Chain Store Church

THE PAUL REPORT ARRAIGNED

BY GUY MAYFIELD

IN 1960 a resolution was carried in the Church Assembly instructing the Central Advisory Council for the Ministry " to consider, in the light of changing circumstances, the system of the payment and deployment of the clergy, and to make recommendations ". In itself the motion was timely. The result has been controversial. No instructions were given in the motion as to how the inquiry should be made. Maybe it was assumed that an inquiry which, if thoroughly made, would require expert legal and administrative knowledge of the church and, even more important, would rely on the experience of clergy and laity well versed in the pastoral and financial problems of the Church of England, would be committed to a group of experienced investigators. But for reasons which so far have not been explained the inquiry was committed to one man, Mr. Leslie Paul, who is described on the blurb of his report *The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy* (Church Information Office, 12s. 6d.) as " author, sociologist, philosopher ". There has been well founded and deeply felt criticism, none of which reflects on Mr. Paul himself, that an enterprise of such a grave character should be committed to one man. Is the Church of England so small that it can be examined in these respects by one man only? What view of the Church underlies the decision that investigations touching the life and work of the ministry can fairly be placed in one man's hands, however well qualified he may be as a statistician, and as author, sociologist, and philosopher? It is doubtful whether the Central Advisory Council for the Ministry appreciated that if the inquiry was made by one man, the invitation was being made to one man to pass judgment on the present parochial " set-up " of the church.

There is, to say the least, great uneasiness that an administrative body, which is the servant of the General Assembly of the Church of England, could reach such a decision. If a chain of banks or of supermarkets had wished for an inquiry to be made into their organization, it is most unlikely that the matter would have been committed to a single person with all the limitations of wisdom, knowledge, and experience which such a decision involves.

It is not surprising therefore that the result of this one man research has caused grave concern among clergy and laity of all schools of thought. Mr. Paul thus began his inquiry under limitations which for some reason were not recognized at the time. But imagination is not the companion of bureaucracy.

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In one respect Mr. Paul has done well. Those parts of his report which deal with the present trends in housing, population movements,

and their present influences, moral and social, as they touch on the life and work of the church, are of great value. There has long been a need to have these factors correlated and presented in a compact form. It is unfortunate that the controversy which has been aroused by the method of inquiry and by some of Mr. Paul's recommendations may obscure the value of his work in this respect.

The report shows that in the areas of densest population, the influence of the church is least effective. Rightly he examines this whole position in detail, and the result will be to shake complacency in many quarters. There are far too few clergy to serve the present pastoral needs of the Church of England. What few there are are not distributed to the best advantage. This has been pointed out before but never so effectively as in this report. Nevertheless, when Mr. Paul examines the statistics of church attendance he comes to the conclusion that " the number of worshippers may be held to be unsatisfactory. but, considered socially, it is formidable, and makes the Church of England by far and away the most important social institution in the land."

Those of us who work in the parochial system would agree with this assessment. It is at once a humiliating one and no less a cause for thankfulness. But the assessment is hardly likely to remain permanent so long as only 41.7 per cent. of the clergy within the parochial system minister to 11.2 per cent. of the population, and a mere 14.6 per cent. of the clergy minister to 34.7 per cent. of the population. The disparity of these figures is caused largely by the numbers of clergy who serve rural parishes where the population is necessarily thinner on the ground than in town and new housing areas.

The Church of England has in the course of centuries covered the country with a network of parishes in which virtually every field, farm cottage, factory, house, and block of flats is included. In theory at any rate the parochial system is flexible, like a fisherman's net. But it has been obvious for long that, despite various administrative and legal reforms since the war, it is no longer possible to adapt the meshes of the net quickly enough to accommodate the parochial system either to the shortage of clergy or to the new population movements. And in the near future these movements are likely to become more rather than less marked.

Those sections of Mr. Paul's report which examine these conditions are admirable. Had the report been content to point to symptoms, there would have been less controversy. But Mr. Paul was empowered by the Central Advisory Council for the Ministry to make recommendations to deal with the situation.

So he had been faced with a tremendous task which, as many people agree, was entirely inappropriate for one man's judgment and experience. He devoted some three years to the preparation of the report. Because he is a statistician, he relied heavily in his inquiries upon the results of a questionnaire which was sent to some 10 per cent. only of the parochial clergy and answered by less than that percentage. The Bishop of Lewes, who has had great parochial and pastoral experience, commented on the questions as follows (in a letter to the *Church Times*) : " Proceeding, as they do, from our central administrative

machinery at Westminster, they constitute an impertinence of so abhorrent a kind that I hope the parochial clergy will not be slow to consign the form to its proper home—the waste paper basket ".

