (Is that true only of the second storey?)
- (3) This leads to a wastage of man power, and possibly affects the quality and quantity of man power.
- (4) The units of work need revision; much larger units than the present parishes are needed.

Chapter six says that the Commission on Parochial Endowments appointed by the Church Assembly in 1936 quickly found—as the 1924 Commission had found—that existing inequalities are indefensible and injurious: e.g.

(p. 55) the average income per benefice varies from £223 in Sodor and Man and £350 in Gloucester to £455 in Norwich diocese.

The yardsticks of population and size proved quite unsatisfactory for attaining equality between benefice and benefice. So the right approach is from the individual priest. All priests have one ordained ministry and commission. Let there be a minimum stipend, and small increments rising to a maximum after fifteen years. Let there be also family allowances to married men according to the number and age of their children; and pensions and widows' annuities. There should be special allowances for special duties and expenses. Such a scale would cover beneficed and unbeneficed clergy. Beneficed clergy (p. 70) should also get a free parsonage house and other allowances on a generous scale if necessary.

The basic minimum might be £200, the same as the maximum pension allowance. Allowances would vary between certain limits. The scale would have to be applied by local committees, archdeaconry or diocesan. (Would there be no room for grievances then?)

Now let us look at the kind of scale that is possible on the present income of the Church: e.g., the total net income (M.M.M., p. 51) from parochial endowments in 1934, £5,865,938. Allow for 12,600 incumbents, and 2,500 bachelors:

	£
2,500 bachelors at £325 a year	812,500
3,500 married, no children, at £450	1,575,000
6,000 married, average of 2 children, at £500	3,000,000
600 special posts, at £600	360,000
4,000 allowances, averaging £25	100,000
1,000 allowances, at £15	15,000
	<hr/>
Total	£5,862,500
Balance	£3,438
	<hr/>
Total	£5,865,938

Bachelors would say, almost certainly, that they could not keep up the present vicarages or rectories on less than £350 a year. In that case only 1,500 allowances of £25 would be available instead of 4,000. If increments are desired, the figures

for married men must be reduced to give money for them.

Anyhow, that is the kind of thing possible on the present income from endowments. It allows for 12,000 children at an average allowance of £25, or 10,000 at an average allowance of £30 each. P.O.H.I.O., p. 73, estimated the cost of allowances at £20 for children up to 13, and £40 for children over 13, at £285,000 altogether. With children's allowances a slight increase in the number of children could be expected.

If that is what can be done, ought it to be done? Is it worth doing? Purely arithmetically such a scheme is immediately possible. But legally, and morally and practically it is quite impossible. For it would be unjust to reduce incumbents with large outgoings on big rectories and big gardens to that figure. It would just mean bankruptcy.

Drastic action on outgoings on big rectories and vicarages with big gardens and outbuildings would be needed to reduce them to a workable proposition on the small help that could be afforded on a basic married allowance of £450.

Of course, a national scheme might be initiated to improve the figures from a common church fund. Then, after the basic figures were agreed on for clergy, dignitaries and bishops a sliding scale might be initiated for the whole church according to the size of the common fund. Such a scheme might well become a model for the nation. All would have an interest in increasing the common fund.

It may be noted that (P.O.H.I.O., p. 55) the average income per incumbent in 1936 was £424 (some had two benefices). It is estimated that when the Tithe and Coal Acts come into full operation the Ecclesiastical Commissioners will suffer a net loss of £50,000 a year.

What can be done on £450 a year with a rectory or vicarage and garden to keep up, such as a layman would probably not have without an income of one or two thousand a year? It allows probably for one maid; perhaps a gardener one day a week; perhaps a small car, if the house is fairly convenient, and the garden not large. Is that about the right standard? Most parsons would have to see to the garden and perhaps also help a bit in the house. Three fires, kitchen, dining or drawing room, and study might be possible.

Is that a fair standard of living for the clergy? Does it allow for parish work by the parson's wife as well as looking after the house and family?

Anyhow, who can say what the value of money will be after the war? I for one refuse to dogmatize. But legislation requires a detailed scheme; we must see what we are doing. Money lost about a third of its value in the last war, and may do the same in this. Then endowments will be worth about half what they were before A.D. 1914.

In 1907 a deacon received £140 a year, and £150 when priested. In 1937 a deacon received £200 a year, and £250 when priested. That shows a 50 per cent. or 60 per cent. increase in stipend in thirty years, with about a corresponding drop in the value of money. But the incomes of livings have not changed. A £400 living before 1914 should be about £600 now to have the same value as then. The beneficed clergy are definitely one-third poorer than a generation ago, if they have the same income in money.

