

BOOK REVIEWS

PRACTICAL CHURCH MANAGEMENT—A GUIDE FOR EVERY PARISH by JAMES BEHRENS, Leominster, Gracewing, 1998, xix + 485 pp (paperback £15.99) ISBN 0-85244-471-0.

This book which, as its author admits, is more a work of reference than a book to be read from cover to cover, is sub-titled 'A guide for every parish', and contains a wealth of wisdom and information which will be invaluable for anyone who is involved in any way with the administration and management of parish life in the Anglican Church. Here are accessible and readable answers to so many of the questions which are posed by clergy, churchwardens and officials of the PCC. The information given is supported by a wealth of footnotes so that its authority is easily confirmed, and the book has a comprehensive and clearly laid out index which makes access to the information simple and straightforward. The range of subjects tackled is impressive. It is good to be able to commend a single book to parishes which sets out clearly, for instance, the task and responsibilities of the PCC Treasurer, the parish's obligations with regard to Child Protection, the pitfalls of Data Protection legislation, and what to do if the priest fails to turn up to take the service. In short this book is a wonderful thing to commend to parishes so that attention is drawn to all those things which 'they ought to know'.

Perhaps the more acid test is whether the book can be commended to parishes in order to answer the questions which they seem most frequently to ask—of rural deans, archdeacons and diocesan secretaries. On this score, and in the experience of admittedly but one archdeacon, the book is less successful. It is not immediately clear how a parish should set about selecting an architect for the quinquennial inspection of their church building, nor why their choice should be confirmed by the DAC before the inspection is undertaken. Though Mr Behrens sets out in great detail the necessary steps in the faculty procedure, it is confusing to have '*faculty applications form*' (p 320) and '... *Form of Petition. This is the faculty application*' (p 321) to describe two quite distinct stages in the process. If PCC members find the faculty legislation complex, they are equally confused by the way in which that legislation is normally managed with regard to churchyards and the erection of grave-stones. There are many who will testify that the dead cause more problems to the church than the living, and Mr Behrens' somewhat trusting references to Diocesan Guidelines for churchyards will not diminish the enquiries received from anxious relatives or exasperated incumbents.

I am grateful for the very full treatment of disputes in Chapter 15, 'Resolving Conflicts', but largely unaddressed is the impotence, in practical terms, of both parishioners and senior diocesan staff in cases of serious pastoral breakdown. The problems of using existing legislation successfully and speedily are well known to senior staff but less widely appreciated in the parishes where the secular procedures for discipline and dismissal are more readily understood. Most surprising of all, however, is the absence of any detail of ecumenical matters, at a time when many parishes are involved in or are exploring the possibility of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and when guidance and reassurance are often sought as to the legitimate extent of ecumenical canons and the generous but careful provision which they make, not least in the importance they place on the opinion of the PCC.

In his preface Mr Behrens admits that his Christian experience has been largely low church and London based, but he hopes that what he has written will be useful for all types of churches, wherever they are. Up to a point he has succeeded, and I hope his book will be widely purchased and widely used throughout the country, but the cultural background from which he comes does reduce somewhat the usefulness

of his book. I suspect I will not be alone in regretting the limitation of his commendation of Christian stewardship to the more obvious passages in the Corinthian correspondence of St Paul. The stewardship obligations of the individual are very fully treated, but the stewardship obligations of the parish to the diocese and the wider church, not least through the Diocesan Quota, are passed by in a way which does not reflect the amount of time and concern spent on their debate in the average PCC! In this part of the world a 'discreet visit' (p 270) to the present parish of a prospective incumbent is an impossibility, and where such visits have taken place there have been hard words, false hopes and often disappointment. I have anxieties about 'people who would like to assist' in the distribution of the consecrated elements at the Holy Communion being commended to the bishop for approval, and I am alarmed that the author should state on page 402 that a photocopier, being part of the fittings of a refurbished church, is therefore a legitimate claim on the (restricted) Fabric Fund. Understandably and rightly much of what Mr Behrens says about PCC work, the employment of staff and child protection issues has little relevance for tiny country parishes or struggling parishes in Urban Priority Areas where children's organisations are non-existent, it is only volunteers who do jobs and where the PCC is virtually synonymous with the congregation. But good practice should not be confined to the large and flourishing. PCC business perhaps needs even more careful definition where none of the members are well-versed in procedural matters, volunteers are entitled to as much protection as paid employees and 'no children's work' is not an excuse for an irresponsible attitude towards visiting youngsters or no proper questions asked of outside organisations hiring a church hall or camping on the Glebe field. It would have been good to have a little more space devoted to the particular problems and challenges of practical church management in the smaller parish.

Despite this I have commended this book with enthusiasm to churchwardens in the Archdeaconry of Northumberland and hope that many parishes throughout the Church of England will buy it and use it. Names, addresses and telephone numbers (with which the book abounds) will I fear be rapidly out of date, but the bulk of the information and wisdom contained within its pages will have a very considerable shelf-life.

Peter Elliott, Archdeacon of Northumberland

MONUMENTS OF ENDLESSE LABOURS; English Canonists and their Work 1300–1900 by JH BAKER, London and Rio Grande, the Hambledon Press with the Ecclesiastical Law Society, 1998, xx + 188 pp. (£25) ISBN 1-85285-167-8. [Copies are obtainable by members of the Ecclesiastical Law Society from the Treasurer at £15].

Throughout these last ten years Professor Baker has been gently introducing such as myself, who am not completely au fait with the history of the Church of England, to the 'Famous English Canonists'. This book brings together that series, with minor revisions and amendments, and also takes the opportunity to provide illustrations and indices. We are grateful. It is one thing to read articles some months apart, and quite another to see them brought together and to be able easily to cross-refer. The joint publishers, The Hambledon Press with the Ecclesiastical Law Society, are to be congratulated.

There is a gorgeous Freudian slip in the blurb on the front flap—it speaks of cannon law. Certainly those whose careers are sketched were big guns in the ecclesiastical law of England. There is an introductory chapter on how the tradition of English canon law began, and then, beginning with William Paull (comparatively unknown until recently), the careers and labours of fourteen men are outlined and discussed. Some were relatively familiar, and Lushington in particular was known to