

EDITORIAL

One of the matters which regularly drops into a bishop's in-tray (or at least this bishop's in-tray or telephone) is 'baptismal policy'. There are occasional complaints. But more often the clergy themselves want some counsel or advice, usually in connection with a PCC discussion on the subject.

In offering counsel and advice—and occasionally direction via the Diocesan Bishop when an appeal is made according to Canon B 22 para 2—it has surprised me how little clergy are familiar with the Canon Law. But when I have used the provision of the relevant Canons as a framework for counsel, there has been a gratified surprise that Canon Law is so 'helpful', 'objective' or 'pastorally sensitive'.

I have sometimes pointed out to clergy that they have the power to dispense with the requirement of Confirmation where they so judge. Some felt guilty at ignoring the confirmation requirement. Equally, the canonical ability to have more than the customary three godparents allows the inclusion of a confirmed member of the regular congregation in some parishes. The law is more pastorally flexible than custom.

In other ways too the Canon Law affirms good baptismal practice, and thus priests and parishes who use the occasional offices as heaven sent occasions for evangelism, for example the establishing of baptism on Sundays 'at public worship when the most number of people come together'.

The Canons also lead us on an Anglican mean between the two extremes of a casual administration of the sacrament and a rigorist fencing in of what Augustine called the sacrament of our justification. In my experience parishes are helped to see that the priest has a duty to 'instruct' parents and may delay for the purpose of preparing parents—save an infant in danger of death. The latter is usually, today, the province of the hospital chaplain.

All this will be familiar enough to members of this Society. But this pastoral steering between a baptismal Scylla and Charydis is often a revelation to parish clergy. For the first time (perhaps) they see the Canon Law not as a restraint on what they want to do but as a pastoral and theological, as well as legal, undergirding of the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ. All of which augurs well—in the long run—for the Society's long-standing concern for Education in the Canon and Ecclesiastical Law. Discussions between the Society and the Advisory Board for Ministry have led to the approval in principle by the relevant committees for Colleges, Courses, and Continuing Ministerial Education of a Syllabus and members are busily engaged in producing (engaging!) case studies. Members will be aware that real life is even more amusing than fiction—when in case studies rather than court. We intend to stimulate as well as educate. At least on baptism many are ready to learn that the Canon Law balances evangelistic opportunity with pastoral sensitivity in an admirable way.

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Vice-Chairman.

Note. This is the last issue of Volume 4. Order forms for binding your own copies or for separately bound volumes will be sent out with the next issue (No. 22) in January 1988. Copies will no doubt be on sale at the next Conference on 28 March 1988.—Ed.

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