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Men, Money, and the Ministry

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THE JULY session of the General Synod had before it two reports which bear on the shape of the Ministry in years to come. The first was the sixth report of the Archbishops' Advisers on the Needs and Resources of the Church.¹ This is an annual report, usually concentrating on anticipating financial problems facing the church, but on this occasion focussing attention also on the manpower problems of the Ministry.

They note that the church is not yet meeting more than a third of the working expenses of the clergy, and that many stipends have not yet been brought up to the minimum they proposed in their previous report. The overall deficit they estimate as about £4 million in 1970. Looking ahead to 1975 they estimate (on an annual inflation rate of 5%) that about £21.6 million will be required over the amounts found in 1970, of which the laity will have to find about £14 million. Laity giving per head has kept pace with rising wages: but this is offset by the reduction in church membership.

Turning to manpower they estimate that of the 13,000 clergy presently in the parochial ministry, about 6,000 will have left it due to all causes by 1980. This, with the reduction in numbers being ordained, leads them to conclude that the 'queue for livings' will give place in two or three years to a 'gap' in clerical manpower. They see us faced with a choice between a special nationwide effort to encourage more men to offer themselves for the ordained ministry or more rapid progress with the restructuring and redeployment of the ministry. The former choice poses two questions—how to attract men of the right quality and how to pay for them: and though the advisers leave the issue open, they give a strong impression that they believe restructuring and redeployment to be the right answer.

The second report was that of the Terms of Ministry Committee.² Set up in 1970 to prepare a scheme for the implementation of those parts of the *Partners in Ministry* report³ as found favour in the dioceses,

this interim report outlines their first proposals. These are to constitute the Church Commissioners as a Central Payments Authority and to pool benefice endowment income including glebe income; to get the bishops to appoint a working group to assist them in a fairer distribution of manpower; to provide for compulsory retirement of clergy at 70; to make provision for dissolving pastoral relationships in cases of ill health or disability of the incumbent and in cases of pastoral deterioration; and finally to suggest that nearly all appointments be made by Parish Appointment Committees composed of the bishop, patron, and representatives of the parish concerned.

Most of these proposals will seem reasonable in the circumstances. The ethical dubiety of pooling endowments given for specific purposes is partly offset by those cases where the original intention no longer makes real sense. The bishop's working group is unlikely to do any harm, and cynics may think little good. Retirement at 70 is reasonable: and action to deal with situations where pastoral relationships become impossible long overdue. Whether the Committee's proposals for making provision for a clergyman required to give up his living are adequate is another matter. When will we face the reality of the situation that occasionally arises where a man should not continue his ministry?

The proposals about patronage are more controversial. The good intentions of the Committee are not in doubt: but the wisdom of their proposal is not self-evident. If the Parish Appointments Committee meets only once, then the parish representatives are at a major disadvantage in probably having little first-hand knowledge of the men considered. If it meets several times, so that enquiries can be made between meetings, then the demands on the time of the bishop and others may well prove intolerable. The Synod was not happy about the proposals and asked the Committee

to reconsider their proposals for the reform of the patronage system in the light of the manpower situation set out in the sixth report of the Archbishops' Advisers on Needs and Resources; and (a) to formulate proposals for the deployment within the diocese of available manpower in accordance with the needs of parishes and other areas of ministry; and (b) to make proposals regarding the patronage system in the light of the needs for such overall deployment.

This amendment was passed by 209 votes to 177 after a very unsatisfactory debate which showed little agreement among the supporters as to what the amendment meant. But it was clear that the present proposals on patronage were not considered satisfactory: and some action on deployment in addition to the Bishops' working group was called for—particularly in view of the statements in the Advisers' Report. It may therefore be relevant to examine the present situation more closely.

The Facts of the Present Situation

IN view of the way in which statistics are bandied around it may be as well if we start by getting some of them clear. In round figures there are about 10,000 clergy who are beneficed (or of incumbent status), 3,000 assistant curates, and 4,500 clergy with full-time non-parochial duties or part-time work (including chaplains to the forces, worker-priests, and semi-retired clergy). The annual number of new clergy needed to keep the total constant (making allowances for death, retirement, losses from all other causes, and gains by clergy returning from overseas) is about 490, and will rise somewhat with compulsory retirement. Ordinations, which reached a postwar peak of 636 in 1963 have been dropping, and were 437 in 1971. They will drop considerably more in the near future. In February 1971 the Synod agreed to a House of Bishops' Report reorganising the theological colleges to provide a maximum of 850 places, of which up to 170 places could go to theological students other than A.C.C.M. ordinands. As the average time in a College is about 2.7 years, this envisaged ordaining a maximum of about 350 a year, after making allowance for those trained in non-residential schemes.

If we fail to ordain 490 in any year the only immediate effect is to reduce the total number of clergy by the deficit. If we do so continuously then after 30 years or so we reduce the total number of clergy pro rata. The Bishops' maximum of 350 means an ultimate reduction of 30-40% in the total number of clergy, with an even greater reduction in parochial clergy if non-parochial appointments do not reduce.

However if we wish to consider, like the Advisers, the 'queue for livings' we have also to look at what is happening to the number of livings. A recently published investigation by the Rev. C. O. Buchanan⁴ shows that under various reorganisation schemes incumbencies are being reduced by about 160 or 1.6% per annum. To keep the 'queue' constant we require 490 minus 160, that is 330 per annum to be ordained. He is therefore quite right to dispute the Advisers' claim that the 'queue for livings' will disappear in two or three years. There is no likelihood of its disappearing for quite some time on present trends: indeed it may get worse. This is the main theme of Colin Buchanan's book: and the argument is basically sound. It is a pity that he draws the wrong conclusion and pleads that we should only ordain 240 a year without examining the long term implication of such a policy.

