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

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

Progress in Ministry

BY F. F. G. WARMAN

IF a 'Hands Off' competition were to be run whose object was to place in order those matters connected with the Church of England whose immunity from change was most desired, the Parochial System would undoubtedly come near the top, particularly if the rights and status of those who work it, namely the incumbents, were to be included. There has been remarkable resistance to change even in the face of well directed attacks, such as 'Putting our House in Order', and the only changes that have come about have been due to the effects of various Pastoral Re-organisation measures and the levelling out of incomes indirectly due to the fall in the purchasing power of money and the activities of the Church Commissioners and others to help provide a living wage for the clergy. The pressure to produce a new plan within which the parochial clergy should work, and which might also include non-parochial clergy, comes from two sources. The first is the pressure of events. The old system is no longer sound, for it no longer provides for the economic use of man-power or material resources. In order to keep things running at all parishes have to be put together or divided by long and involved legal process and men have to be moved about as opportunity occurs and not always as occasion demands. The machinery grew out of another age and is ill-adapted to the age in which we live. There are too many different interests to be considered in each case and a logical over-all plan is next to impossible to achieve. The second pressure comes from those who believe that the present system both of appointing and paying and placing the clergy is morally indefensible, that it is not only ineffective but wrong.

These matters were brought to a head in the debate in the Church Assembly, initiated by Colonel Madge, which led to the report to CACTM by Mr. Leslie Paul. Further debate led to the appointment of the Commission presided over by Canon Fenton Morley who presented the report 'Partners in Ministry' to the Assembly in the Summer of 1967. It set out a comprehensive plan for the re-organisation of the ministry, its payment, appointment and deployment. The main criticism of the proposals came from the Bishop of Chester, Dr. Ellison, who has redrawn and expanded his speech in a recently published pamphlet*. It is commended in a foreword whose seventeen signatories included six diocesan bishops.

The authors of the Report and its critics are at one in believing that something must be done with the machinery. It does not merely need oiling or minor repairs, some of it needs replacing. The question is not *Whether?*, but *With what?* Dr. Ellison examines the major proposals one by one in lucid style and makes his own suggestion for alternative treatment of the problems, and includes, in an appendix, a statement of the status enjoyed by clergy in other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Before the detailed examination he gives a

general warning which is worth bearing in mind in regard to any proposed legislation, that once legal matters are established and laid down in black and white the spirit and intentions behind them disappear. What matters is not what the promoters intended but what the measure says. The main aims of the Commission were set out in Canon Fenton Morley's opening speech at the Church Assembly. He gives them under four heads: 1. The merging of all patronage (apart from certain patronage of the Crown now being dealt with by another Commission). 2. The disappearance of the benefice and its replacement by forms of tenure of appointment. 3. The establishment of a new payment system under which clerical stipends may be more uniform. 4. The development of overall co-ordination both of manpower and financial resources by central bodies with executive power. The Commission takes the Diocese as the unit for dealing with these matters and not the 'region' as in the Paul Report, thus inviting the criticism that inter-diocesan changes of personnel will not be very easy, but supplements diocesan administration with central bodies to assist in obtaining a wider field of choice.

In place of patronage now in the hands of Bishops, Deans and Chapters, Colleges, individual trustees, private bodies of trustees etc., all patronage will be exercised by a Diocesan Ministry Commission of from 20 to 25 persons including the Bishop, the diocesan official clergy, representatives of the parochial clergy, lay people and some from outside ordinary Church life. It is envisaged that there should be an executive of about five persons and that each appointment would be made by this executive with some representatives who knew local conditions. If the Diocesan Ministry Commission failed for any reason to make an appointment, a Central Commission would do so. The Bishop of Chester criticises this procedure on the grounds that it is a big and expensive piece of machinery and that it will lessen the valuable connection, which the Report of the Commission admits, between persons or bodies and a parish with which they have been long associated and in which they take an interest. It would also be a time consuming task which would concentrate onto fewer people what had before been a more widespread activity. It would also be bound to reflect a more monolithic attitude and keep appointments more confined to the Diocese than the present method. It has the advantage of getting over some of the abuses to which the old system has been subject. The appointment would be for a term of years with the possibility of review by mutual consent or without a term of years and subject to review. Thus there is brought before us a further radical change. The 'parson's freehold' will no longer exist. He will no longer have his career in his own hands. To what extent will this detract from the dignity of his office? He will no longer have a personal 'cure' as his responsibility, care and charge. Dr. Ellison sets out the pros and cons of the case, admitting that there have been occasions of abuse, where a man on all counts ought to leave because he is ineffective for one reason or another, but he claims, and the Commission admits, that the freehold has been a protection against victimisation by ecclesiastical authority or ill-disposed parishioners. It has also given a freedom and stability to a clergyman's ministry. It must be said

that there is little except this left of the freehold now, for in the majority of cases it has little property value.

