

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

With very minor exceptions, every part of England is contained within some parish, rural deanery, archdeaconry, diocese, and province; but the really significant divisions are the parochial and the diocesan.

There are about 14,000 parishes, varying in population from a handful to over 30,000. If the population is small, one priest may hold more than one parish; conversely, the larger parishes are often worked by teams of clergy. About half of the 20,000 clergy of the Church of England are incumbents (i.e. rectors or vicars, in charge of parishes) and the remainder are either dignitaries, assistant curates, chaplains to institutions, schoolmasters, or other specialist ministers. The laity of a parish elect members to the Parochial Church Council. The functions of this body include 'cooperation with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical'. The laity also elect two of their number as Churchwardens. The Churchwardens are *ex officio* members of the P.C.C. and are generally the principal lay men or women in the parish.

The diocese is the family of the Church over a much wider area – there are 43 dioceses in the Church of England. The Bishop is 'Father in God' to the whole diocese, but as a diocese may contain over 600 parishes and nearly 1000 clergymen (though the average is about half this number), he delegates certain episcopal functions to his suffragan and assistant bishops, of which almost every diocese has at least one.<sup>1</sup> His chief legal officer is the Chancellor, whom he appoints (for life) to exercise his jurisdiction as Ordinary, whether in granting marriage licences or, in the Consistory Court, for the issue of faculties authorizing alterations or additions to the fabric or fittings of consecrated churches throughout the diocese. (The more lurid cases of ecclesiastical discipline which reach the Sunday papers from time to time are also matters for the Chancellor's Consistory Court, but are mercifully infrequent.) The Chancellor is often the Bishop's adviser when legal questions arise over the diocesan administration, though such questions of law are generally referred in the first instance to the Diocesan Registrar or the Bishop's Legal Secretary. These two last (often the same person) are positions usually filled by a solicitor living in the Cathedral city, whereas the Chancellor must be a lawyer who either holds or has held high judicial office or is a barrister of at least seven year's standing, and

need not reside in the diocese. In the diocese he ranks second in precedence only to the diocesan bishop.

The Diocesan Synod is the representative body for the whole diocese, though day-to-day administration and detailed work is carried out by its permanent boards and committees, and the Synod deals only with matters of broad principle. The Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod (also called the Bishop's Council) meets more frequently and between Synods, and it is this body which effectively controls diocesan policy, subject to the agreement of the full Synod. The Diocesan Bishop is the president of the Synod, and there are two houses (which generally sit together), the house of clergy and the house of laity. These must be of approximately equal numbers, and the total size of the Synod can vary between 150 and 270 – except in the case of the diocese of London, which is allowed up to 500 members in its Synod. Most diocesan Synods meet for a day at a time, about two or three times a year.

Each diocese has its cathedral, so called because it houses the Bishop's seat or *cathedra*; but the cathedral is under the care of a Dean or Provost and his chapter of Canons Residentiary, who stand somewhat apart from the general organisation of the diocese. In days past this independence was greatly valued as a check upon the autonomous power of the bishop; but now the bishop is president of a Synod rather than an autocrat, and is not the prelate he was in the Middle Ages, this division of powers means a great deal less. Besides its Residentiary Canons, the Cathedral also has honorary Canons, but they have no real powers or effective functions. They are appointed by the Bishop as a way of giving an honorific title to a strictly limited number of priests as a token of recognition of their value in the diocese. In some Cathedrals the honorary Canons are called 'Prebendaries'.

