

From the pen of Revd Canon Jim Canning

The Vicar of Coleshill, Nick Parker has been doing a lot of Funerals. He found that several families lacked confidence in God around the time of the death of loved ones, particularly in present circumstances. So he wrote a special prayer to be used at Funerals with these families. I pointed out that I had also encountered that sort of problem and had written a Hymn about it. He said that he would be interested to see it. I would have sent the words to you as my contribution to the Sunday email circulation to the people of Corley and Fillongley but as I have not yet found the words I have had to delay sending it. I will find them.* It goes to a tune called 'Eton Song'.

I had a very satisfactory relationship with Ray Carnell, the Organist at St. Paul's Church. He knew I could produce words, so he would produce tunes. Normally the tunes preceded the words.

On the occasion that produced these words I had been reprimanded by the then Archdeacon of Warwick for failing to give full attention to the matters in hand at a Meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Committee. The Diocesan Pastoral Committee was a rather wonderful institution, a democratically elected Diocesan Committee. Well, something like that. Certain people were ex-officio, Bishops, Archdeacons, and Diocesan Secretary but each Deanery was allowed to elect a Member. As I was interested in this matter our Deanery elected me for 20 years.

It was rather wonderful because there was the potential for the elected members to outvote the Officials. It was also rather useful because whenever it was proposed to amalgamate Parishes into ever larger joint benefices, local people often knew about local churchmanship traditions and historic rivalries which mitigated against proposed Groupings.

There was also the added complication that, in those days, Dioceses had to deploy an agreed number of full-time Clergy and not exceed their quota. This was used as an excuse for combining more and more Country Parishes. However, it was also obvious that certain Country Parishes spoke with a louder voice than others. This made things very interesting after the Faith in the City Report (1984).

Coventry Diocese had been criticised in this Report for having less Clergy in the Inner City Parishes than all the other 43 Dioceses apart from Bradford. This information was not welcomed at the time, and I had been prevented from raising the matter in the Diocesan Synod. Around the same time a vacancy arose in a wealthy parish near Stratford. Should this Parish be linked to Stratford so that another Full Time Clergyman could be deployed in the City of Coventry? To my amazement, we won the vote.

The Sequel was very interesting. The Diocesan Secretary and the Legal People examined the Pastoral Measure carefully and decided that the Bishop had the right to override the Decision of the Pastoral Committee. He did. And this particular Parish remains a separate Parish and has never yet been amalgamated with anywhere else.

The Pastoral Committee remained in existence for some years after this but was eventually abolished in the time of Bishop Colin. I was not a Member at that time, but it was replaced by an appointed body which consists entirely of the Members of the Bishop's Council wearing different hats. I was asked, at the time, to be an appointed Member, but I refused. I said that I would always be perfectly happy to be an elected member, but would never agree to be an appointed member. I did question, at the time, whether the New Body was legal under the Pastoral Measure. A decision was made that the new system was not illegal. Several Dioceses still have a Pastoral Committee, though none of them seem to have stood against the current practice of amalgamating more and more Parishes into one Benefice. There are better models available. The current system is bad for the Parish Clergy, bad for Mission, bad for the local Communities and disastrous for the local Churches. I once took my Parents to a Country Church in Herefordshire to a Service at 11:00am during August. The Officiant was doing her third Service that day and had to do two more. Someone else was doing the other five Parishes. How do you raise enthusiasm for the joys of the Gospel in that kind of situation?

I think we need to find the words of that Hymn. I will send them when I find them.

Good Wishes,

Jim Canning.

*Dear Jim & Other Friends,

I have not quite spent all day looking, and I have found various other things.

Here is the Hymn written after a Pastoral Committee Meeting at Offchurch Retreat House (Now Sold).

LORD PROTECT US.

Tune: Eton Song.

1. Lord protect us, in you mercy,
From the clouds which hide your light.
Teach us how to know your goodness,
When you're hidden from our sight.
Lead us safely
Through the darkness to your Light.
2. Sometimes others on the journey,
Seem to lead your sheep astray,
Preaching from the human gospel,
Words which serve the easy way.
Lead us safely
through the darkness to your Day.
3. Turn our eyes to see the suffering
Of the Homeless, Sick and Poor,
Help us raise our expectation
That such darkness be no more.
Lead us till we
Breach the darkness of your poor.
4. Help us see your power in others
Who glimpse light beyond despair.
Help us bring to your Communion
Those who share your Love and Care.
Lead us safely
In the darkness by your Care.
5. Show us visions of your glory,
So that we can live with joy,
Skipping o'er the daily burdens
That might all our hopes destroy.
Lift us boldly
To the realms of endless Joy.