

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Alternative Episcopal Oversight'?

From The Archdeacon of Newark

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the article by Roger Turner, 'Bonds of Discord: Alternative Episcopal Oversight examined in the Light of the Nonjuring Consecrations' (1991) 3 *Ecc. L.J.* p. 398–409).

The phrase which needs to be challenged is 'alternative episcopal oversight'. The Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod speaks of 'extended pastoral care and sacramental ministry' [clause 5: (3)]. The Act of Synod refers to three ways in which the Diocesan Bishop may extend his episcopal ministry to those unwilling to receive such a ministry from him direct—through one of his episcopal colleagues in the Diocese; through a neighbouring bishop; or through a Provincial Episcopal Visitor. The House of Bishops, in presenting these arrangements to General Synod, made it clear that such Bishops act under the jurisdiction of the Diocesan, not separate from him—with his approval and on terms set out by him.

A Parochial Church Council which passes the Petition by the required majority ('two thirds' having a stronger weight than a straight majority) does exactly that: petitions the Diocesan Bishop to make appropriate arrangements for episcopal duties to be carried out in accordance with the Act of Synod in that parish. He is required to consult with the parish prior to making these arrangements. This is crucially different from the concept of a parish voting to opt out of Diocesan jurisdiction and opt into alternative oversight. General Synod, in the long process of considering ways of making provision for the ordination of women as priests, consistently rejected motions seeking some expression of a 'church within a church'.

Some may aspire to seeking such arrangements, and may want to use the existing provisions in this way. However, the Act of Synod makes no provision for Provincial Episcopal Visitors to preside in their own right over a 'church within a church'. Again, to quote the Act of Synod, each Provincial Episcopal Visitor will carry out or cause to be carried out 'such episcopal duties, in addition to his other duties, as the Diocesan Bishop concerned may request'.

The document which forms the background to the Act of Synod, 'Bonds of Peace' (alluded to in the title of the article as 'Bonds of Discord') is concerned to promote continuing relationships between those accepting and those rejecting the Synod's decision that it is lawful to ordain women as priests—it does not seek to promote an alternative church. This sets a question mark against the parallel being drawn between the present situation and the 'Nonjuring movement'.

We need to take great care over words and to ensure that they accurately reflect what has been agreed.

Yours sincerely,

David Hawtin.

THE REVD MICHAEL VASEY

*Tutor in Liturgy**St John's College, Durham*

Dear Sir,

If, as it is argued, the Canon Law does not bind the laity, I wonder whether you or one of your correspondents would like to comment what, notwithstanding Canon B12.1, forbids lay communicant members of Church of England presiding at the eucharist, particularly outside designated ecclesiastical buildings?

Yours faithfully,

Michael Vasey

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHDEACON

FROM THE REGISTRAR OF LEICESTER DIOCESE

Dear Sir,

Following Archdeacon Ravenscroft's recent article 'The Role of the Archdeacon Today' (1995) 3 Ecc. LJ.379, it would be interesting to know from Archdeacons throughout the country, how they act in cases of opposed Faculty Petitions.

For example, the Parish and the Parochial Church Council wish to proceed and make their Petition. The DAC is against it or in some cases sits on the fence. The Archdeacon is a member of the DAC and will have expressed an opinion in the DAC, which may be a minority view or even that he is neutral to the particular issue. At the subsequent Consistory Court does he make his view known? It would be most interesting to learn from Archdeacons how they see their role in that situation.

So far as the Archdeacons in my own Diocese are concerned, they authorise me to say that they never adopt an attitude of 'no comment' or refuse to give evidence, but will always say at the subsequent Consistory Court exactly what they said at the Diocesan Advisory Committee meeting. Do other Archdeacons share this view?

Yours sincerely,

R. H. Bloor