The dioceses are grouped into two Provinces – Canterbury and York. Each Province has its Archbishop and the Convocation of its clergy. The convocations are more ancient than Parliament, and it is because a priest of the Church of England can be elected by his brother clergy to a seat in Convocation that he is debarred from sitting as a Member of Parliament at Westminster. Indeed, until 1966, Convocation and Parliament were dissolved and elected simultaneously and it is only since then that the Convocations have been allowed a fixed five-year term of office irrespective of the dates of General Elections. Nowadays, however, the Convocations do not often sit by themselves. They combine to form the House of Clergy of the General Synod. General Synod has two other houses; the House of Bishops consists of all the Diocesan bishops and six suffragans elected by their peers, and the House of Laity is elected by the lay members of Deanery Synods. The whole body is about

550 strong and generally meets in Westminster (occasionally in York) three times a year for four or five days at a time. It is the supreme legislative body of the Church of England, and its Measures have the force of Statute Law once they have been laid before the Houses of Parliament without challenge and been signed by the Queen as Supreme Governor of the Established Church.

Rural deaneries are subdivisions of the diocese; each is a group of about a dozen or twenty parishes. One of the clergy of the deanery presides over the Deanery Synod as Rural Dean (but there are two chairmen, the Rural Dean and a lay person elected by the House of Laity). The office of Rural Dean is the Bishops' nomination, though most bishops now consult the clergy of the deanery before making an appointment. Except in a very few cases, the Rural Dean is a parochial incumbent who takes the additional burden of the leadership of the deanery as a part-time and honorary task, and in the deanery is no more than a *primus inter pares*. (In the Southwark diocese they are known as Borough Deans and the deanery is coterminous with the boundary of the appropriate London borough.) Besides the Synod, each deanery also has its Chapter, consisting solely of the clergy, deaconesses, and licensed lay workers. This is an informal body meeting periodically for worship, corporate study, and the business of the deanery.

About Archdeacons, the less said the better; for they are the subject of the following article.

## ARCHIDIACONAL FUNCTIONS

I must confess that when the late Bishop Ian Ramsey asked me to be Archdeacon of Durham I had only the haziest of ideas as to what Archdeacons did with their time. I therefore took the earliest opportunity of calling on the only Archdeacon I knew, in the hopes that a talk with him might help. By the time I left, the picture was almost as unclear as ever, except that I had been given the incontrovertible (though not very useful) definition which I later learned had been first coined by Charles James Blomfield (Bishop of London, 1828-56): 'An Archdeacon is an ecclesiastical personage who performs archidiaconal functions'.

Now that I have been in office for four years, I can appreciate my friend's difficulties. There seems to be no other satisfactory definition. There may be certain things an Archdeacon *has* to do (and we shall be mentioning most of them in the course of this article), but these take up a very small fraction of his time. Most of

his days seem to be occupied in doing the things he does rather than in doing the things he has to do (things, for example, like writing articles for periodicals . . .). That is why archdeaconries (and the Archdeacons in them) vary so enormously.

The Church of England has preserved the traditional threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons; but Anglican illogicality thereafter immediately asserts itself. The deacon is the young man who has just been ordained, who expects to be automatically advanced to the priesthood in a year's time providing he has been 'found faithful and diligent in executing the things appertaining to the Ecclesiastical Administration' and not blotted his copybook during what is in effect a probationary year. The Archdeacon is certainly not one of the deacons – not even the chief of them; indeed, he must have been in priest's orders for at least six years before he can be eligible for appointment. In order to see how he came to be what he is, we must make an historical digression.

Opinion is divided as to whether the origin of the order of deacons is to be found in Acts 6:3, where the apostles appointed seven men to look after the charitable bequests to the Christian widows in Jerusalem in order that they themselves should not have to 'leave the word of God, and serve tables' (in the Greek, *diakonein trapezais*). At any rate, this text has had a strong influence on the diaconate. The deacon may originally have been the person who served at table at the Lord's Supper, and then carried the bread and the wine to the homes of those who were absent. Since these were, as a rule, mostly the sick, the deacons also became those who were responsible for exercising the Church's care and charity towards the sick. Eventually they became the assistants of the Bishop in the collection and distribution of alms and the carrying out of services of love to all the needy members of the Church. In many churches, the figure seven was maintained, so that in so large and important a Church, for example, as that of Rome, the administration of the charitable revenues of the diocese required a host of subdeacons to assist the seven deacons. We can see the deacons becoming important financial and administrative executives, appointed by the Bishop to be his close officials and associates, and can understand why, when the Bishop's chair was vacant, it was usually one of the deacons who filled it. (There is a comparable rise in status – though in another direction – in the case of the original Seven of Acts 6. They were appointed as dole officers and yet we immediately find them performing 'great wonders and miracles among the people', and amongst their number we find Stephen, the first martyr, and Philip, the apostle of Samaria, who converted Simon the magician and the Ethiopian imperial treasurer.)