In order to meet the criticism that a clergyman has thus become insecure, the Commission gives him a quite different status. From his ordination as deacon he is, with variations to suit his particular case, the responsibility of the Church through the Diocese. If he is moved, he must be moved to a reasonably suitable place; if one cannot be found, he must still be paid a living wage. There could be thus a quite rapid turnover in appointments and it is doubtful whether this would be an advantage. The defence of the whole system is backed up by the statement in the Report that anglican clergy do not have the privilege of the freehold outside England. The Bishop of Chester controverts this assertion in the appendix. There would, on the face of it, be a greater flexibility in appointments without the freehold and in certain cases this might have good effect, but Dr. Ellison points out from the statistics of his own Diocese that there is unlikely to be more movement under the proposed system than under that at present obtaining.

The Report has, it will be realised, introduced a certain bureaucracy into the management of the Ministry. This is centralised in the Central Ministry Commission and set out on two pages (58ff) in *Partners in Ministry*. It would be 'an executive body with clear responsibility for keeping all aspects of ministry under continuous review and for making such changes as may be required from time to time in the ministry's organisation and management'. It would thus need personnel of the highest standing and expertise; it would have to meet often, and would require offices and a secretariat that would make it an expensive organisation. It would add one more to the large central bodies of the Church and it would duplicate a fair amount of work already done elsewhere, and it would have compulsory powers if it was to do the work entrusted to it. The Bishop of Chester feels that it would be bound to influence, if not to usurp, the powers of, Bishops in their relationship with their clergy. Why not, he asks, let ACCM add the necessary duties for dealing with the ministry to those which it already possesses, and remain an advisory body to those who have the responsibility for dealing in person with clergy and ministers? There will be much sympathy for Dr. Ellison's argument against setting up this powerful body at 'headquarters'. The proportion of civil servants to productive workers is ever increasing in the State. We should take warning that it does not happen in the Church.

It is clear that new financial arrangements could not escape the attention of the Commission, for there is no doubt that the present system of payment of the clergy is anomalous and inequitable. The same work and the same responsibility by no means invoke the same pay. What is proposed is that all endowments should go to a central fund and similar arrangements would be made about glebe rents and fees. In addition to a new stipend scale legitimate expenses of office are to be paid. The Commission somewhat naively say that £1m will be wanted for this purpose in addition to £½m for other expenses of the new system. Apart from this money, will the pooling system work? Of course it ought to and people ought to be just as pleased to give

money to a central fund as to their own parish, but there's the rub; they do not do this. In spite of all the changes, people will for a good many years continue to think of the parish as *their* parish, of the vicar as *their* vicar. Even supposing it were otherwise, would it be a good thing for parishioners to lose this kind of interest in their local church, for it is through this that they learn to be good members of the great church throughout the world. The Bishop of Chester has much to say on the same lines, feeling that many of the new provisions and administrative bodies and activities would separate bishops and clergy, separate clergy and people, and separate people from the idea that they had a stake in their own local Church. In some respects it may be that the Bishop is exaggerating, for the people they each know and have contact with will still hold the same ministerial office, they will still seek each other's advice and help, and personal relationships cannot disappear. But there will be a great sense of the Church being run by committees for it will be committees who will appoint and hear grievances; there will be the tendency to think of things being done by 'them' and not by known persons, and this would be a great loss. There is no doubt but that the atmosphere of the Church of England would be changed. Change is needed, but should it be *this* degree of change?