One may reasonably question whether the Church of England, if it is considered purely as an organization, is suitable for a small sample investigation such as this. One may question whether the Church, which is concerned with spiritual and not material products, can usefully be assessed by the method of questionnaire and statistical results. One may doubt in any event whether a body with the varied traditions and complex organization of the Church of England is suitable for submission to a one man jury.

The method of inquiry pursued casts no reflection on Mr. Paul, but it does reflect on the judgment of those who authorized it. The aim of the questionnaire circulated among a sample of clergy was to find out how their time was employed in parishes of different types. This, it is thought by some critics, might be a useful method of finding out whether managers of chain stores or of banks were well employed. But the work of the clergy is unlike that of anyone else. It goes on all the time. The frontier between work and recreation cannot be drawn. It is impossible to assess in terms of the spirit and the judgment of God whether, for example, a busy parish, flourishing with organizations and overworked clergy, is necessarily more valuable or more successful (material judgments are irrelevant) than a country parish where the pace is slower and where also attempts to quicken the pace or to deprive a small parish of a resident parson may not gravely hinder the work of the Church. The Church of God has a responsibility for the souls of men, whether the people cover the ground densely or comparatively thinly in the country. The vocation and gifts of the clergy are almost infinitely varied. Some clergymen, for example, in small country parishes, are the modern counterparts of George Herbert, and they would be stultified in an industrial or suburban parish. Other clergy who are the modern counterparts of former great ministers in the towns, would be ineffective in country parishes. Some clergy may have a genius for preaching and for organization ; others may be primarily pastors and guides of souls, dealing with comparatively small numbers of people. All these different types of vocation and ministry are essential to the health and vigorous life of the Church. But their effectiveness is not to be expressed in terms of statistics or answers to a questionnaire, however well drawn up. No questionnaire can take account of God-given vocation.

The report leaves the impression that many of the reforms which are advocated are based on statistical examination, and that therefore the elusive but divine factor of vocation is ignored. One is left with the impression also that some of the reforms are unrelated to statistical inquiry and arise from prejudices, good or otherwise, in the author's mind. The statistics and the recommendations do not always tie up with each other.

Some of the reforms advocated, which are not new in themselves, may be admirable even though they will arouse great opposition. The pity of this method of approach is that wise reforms will be resisted because of the grounds with which they are supported in the report and

the manner of their presentation. In this important respect Mr. Paul may have gone a very long way—if not to defeat good ends, then to surround them with needless controversy and bitterness. If the report had been content to be less detailed and to point to principle rather than attempting to apply the principle, more might have been achieved with less controversy and, perhaps most important of all, the most telling part of the report which deals with the present distribution and shortage of clergy and the consequent limitations of the parochial system would not be obscured in the dust of conflict. As it is—and this is written before the Church Assembly has discussed the report in a preliminary way and before it has decided whether to receive it or not—the focus of discussion tends to centre on the recommendations rather than on the situation. There may be wiser treatments for the symptoms laid bare by Mr. Paul.

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But one must take things as they have happened. Discussion, if the report is received by the Church Assembly, will tend to centre on three of his recommendations. He advocates the abolition of the freehold of office of the clergy, parochial and otherwise, and the substitution of a "leasehold" of office for ten years for parochial clergy, renewable for a further five years. From the viewpoint of administration the present freehold is an obstacle in the way of changing the work of an incumbent who has proved to be a square peg in a round hole, possibly through no fault of his own, or who has become disheartened, or who needs a lighter post. Yet experience also confirms that such cases are an insignificant minority. Ideally, it would be admirable for men to be readily moveable; ideally also, the freehold should not be an obstacle to their moving. But the freehold has grown into existence for two reasons. First, the clergy should have the right to proclaim the Gospel free from local pressures, whether ecclesiastical, economic, social, or political. It may be necessary for a clergyman to suffer the hardships of being unpopular with some local interest. Freehold of office gives him this security to withstand the prejudices of ungodly opposition, since by virtue of his freehold no man can be removed from office, except after trial, hearing, conviction, and sentence by process of law, recognized by the state courts. Second, this parson's freehold is also the safeguard of the laity's right to receive the Gospel, knowing that the minister is not subject to ecclesiastical or other pressures. The point at issue is whether these safeguards for clergy and laity alike can be secured by anything less than freehold of office. The recommendation in the report that an incumbent may be interviewed in the seventh year of his leasehold of office cuts both ways. For a very few seven years will be too long a period. Yet it is not hard to think of cases where an interview in the seventh year "by his bishop in order that his future may be planned" will become a focal point for the exertion of the very pressures which are now avoided.