The chief of the deacons was the Archdeacon, who was thereby

the person most closely in touch with the Bishop. He attended the Bishop in the liturgy and at ordinations, and assisted him in the management of the diocesan revenues. Gradually the Archdeacon came to be more and more of a personage whilst (apart from the survival of the seven Cardinal Deacons of Rome) the deacon slipped back into being the man in the lowest of holy orders, so that the diaconate became simply a stepping-stone to the priesthood (although there have always been exceptions who for varying reasons have never wished to be further advanced).

At this stage there was only one Archdeacon to a diocese, and he was a financial official of some standing. As the Middle Ages drew on, with Bishops who were great landowners and officers of state, the administration of the temporalities of the see made Archdeacons not always very popular people. Indeed, the first recorded mention of a predecessor of mine was on a singularly ill-fated occasion in 1080. The chief confidant of Bishop Walcher of Durham was the Archdeacon Leofwine, of whom Simon the chronicler records that he purloined much of the ornaments and treasures of the Church and distributed them among his kinsmen. When a local noble remonstrated with the Bishop about the conduct of his officers, the Archdeacon arranged for the nobleman's house to be surrounded and for him and his family to be murdered. The people took a dim view of this sort of conduct, and Bishop Walcher came up to Gateshead to parley, promising that the Archdeacon should be tried. The mob was in no mood for fair promises and preferred action to talk; so, with a chant of 'short rede, good rede' they manhandled the Bishop who retreated into the Church. The building was promptly set on fire and the Bishop perished with it. Since it took some months to appoint a successor, there is no record that Leofwine was ever brought to book.

Fortunately, even in those rough days, that sort of thing was more scandalous than normal; but Archdeacons were not officials of great popularity and one can have some sympathy with the choice of subject for a medieval disputation which asked 'Can an Archdeacon be saved?'

In early Norman times the dioceses were divided into several archdeaconries apiece to correspond with the civil division into counties, whilst the rural deaneries followed the boundaries of the hundreds. As dioceses have multiplied and the country has become more populous there are now 43 dioceses in England and 107 archdeaconries. Sodor and Man, which consists of the Isle of Man, is the only diocese to have but one Archdeacon and one of the Canons of Westminster Abbey is styled 'Archdeacon of Westminster', though he is without territorial jurisdiction; the Diocese of London has five, Exeter and Salisbury have four each, and all other dioceses

have either two or three. By 1662 it was necessary for an Archdeacon to be a priest and in 1840 the present regulation was enacted whereby he had to have been in priest's orders for six years. It was in that year that H. E. Manning (who subsequently seceded to the Roman Catholic Church and eventually became a Cardinal) set up a record since unequalled in the Church of England by being appointed an Archdeacon at the age of 32. This lack of years did not prevent him from being styled 'the Venerable', though this title only began to be applied to Archdeacons in the 1820s.

So much for the history of the office; but what do Archdeacons *do*? They have liturgical and legal functions, but these cannot fairly be described as anything other than vestigial. At an ordination the Archdeacon presents the candidates to the Bishop and the following dialogue takes place:

*Archdeacon:* Reverend Father in God, I present unto you these persons present, to be admitted deacons (*or* to the order of priesthood).

*Bishop:* Take heed that the persons, whom ye present unto us, be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly, to the honour of God, and the edifying of his Church.