At the end of his pamphlet the Bishop of Chester sets out what he calls an alternative way ahead. He states that, allowing the Commission's proposals to be right, they will still take a great deal of time to put into effect, and certain of the propositions, he believes, ought to be fully debated in the Church Assembly as principles on their own, for example, the complete deprivation of patrons of their rights out of hand. May there not be ways in which the desired results can be obtained by less drastic means and at less disturbance of the traditions of the Church of England?

From his own Diocese the Bishop is encouraged by the new sense of purpose and responsibility that is developing from the introduction of a form of Synodical Government. It is producing an increased sense of fellowship and co-operation and he believes that such a system should be allowed to develop its own way of working before such expensive and time consuming bodies as the Diocesan and Central Ministry Commissions are set up. Together with an expanded ACCM such a system could very well do all that is required, both in the matter of appointments and in the general strategy on which the Bishop of the Diocese, with his near advisers, would be concerned. Further needs in the way of administration and procedure are already in hand in the new Pastoral Measure which allows for the traditional patterns of ministry to be continued where they remain suitable and for newer methods thought out and created for new housing areas, new towns and large country districts in the shape of group and team ministries working from the kind of buildings best adapted to their needs. The new Pastoral Measure will help to overcome many of the legal entanglements which have hitherto existed and it is unwise to embark on further far reaching legislation before we have given the facilities at hand time to prove their value. If to this there is added some modification of the parson's freehold, there would be no need for the complete changing of a

system which has already shown signs that it is capable of development.

Some changes in the freehold are certainly desirable. Dr. Ellison advocates a definite retiring age for Bishops and beneficed clergymen, with power to extend their tenure on an annual basis. He also wants to see another look taken at pensions to make sure that hardship is avoided. An important proviso is based on a request from the Convocation of Canterbury that some means should be sought, short of the legal procedure laid down for conduct cases, to ensure that there may be a 'pastoral' method of dealing with occasions when a clergyman, for local reasons, can no longer properly do his work. The feeling that it is not the 'done thing' for an incumbent to ask for a change or for the parishioners to ask for a change ought to be banished utterly. This means no more than the extension of the duties which existing persons or diocesan bodies already possess. In fact, changes of work desired for perfectly good reasons could be brought before those already engaged in similar duties without the creation of new Commissions. It is simply a matter of keeping registers and records. These all seem to be reasonable ways of evolution rather than the revolution proposed by the Commission, some of whose proposals need for their fulfilment not a change of machinery but a change of attitude, and the Bishop refers to this when he suggests that, with the coming of team and group ministries a man should not consider himself a failure if he did not obtain a sole charge after a few years in orders. Patronage, security of tenure and finance could all be dealt with by relatively simple measures without the necessity of changing the whole position which has developed in the Church over many years. English people have a liking for gradual rather than sudden change and it is an instinct that has served them well both in Church and State. Only when this has been genuinely tried should we demolish and rebuild, for this latter procedure has not always proved successful.

The proposals of *Partners in Ministry* are, however, only one manifestation of a general slight change of emphasis in the outlook of the Church of England. In several other ways differences of direction have appeared and it is worthwhile looking briefly at some of the indications so that we may see which way the wind is blowing and whether it is a fair wind or not. The nature of the Church, and the nature of the environment in which it finds itself, determine the nature of the relationship between them. Theologically it must always be the same, for the Church's mission in the world remains, as ever, to witness to the truth of the Gospel and work towards the salvation of mankind. For a good long while Church and State in England have got on well together, apart from a few minor disturbances, and at least outwardly have professed to follow the same ideals in their different spheres. But this is changing, for it must be realised by everyone that decay in church-going—in all denominations—is a token of the fact that Christianity, as an institutional religion, is not the power it was. The reasons are complex but it is true that Bishops, Deans and other leading churchmen have, in the main, lost their influence, and pronouncements by Christian bodies no longer compel the attention or respect that once was theirs. What are the churches doing about this? What, for our present purpose, is the Church of England doing

about it? The very best, as always, in their different manners, are doing something constructive, even if they appear sometimes to make mistakes; trying to understand and trying to build. But what in general is happening? To me we seem to be in danger of taking one of two paths neither of which appear to hold out much real hope. We are either trying to get up to date or trying to concentrate our power on a smaller front.