How many clergy do we need?

IT is almost incredible that with the numbers of clergy being debated for a decade, we still have little objective assessment of the numbers we need. In 1964 Leslie Paul produced his report⁵ which the Church

Assembly was never allowed to debate directly. It contained at least the suggestion that we should aim at keeping the laity/clergy ratio constant, and produced the interesting fiction that by 1970 we would be ordaining 809 clergy a year, as against 1,365 which, on certain assumptions were said to be needed. He did not explain how they were to be paid: but at least he was trying to look at the need. The Advisers, and Colin Buchanan, seem to be only looking at how many incumbencies there are, not at how many there should be.

Unfortunately any objective assessment is difficult: and confused both by unsatisfactory aspects of our present conception of the sacred ministry, and by imperfectly thought out proposals for its modification. It really is absurd that we effectively define the ministry by the authority to say the consecration prayer in Holy Communion: it is justified neither by the New Testament nor by common sense—yet it bedevils any attempt to consider the proper relative roles of clergy and laity. It is absurd that we ordain men at 24 or thereabouts with an implied promise that later they will have incumbencies of their own. In any other profession the final decision as to whether men can assume major responsibilities comes nearer the age of 30: and we ought to recognise that if we ordain at 24 there are a few, at least, who should never end as incumbents, and plan accordingly. Nor can we justify a major reduction in the number of clergy by talk of auxiliary ministries where men follow a secular calling through the week, and act as clergy at week-ends. There is a limit as to what men engaged in secular callings can do (though we rarely let them anywhere near the limit): and it is far from clear what we achieve if we turn something like lay readers into explicitly second-class clergy. The cynic might be forgiven if he suspects that, as usual, instead of mobilising the laity, we are merely trying to see if they can be brought under better control.

Let us, for the purposes of this article, merely define the clergy quite untheologically as men available full-time to exercise a pastoral ministry. How many do we need? This (not, how many we can afford) is the real question. The shutting down of 160 livings a year is partly motivated by grounds of economy: but it is evident that it contributes only 1.6% per annum to clerical stipends—or, over the period 1970-75 only about 5% of the new money that the Advisers tell us has to be raised in any case. Money so realised may be useful, but this should not be the determining factor. In any case augmenting stipends by this means is getting perilously close to living on capital.

At the moment we do not employ our clergy (or our laity) as well as we should. We can afford to deploy fewer in rural areas, though such areas clearly need a lower lay/clergy ratio than towns. We are failing, in new housing areas, to deploy sufficient clergy to build up new parishes. We are failing in existing parishes to recognise our responsibility to witness to the whole nation. Parish evangelism is frequently without imagination or urgency, and too often non-existent. We have

become mesmerised by the defeatism of our leaders, and we see contraction as a policy. As a policy it would have been abhorred by the Apostles: and should be by us. The decline in church membership should spur us to repentance and renewed effort till the vicious circle be broken.

Our first objective should be to maintain the witness of the Church to, and responsibility for, the whole nation: or, in other words, the preservation of (at least something like) the parochial system. More effective deployment might allow us to save some manpower, but it is doubtful if this could even in the long term, be more than about 20% if an effective parish system is to be maintained. At this figure there would be 5,000 laity for every incumbent or assistant curate. Effective deployment essentially involves the creation of new jobs where the need is, and not just playing around with patronage, a fact which the General Synod might note. A 20% reduction in clergy would mean that we will still need to ordain on average about 400 men a year—and to preserve the plant within which they can be trained. It means that a conscious effort must be made to create new parishes in areas of need at least half as fast as we close others by merging. New money will have to be found for the new parishes: though the sum involved is not a great increase on the figures the Advisers already give us as far as stipends are concerned—and it is far easier to raise money for expansion than for contraction—people can see the need, and some return for their money. But if finance is the limit, let us sit light on buildings, on redundant churches and sites, on central administration and even education, before we economise on those whom the church sets aside to proclaim the gospel of Christ. It is ominous that at the July Synod the first mutterings were heard that we could not afford the cost of training men for the ministry. Such might care to ponder the following figures:

	1954	1971	%
	£	£	<i>increase</i>
Vote for training ordinands	168,000	267,300	59
Vote for C.A.C.T.M./A.C.C.M.	8,000	67,380	740
Total central vote for purposes other than training ordinands	182,000	861,560	374

The number of candidates starting ordination training were roughly the same in the two years chosen. A.C.C.M. covers a slightly wider field than C.A.C.T.M., so that a 600% increase is perhaps a fairer figure. Even so, comment is superfluous.

Our second objective must be to mobilise more fully the abilities of our laity with vision and imagination, in a genuine working together with the clergy: that releases the clergy from many of their present—essentially lay—tasks, and that encourages the laity to use their talents to the full both in secular work and in the total ministry of the local Church. And it is more than high time that there was set before the

Synod a considered document setting out a consistent policy on these matters, supported by correct arithmetic.

- ¹ *The Church's Needs and Resources*. A sixth report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York by their Advisers on Needs and Resources. G.S. 89. CIO. 32 pp. £0.40.
- ² *First Report of the Terms of Ministry Committee*. GS 87. CIO. 44 pp. £0.50.
- ³ *Partners in Ministry*. The Report of the Commission on the Deployment and Payment of the Clergy. CA 1640. CIO. 1967. 112 pp. £0.22½.
- ⁴ *The Job Prospects of the Anglican Clergy*. Colin O. Buchanan. Grove Books. 1972. 38 pp. £0.45.
- ⁵ *The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy*. Leslie Paul. CIO. 1964. 312 pp. £0.62½.