*Archdeacon:* I have enquired of them, and also examined them; and think them so to be.

Nowadays the enquiry and examination is the function of the theological colleges and the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, and the Bishops will have received reports on the candidates and seen them at least during the pre-ordination retreat and (in many cases) on several earlier occasions. They also have their Examining Chaplains who in some dioceses still require candidates for ordination to write essays in order that their suitability for service in that diocese may be assessed. Some Bishops appoint their Archdeacons among their Examining Chaplains, but this is by no means universal. It therefore frequently comes about that the Archdeacon has neither set eyes upon the candidate nor held any communication with him until the ordination rehearsal or even until the morning of the ordination itself. This means either that the dialogue quoted above is a specimen of liturgical perjury, or that the Archdeacon has to gloss it to mean 'I believe, my Lord Bishop, that you would not have permitted these candidates to come here this morning were you not satisfied that they had done well in their General Ordination Examination, that their theological college principals think them suitable persons to be ordained, that they have found friends to vouch to you for their honesty, orthodoxy,

and sobriety, and that, when the document *Si Quis* was read in their parish churches some weeks ago, nobody got up and protested'.

When a clergyman is being presented to a parish the Bishop performs the act of institution which confers upon him the cure of souls ('which', as the Bishop says, 'is both thine and mine'); but the temporalities of the benefice, 'the real, actual, and corporal possession of the Parish Church of St. Agatha's, with all the rights, members, and appurtenances thereunto belonging', are given him by the Archdeacon at his induction. Normally the institution and induction are performed at the same service, the Bishop instituting and giving the mandate for induction, and the Archdeacon then laying the incumbent's hand on the key or ring of the principal door of the parish church, after which the incumbent tolls the bell to signify his having taken possession, and the Archdeacon installs him in the prayer-desk customarily assigned to the incumbent.

So far, all we have heard about are quaint surviving customs. There is more substance to the Visitation which the Archdeacon carries out annually (unless the Bishop decides in any year to hold an Episcopal Visitation, whereby the archidiaconal one is inhibited; or unless, in these circumstances, the Chancellor holds a Visitation at the Bishop's request). Early in the year the Archdeacon compiles and issues Articles of Enquiry to the churchwardens of all parishes within the archdeaconry, to see whether they have been conducting affairs in a proper manner and that the property of the benefice and parish church is being well cared for. Before 30 April each year, the parish meeting elects its wardens for the year and the newly-elected (or re-elected) churchwardens bring the completed Articles to the Visitation. This is held in some convenient central place in the archdeaconry (usually at several centres on several evenings, frequently one in each rural deanery). The wardens are there admitted to office for the ensuing year by making the statutory declaration. In most cases the Archdeacon then delivers a Charge to those present. He has power to cite the clergy as well as the churchwardens to attend and hear the Charge. In many places the Visitation and Charge is made into quite a Deanery occasion with a Eucharist, Evensong, or specially devised service to which members of the Deanery Synod or Parochial Church Councillors from the constituent parishes may also be invited, and at which the Archdeacon's Charge sets the affairs of the local Church in a diocesan or national context.

Most Archdeacons are used to having their legs pulled about their supposedly excessive concern for gutters and downspouts, and it is true that the Archdeacon has a particular responsibility for the Church's buildings. Canon Law provides that he shall survey the churches, chancels, and churchyards within his jurisdiction 'at

least once in every three years, either in person or by the Rural Dean, and shall give direction for the amendment of all defects in the fabric, ornaments, and furniture of the same. The inspection of Churches Measure compels a five-yearly architect's inspection of every consecrated church building in the diocese; if the Parochial Church Council fail in this duty, the Archdeacon may instruct an architect to carry out the inspection and charge a special diocesan fund with the cost. But no one can compel the parish to do the work which this report reveals to be necessary, since there are no funds available for such 'amendments of defects' apart from those provided by the Parochial Church Councils and voluntary bodies, and relatively small sums administered through the diocese. The Archdeacon, therefore, can do nothing in this respect except persuade and exhort.