In order to safeguard the economic position of an incumbent, the report recommends that the stipends of the clergy and methods of payment should be modernized and should attach to the parson rather than at present to the office he may hold in the parochial system.

This is excellent, but it need not be tied to the retention of the freehold. The report recommends that the parochial clergy shall receive a stipend with increments and allowances. Many dioceses already achieve this in effect, but not with uniformity. Whether uniformity is possible or desirable is a highly debatable matter, but the principle is a good one. At present the parochial clergy are paid from the ancient endowments of the church and from the contributions of the present generation of laity. As a result the average basis minimum for an incumbent in the provinces of Canterbury and York is £827; the average real earnings are £1,020, excluding free housing. The recommendations of the report, aimed at securing a standard basis of stipends, with increments and allowances, would, if carried out, involve an even greater centralization of financial contribution than exists at present. This might be convenient administratively, but it is very much open to question how far the laity, who after all are voluntary contributors, would be encouraged by more centralization to continue, let alone increase their present substantial and all important contributions to the maintenance of stipends. There comes a point beyond which the local contributor is discouraged because by administrative process local loyalty and local sentiment may be reduced to vanishing point. One may regret this, but experience warns one of the reality. One must face human nature as it is and not as a report would like it to be.

There is another recommendation made with a view to securing the complete mobility of the clergy. It is recommended that ultimately all patronage or the right of presentation to parishes should be abolished, and should be replaced by staffing boards which would operate not over a diocese but over groups of dioceses. In the section of the report which deals with patronage, Mr. Paul betrays some personal prejudice. It is clear that he does not like the patronage system. He writes: "Such a dubious system of empire making within the church could only have grown up because the church was never properly master of its house". And he adds: "Patronage also creates endless legal confusion". Experience of the patronage system as it now works within the Church of England (and that is not to argue that it is suitable for exportation) does not support either of these comments. And indeed Mr. Paul does not, wisely, attempt substantiation. The abolition of the patronage system and the substitution of staffing boards could be advocated only where there is incomplete understanding, to say no worse, of the spirituality of the Church of England. The patronage system has its statutory safeguards through consultations with churchwardens as representing the parochial church councils —the value of these consultations is not properly weighed in the report and thus the existing rights of the laity do not appear to be safeguarded. The patronage system expresses the truth, perhaps imperfectly, that one cannot be just a member of the Church of England, faceless and indistinguishable from the next member, any more than in the ecumenical perspective one can be just a Christian.

The tensions of a Catholic, Evangelical, or Central Anglican are good and inevitable ones. This is not the place to explore that statement or to argue it out on doctrinal or liturgical grounds. They exist, these grounds apart, as, for similar reasons, they exist in comparable forms

within the other great churches of Christendom. They represent realities of human character and spiritual *attrait*. Their existence proclaims the fact that though Christ is the same in all likenesses, all likenesses of Him are not the same.

The spirituality of the Church of England, which its members have struggled to preserve throughout its history, proclaims this truth in a unique way. The alternative to the patronage system advocated in the report is one of appointment by committees and boards, and the report does nothing to correct the unfortunate impression that the disappearance of patronage would be accompanied by the obliteration of the great traditions of English churchmanship. The clergy acceptable to a bureaucratic system of appointment are likely to be colourless men rather than prophets. The record of the Old Testament and of the New suggests that the prophetic ministry was never popular with administrators. The more people that are concerned with an appointment, the more likely is their decision to be one of compromise. Prophets were never compromisers. Indeed there is little place for prophets in the report. If the recommendations of the report as to the appointment of parochial clergy were to be implemented, the result would be to make us more dumb and colourless than, it may be, God finds us already.

It is true, of course, that in an age which equates the existence of committees and boards and their attendant bureaucracy with efficiency and improvement, the abolition of the patronage system appears attractive. But the question to be asked is not what is more likely to be efficient in a sinful world, but what it likely to minister more fully and richly to the spiritual needs of church members.

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Among the parochial clergy and laity, who are the people in the front line of the church, there is growing uneasiness at the increasing size of the church's bureaucracy and administration. There is in reality no one centre of the church's administration, though the administrator is naturally tempted to seek to make one. Every parish is a centre. The fallacy of administration is to believe that the creation of more administration will lead to the creation of a common centre. This could be done at a price : part of it would be the extinction of the individuality and therefore the Christ-witnessing work of individual parishes, all of which are, to use the word rightly for once, unique. The report in its recommendations relies heavily on more administration.