What would be a decent scale for incumbents, if rectories and vicarages and gardens, etc., were drastically dealt with to reduce the cost and labour of upkeep? Assuming that the property has been dealt with, by the Diocese or Q.A.B. or the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, I make bold to suggest £400 for bachelor incumbents, and £500 to £600 for married men, plus children's and special allowances. I should certainly like to see Hon. B.D. and D.D. receive some increase in allowance, as a recognition of the value of scholarship to the church. The Church benefices budget might then be:

	£
2,500 bachelors, at £400 a year	1,000,000
3,500 married, at £500 a year	1,750,000
6,000 married, with average of two children, at £560 a year	3,360,000
700 special posts, at £700	490,000
1,000 new specialist clergy at £500	500,000
4,000 special allowances, at £40	160,000
Cost of increments, say	500,000
Total	£7,760,000

That is about £2,000,000 more than the present income. I give these figures to provide a concrete basis for thought and discussion.

Let me add a little note on the pruning of the plum trees. It must be remembered that in the course of centuries the

holders of richer livings have developed a style of living and liabilities commensurate with their incomes, large houses, two or three maids, a gardener and a chauffeur. A sudden drop from, say, £1,000 to £500 would be just bankrupting. Much could be done if capital was available for housing changes. Without housing changes any considerable financial reduction is almost impossible.

To sum up, *Putting Our House in Order* does not live up to its comprehensive title. It almost ignores the Laity, who seem to give at present to the Church about a farthing in the pound; or more probably nine-tenths give practically nothing, and one-tenth about 2½d. or 3d. in the £1.

It has no practical figures for putting the two top stories in order. It simply concentrates on putting the parochial clergy in order. It proposes an ecclesiastical service with family allowances and special allowances for large vicarages and special work.

It probably overloads these financial proposals by proposing also to abolish the parson's freehold and private patronage; and to change many vicars into curates by a great enlargement of parishes. It proposes to make unwieldy vicarages into convenient modern houses with labour-saving amenities, without making any estimate of the cost or any proposals for raising the large amount of capital required. It is impossible to see the House steadily and see it whole, when isolated proposals are made to deal with only one storey. Note p. 119, the airiness of the scheme; allowances will be paid "as and when money becomes available in the common fund." In that case I suggest a sliding scale for the whole church from deacons to bishops.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The challenge is there, and must be met practically. We cannot dismiss the subject of money as S. Theresa does when she says "Oh! if human beings might only agree together to regard it as so much useless mud, what harmony would then reign in the world!"

One thing, quite uncontroversial, could be done at once. Every Diocese might open a fund for making grants to the poorer livings, and especially to married men with families. Contributions might be invited from the richer livings. If richer livings all gave £5 for each £100 over £500, and £10 for each hundred over £700 or £800, that would be a token

of desire to love our clerical brethren as ourselves. It would also encourage more comprehensive schemes.

The explosive leaven of “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” has begun to work again in the twentieth century as it did with slavery in the nineteenth century. It is but just that the clergy should first apply it to themselves. Then it will broaden out gradually over the world. Coleridge said that if you want truth to shine with new lustre put it into practice, into action. Let the clergy begin it. The sacrifice will be dissolved in joy.

APPENDIX

A HALFWAY STAGE

A complete change in the parochial system of finances would not be quick and easy to achieve, so I suggest a simple halfway stage of reform.

(1) Let there be a brief bill or measure (*a*) to take from livings of over £600 ten per cent, of the excess up to £900 progressively for five years (50 per cent. of the excess in all) and use that money as a general pool for augmenting poor livings, on a plan which starts from a basic bachelor stipend plus various allowances for wife, children, travelling, special work, etc.; (*b*) above £900 a year make the percentage 12 per cent. on the excess above £900 (60 per cent. after five years).

(2) Let this financial pruning of the plum trees be accompanied by a thorough overhauling (by Dioceses and Q.A.B. together) of rectories, gardens and necessary expenses of upkeep. Let them all be vested in the Dioceses with Queen Anne's Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

After five years of this plan the gulf between the poorer and the richer livings would be greatly reduced; and the way to a more comprehensive measure would be much clearer. Also the value of money after the war would be better known, and a juster estimate possible of what the stipends and allowances of the parochial clergy ought to be.