The Town and Country Planning Acts do not apply to consecrated buildings in England, except in the case of additions which alter the external appearance. Instead, the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure is in force. Whenever any addition or alteration is proposed to the fabric or contents of a church building or its churchyard or curtilage, the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (the D.A.C.) must be consulted. The Archdeacons are members of this body *ex officio*. The D.A.C. advises the Chancellor (a legal official) whether or not to grant the faculty, though he need not accept this advice and may call for a hearing of the matter in his Consistory Court. For such minor matters as redecoration of the church or an alteration to the heating system, a faculty is not necessary and authority can be given by an Archdeacon's Certificate. But the Archdeacon may not sign the certificate unless the D.A.C. has recommended him to do so, and he receives no part of the fee for the issue of a Certificate!

The Archdeacon has no statutory concern for the parsonage house; but there can be few dioceses in which the Archdeacons are not *ex officio* members of the Parsonages Board or Committee and therefore intimately concerned with the upkeep, repair, improvement (and sometimes sale and rebuilding) of the houses in which the clergy live.

So far, the work of an Archdeacon sounds very dull and unspiritual, and the reader who has persevered as far as this may well be forgiven for asking whether there is enough work in it to occupy a man full-time and whether it is not work which could be done a great deal better by a lay administrator than by a priest of at least six (and generally nearer twenty-six) years' standing. The task is redeemed by Canon C22(4) of the Church of England which requires that

Every archdeacon shall within his archdeaconry . . . assist the bishop in his pastoral care and office, and particularly he shall

see that all such as hold any ecclesiastical office within the same perform their duties with diligence, and shall bring to the bishop's attention what calls for correction or merits praise.

If that sounds more than a trifle sergeant-majorly or schoolmasterish, the word to stress is 'pastoral' and it must always be remembered that the injunction is to bestow praise as well as blame. The Archdeacon has traditionally been called *oculus episcopi*, the Bishop's eye; but he is basically on the side of the clergy, not their oppressive taskmaster – just as the Bishop is, too. Indeed, the Mandate for Induction which the Bishop sends to the Archdeacon when a new parish priest is appointed bids the Archdeacon 'to defend him so inducted', and this should never be forgotten.

The Archdeacon, then, is *pastor pastorum* within his area; not the chief pastor of pastors, for that is the Bishop's function, but an assistant to the Bishop in that cure of souls which is both his and that of those with whom he shares it. And since pastoral care is personal and is so differently exercised by different people, all I can do at this point is simply to say how I personally try to interpret that injunction within an archdeaconry consisting of eight rural deaneries, 161 parishes and districts, and fractionally over a million inhabitants.

The first thing is to get to know it; to visit the clergy in Chapter and at home; to talk over with them their ways of work and worship, their problems and the opportunities they see for the Church in their parishes; to join their congregations in their regular worship on Sundays and festivals. But that is only the beginning and serves to provide the first mental picture of the archdeaconry, of the kind of people who live and work in it and the kinds of communities which exist in its towns and villages. The real work begins when the Archdeacon knows his parishes and his clergy, when he has gained their confidence and can help and advise them and the Bishop from a practical knowledge of what the Church is like at 'ground level'. And from then on, there is no limit. He will want to visit the clergy regularly, sometimes for a particular reason (illness, new arrivals in the family, plans for rearranging the pattern of parochial ministry in the area), sometimes simply because he has not been in that parish for some time and wants to know how things are progressing. He will want to be in the parish at significant moments of joy and sorrow – to be guest preacher at a patronal festival or centenary, or at the inauguration of a stewardship service or parish mission; to lead the Church Council in a weekend of exploration into the mission and future of the parish and the relation between laity and clergy in the teamwork of the furtherance of the Gospel; to welcome the newly-confirmed at their first com-

munion; to be at a flower festival or harvest thanksgiving; to talk to the Men's Society or the Mothers' Union; sometimes simply to say 'it's a year or two since I saw your congregation – may I come next Sunday?' Looking at my diary, I find that in the last quarter of 1973 I delivered 45 speeches, talks, or sermons.