Yet there is much reform that can be achieved without adding to the administrative weight already pressing down on the parochial clergy and laity. The report, for example, recommends that in towns there should be " major parishes " served by groups of clergy. This is not new. It is already being put into practice both in town and country parishes, but it will come best and more quickly through natural growth and evolution, pastoral and spiritual, rather than through administrative action. More is happening in this respect that any one man could easily discover in a short and therefore superficial exploration. The process of growth and evolution is essential to pastoral and spiritual development. The question always to be asked is not : Will

this make us more efficient? but: Will this make the Church more obviously the Body of Christ on earth? This second question has not been asked often enough. Some may be excused for thinking that it has not been asked at all.

However wisely and well the present members of clergy are deployed —and if the fact of vocation is taken into account, the possibilities are not as great as statistics suggest—the fact remains that the Church of England is woefully short of ordained men. In 1851 there were 16,194 incumbents and the like; in 1961 the comparable figure was 10,390. This is grave enough, but it is made even more serious when two other factors are considered. The population has increased so that there is a reduced number of clergy serving a far vaster population. The average age of the clergy has also increased. In 1851 the average age was 44; in 1961 the average age of all incumbents was 53 years. The service of the present numbers is therefore likely to be shorter than that of the totals for the previous century. The need to encourage more men to be ordained is therefore critical. They are ordained in response to a God-given vocation. One may wonder how far this sense of vocation is likely to be recognized and to be fostered within a ministry such as the report envisages. The new ministry would be a regimented one, directed by boards and committees. One wonders again, as a result of much experience, how far, for example, the young men who now respond to the call of God as they find it in the Church of England, would find the same dynamic challenge to take up the cross and follow after Christ in a church so reorganized that its clergy would be regarded more as the branch managers of a multiple store than as ministers within the Body of Christ. The reorganized church, or to put it more truly, the church regimented, would reflect more the uniformity of an army than the family of God. In a family there is liberty, and in a family composed of sinners who are trying to follow Christ some untidiness must be suffered and indeed welcomed.

It is significant that the secular press in its comments on the report, and other commentators on radio and television, have emphasized the breadth and scope of the reforms proposed by the report, though seldom realizing that many of them are not new. It has been popularly assumed that reform at any price and in any way is a good thing for the church. There is a fashionable phrase now used of many movements and bodies, which speaks of "bringing them into the second half of the twentieth century". The same phrase has been used of the report in connection with the Church of England. Reform is needed. There are too many medieval relics of administration, cherished for their own sake. But for a church the basis of reform, the doctrine from which it springs, and the eternal Gospel which the reforms should allow to be proclaimed with greater force and freedom, are of supreme importance and need to be considered first. Every church can point to events in its history in which the apparently right thing has been done in the wrong way because the action was not grounded in truth. The deepest criticism and the greatest sense of uneasiness spring from the doubt to which the report gives rise that in its pages the Church has not been considered as the Body of Christ on earth but has rather been considered as an organization, albeit a somewhat unusual one.

It is attractive to argue in the current atmosphere of secular opinion in England that the more we reform and reorganize, the better we shall be, and that therefore, since reform is equated with efficiency, the more efficient we are in worldly and administrative terms, the more effective the Church will be as the instrument of God. This argument is nothing else than the traditional heresy of the English, Pelagianism, in modern dress. Those who read church history and who explore lovingly and carefully the traditions of the Church of England may still long for reform. They will still wonder whether what is advocated in the report is well grounded in Anglican spirituality and has taken account of it at all. They may well conclude that Martin Luther's advice has been disregarded: the baby has been let out with the bath water.

Social and Spiritual Factors in the Rural Parish

By George Crate

THE impact of modern society on the life of rural England varies both in its severity and effect. There are small hamlets where the situation, at least on the surface, differs little from that of a hundred years ago. Other villages are so urbanized as to be scarcely identifiable as agricultural communities at all. Many have been totally engulfed by the sprawling suburbs of towns, victims of the insatiable desire of town dwellers to escape from the nineteenth century clutter of dwellings. The main stream of rural life, however, shows certain trends which are more or less common to the whole. With these we are here concerned.

Most obvious of the influences towards change are the radical modifications which have taken, and still are taking place in agriculture itself. In spite of the "drift from the land", agriculture is still the largest single industry in terms of manpower employed. The farm worker lives in the midst of his "factory", and the wide deployment of the labour force can easily mislead as to its actual strength. A million workers and their families cannot be ignored either by Church or State. They have the same need for spiritual salvation and economic progress as everyone else.

Despite the reduced manpower, improvements in efficiency ensure that more food is produced now than ever before. English farmers are the most mechanized in the world (including the U.S.A.) in terms of machines per acre. New methods of breeding and rearing stock, improved varieties of crops, and mass produced fertilizers all contribute to this state of affairs. Agriculture now enjoys full support and recognition from the Government, the war and continued difficulties in balancing overseas trade having emphasized its vital importance to the