Some advantages have undoubtedly come from permission to use versions of the bible other than King James, though I have yet to come across a church which uses the Revised Psalter. Liturgical revision, both on its literary and ceremonial sides, is in an early stage and it cannot be yet determined whether the new language, new forms and new treatment are making worship any fuller in meaning, or more attractive to ordinary people than equally sincere and efficient presentation of older forms. If our churches are catering for a known congregation, this matters little since they can soon be got into the new way; but if we are catering for all who have the right to come to our parish churches, we must think of them as well as ourselves, and we do not want to be in the position of continually explaining as we go along what is to happen next as though it were a kind of private party. In the early church, for excellent reasons, this is what some of its worship was, but it should not be so now. It is manifestly right that the Church of England should be free of the bonds which restricted liturgical reform in 1927 but it is still possessed of a relationship with the State which to lose would close doors even if, and this is doubtful, it opened others.

The very slight withdrawal mentioned above is probably unintentional and insignificant but there are other instances of greater importance. The whole discussion of State-Church relationships and Crown appointments has brought into view a strong array of opinions on the side of more self-government, more independence; as though the Church existed as an end in itself, as a master and not as a servant. That there is a difference between Church and State is undeniably true, but there is no reason why there should not be a partnership. The present partnership has grown over the years and may have continued into a new age in a form no longer entirely suitable, but that is no argument for the Church becoming more exclusive, rather is it a reason for *Progress in Partnership*, if one may so adapt two titles. The fact of the Establishment is there; it gives the Church of England a position and responsibility of which it cannot divest itself however hard it finds it to bear and yet, every now and again, proposals are made which seem to edge it away into a more comfortable world of its own. One small instance of this came up at the Church Assembly in February when the basis of membership on the Church Electoral Roll was discussed: should baptismal or communicant status be required? The overall vote went in favour of those who in Baptism had been made members of the church, but there was a very substantial minority which desired to exclude from any voice in the Church's government many who come to church, who think of the Church of England as their church, who give it a good deal of support but who, perhaps at the age of eighteen or nineteen, have not yet been confirmed.

The argument that the Church of England should be more exclusive

in its membership and so keep out of it all but those fully committed stems from the belief that smaller numbers but higher quality would be a more effective force for the propagation of the Gospel. This might have been true fifty or so years ago when it was something of a status symbol to have your pew at the parish church and to hold office as churchwarden a social ambition, but surely not now when such motives scarcely exist. We should be glad of the interest of the 'outsider'. If, as with us all, he is welcomed as a sinner, he should always be regarded as a potential saint. If he is willing to join the army he will soon know what he is fighting for, and it would be a mistake not to give him the uniform.

To find the best way of solving some of the admitted problems of Church and State relationships has become all the more pressing with the movement towards Church union now gaining pace day by day. Some of the matters which are the subject of proposals in *Partners in Ministry* will unquestionably have to be dealt with so as to provide a structure for the ministry acceptable to all participants in a fully united Church, and it might on this count be wise to adopt the line the Bishop of Chester suggests rather than set up a whole new structure that would be difficult to unbuild. The Church's Ministry has many ties with the State and, if the more frustrating of them could be done away with or modified, this relationship might well be one of the particular contributions which the Church of England could bring to a united Church. The movement towards Synodical Government is likewise of great importance in regard to Church unity matters for a system which engages the interest of all men of goodwill towards the Christian religion will provide a pattern of Church government which all could accept.

The particular mark of the Church of England is to be the Church of the English people; not a secret society trying to hide from the attacks of a wicked world, nor a sect with a gathered congregation, but an outward looking body always seeking to include rather than exclude, accepting the friendship and help of all rather than treating them as potential enemies. Its general structure is sound; it has agents everywhere, not for its own advantage but, because it has the duty to see that, within human and physical limitations, no one is without Christian ministrations and a place of worship. This is the special characteristic of the Church of England which, in order to carry out the duty, must continue to accept certain privileges and certain burdens. A new look for it which would alter the essential features of this spirit and character would not help it in its task and would deprive it of the chance of making its own particular gift to the society within which it lives. In other places and at other times and through different sequences of history the Church has developed its various forms. Each has its treasure. Let us be very sure we do not squander what is of real value in ours.

* *Progress in Ministry* An examination of some of the proposals contained in the Report *Partners in Ministry* with suggestions for A Better Way Forward. (Faith Press. 3s. 6d.)