In that same period there were 79 meetings of boards or committees which I attended, and that brings me back to the administrative side of being an Archdeacon. Each diocesan bishop has his senior staff – the Archdeacons, the Deans or Provost of the Cathedral, the suffragan and assistant bishops – and he will generally ask each staff member to take a particular interest in and responsibility for one or more committees or aspects of diocesan life. Thus, for instance, within Durham diocese at the moment the Archdeacon of Durham has a particular brief to be responsible for the Parsonages Committee, redundant church buildings, grants towards building projects and church repairs, the work of hospital chaplains and their appointment, women lay workers and deaconesses, and the Social Responsibility Group. But he will also attend meetings of the Board of Mission, the Board of Education, the Board of Ministry, and the Board of Finance as an *ex officio* member, even though he is not chairman of any of them; and he will be much concerned in the Pastoral Committee whenever schemes of pastoral reorganization are mooted which concern the parishes in his archdeaconry – particularly as he will most likely have already been deeply involved in them at local level through discussions with clergy, churchwardens, and church councils. Then there are local or diocesan charities which may invite the Archdeacon to sit on their Board of Trustees, or diocesan committees for the missionary societies which may like to have him as their chairman. And General Synod must not be overlooked – this takes one Archdeacon from every diocese for its sessions in London or York for four or five days at a time, three times every year.

Despite all this, there are few Archdeacons who are appointed as such as a full-time job. It is general for the Archdeacon either to have a small parish or to be on the Cathedral staff, which provides him with a house and help towards his stipend which otherwise the diocese would have to find out of the Quota it levies from the parishes. Cathedral duties include a share in the daily round of services and the weekly round of preachments, meetings of the Cathedral Chapter, and the general administration and mission of the mother church of the diocese and of its estates.

It can be seen that an Archdeacon's work is oddly assorted. Much of it is administrative, but it is not thereby unspiritual. Pastoral care can be exercised through administration as well as through conversation. Indeed, often it can *only* be exercised through

the nitty-gritty of the practical problems which beset a clergyman – his housing, the negotiation of a grant for the repair of his church, the planning of redeployment of manpower and resources, the resolution of a problem which is hindering the mission of the Church in some locality or which is diminishing the effectiveness of a particular man's work. Pastoral care cannot be exercised in a vacuum, as a purely 'spiritual' matter unconnected with a man's material circumstances and concrete needs; so it must necessarily be tied up with administration. When Bishop F. R. Barry was writing about Mervyn Haigh (Bishop of Coventry, 1931-42, and of Winchester, 1942-52), he said of administration that Haigh

did not regard it as many bishops do, as a usurpation of time and energy which ought to be devoted to his 'real job'. It seemed to him to be part of his pastoral ministry. And unless it can be regarded in that light, as a liberation of spiritual forces making it, in one way or another, easier for the parish priests to make full proof of their ministry, few bishops could endure it for long.

The same is true of the work of an Archdeacon. His work is to be a support to the parish clergy, helping them to realize that certain problems are on someone else's plate than their own, showing them that they have someone they can always call in for advice and consultation, letting them see that 'The Diocese' is not a faceless bureaucracy which demands its financial Quota and gives nothing in return, but a team, a family, in which all work together for the good of the Kingdom.

I may still not be entirely certain what 'archidiaconal functions' are, but I recognize the work as something richly satisfying and with an incredible number of different facets to it, in which it is possible to use one's full powers in the service of the community, the Church, and the Church's Lord.

The Venerable MICHAEL PERRY, Archdeacon of Durham and Canon Residentiary of Durham Cathedral