

THE OFFICE OF CHANCELLOR IN A CATHEDRAL CHURCH

After fourteen and a half years wearing this title in Truro Cathedral, I am becoming used to the rather hesitant question, 'Er – do tell me, what exactly does a Chancellor do?' The implied suggestion is quite clear, that he does not do very much. Others ask whether he deals with matters legal; and indeed I quite often get enquiries from people who think the Chancellor of the Cathedral is the Chancellor of the diocese (who is in fact a barrister, probably a Q.C., and whose duties are purely legal, carried out by remote control).

The Chancellor of the Cathedral, however, is quite different. He is necessarily a canon residentiary, which means that he is a member of 'The Chapter' (sometimes as at Salisbury called 'The Close Chapter') as distinguished from 'The General Chapter' or 'The Greater Chapter'.

The Chapter consists of a Dean (or Provost) and usually three canons residentiary. These may be appointed to 'Dignities' such as Precentor, Chancellor, Treasurer, Missioner or Librarian. Any of these may be given to honorary or non-residentiary canons (forming the General Chapter – probably between twenty and thirty in all), except the dignity of Chancellor which must be held by a canon residentiary.

The statutes of Truro Cathedral are fairly characteristic of cathedrals in general, and in them the duties of Chancellor are laid down as follows:

1. (1) The Chancellor shall be the Secretary of the General Chapter and of the Chapter. He shall be the keeper of the Chapter Acts and shall be entrusted with the keeping, on behalf of the Chapter, of the Common Seal. His exercise of these duties shall be subject to the ultimate authority of the Dean.
(2) The Chancellor, with the consent of the Dean and Chapter, shall at the request of the Bishop examine, or arrange for the examination of, candidates for Holy Orders, and shall under the direction of the Bishop supervise the promotion of religious teaching and theological study in the diocese.
2. During the absence of the Dean or a vacancy in the office of Dean, the Chancellor shall, as Secretary, receive Royal Letters Missive and Archiepiscopal and Episcopal Mandates and lay them forthwith before the Chapter.

What this actually amounts to is that the Chancellor is not a clerk to the Chapter in the sense of sending out letters drafted by the Dean or someone else. He does himself draft the correspondence arising out of the deliberations of 'The Chapter' and 'The General Chapter': the latter consists of the Dean and canons residentiary, and a number of Honorary Canons (twenty in this diocese) who are parish priests in the diocese. As the General Chapter has a good many benefices in its gift, this alone involves a great deal of correspondence – and neither Dean nor Chancellor has any secretarial assistance. The Chancellor also writes the minutes of 'The Chapter' (once a week), of 'The General Chapter', of the General Chapter Patronage Committee (the committee which chooses priests for the parishes), and of any other odd meeting which is called.

In his capacity as Diocesan Director of Ordinands, he interviews prospective candidates for training, reports on them to the Bishop who himself interviews those sent on to him and decides whether to sponsor them for a selection conference arranged by the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry. He then looks after them during training and helps them to choose suitable theological colleges. This diocese, however, has now re-started the old *Scholae Cancellarii*, which was at one time a regular theological college. As we have now decided, it is in its present form an ordination course for the 'Auxiliary Ministry': i.e. for men who will continue their secular work, and take their pastoral insight into their schools, offices, medical work or banks, or into their factories and garages. Meanwhile they will give help with Sunday worship and be ready as counsellors not only to the laity, but also to the full time parish priests. All this work with ordinands takes up a great deal of the Chancellor's time and attention. (There are fifty-three on my list at present.)

The most general duty of a Chancellor of a cathedral is the promotion of 'sacred learning'. In the two dioceses in which I have been concerned, Salisbury and Truro, this is a Chancellor's primary duty. In Truro Cathedral statutes this appears as the supervision of 'the promotion of religious teaching and theological study'. For twelve years, for instance, I was both Diocesan Director of Ordinands, and Director of Post-ordination Training, until at the re-founding of the *Scholae Cancellarii* the burden became too heavy, and the particular care of study among the recently ordained was handed over to someone else. But the general promotion of study, the encouragement of lecturers as well as the giving of lectures oneself, and the interest in higher education in schools remain. There are now three of us who give extra-mural lectures under Exeter University. Clergy are encouraged to attend scholarly conferences at Oxford and elsewhere, and are subsidized to enable

them to do so. I myself act as chaplain to a school with a fine academic record, and give teaching at sixth form level regularly; and I am available to visit and speak to VI-formers at other schools when invited. In common with the other tutors on the staff of the Scholae Cancellarii the Chancellor takes part in 'in service' study groups for the clergy and in lay training in theology.

Finally, the Chancellor as canon residentiary is 'in course' at the Cathedral for four months in the year. This means that he is responsible for arranging the regular week-day services, and is himself on duty for the many events of the strangest kind which take place in cathedrals – concerts, all-night vigils, rallies and so on.

I said 'Finally', but this should not be the whole story, for a Chancellor cannot be the supervisor and promoter of sacred learning unless he does a good deal of sacred learning himself. He need not be a scholar in the professional sense, but he should have scholarly tastes, and scholarly qualifications. He is expected to be the sort of person who contributes articles to theological periodicals, and has probably published one or two books. He may, indeed, if he can find time from his various activities, still do some writing; but undoubtedly he must keep up his reading so as to be a reliable guide to the clergy of the diocese, who tend to refer theological problems to him.

He will nowadays have real difficulty in being what at one time all canons residentiary were supposed to be: namely men who had leisure (in the Greek sense of 'scholia'). I remember one cleric saying to me that he could never think of a canon residentiary without thinking of 'the crunch of gravel under his carriage wheels'. Those days are long past; but it is probably true that of all the varieties of canons residentiary, the Chancellor has still the best chance of keeping up his scholarship, although it has to be a very much diffused scholarship. He has to know a little of most branches of theology, and if possible of related subjects outside the theological boundary.

I write from inside the job, and my description may not fit all Chancellors of cathedrals. It is a full life but a pleasant one, dealing all the time with intellectual interests, but with those interests as they concern people. It is not like a university lectureship, nor is it subject to the 'odium theologicum' – or indeed the 'odium academicum'. A Chancellor has no part in the university rat-race. He has much more time for reading and writing than a Dean. He is less occupied with the material well-being of the Cathedral than the Canon Treasurer. He is not continually immersed in psalms, songs, canticles and anthems like the Precentor. He is a member of a body of equals – the Chapter – for a Dean is only the 'primus inter pares', not a sort of outsize vicar with curates. It

can be – and has been in my experience – a harmonious relationship with the Cathedral at its centre; but for the Chancellor there is less likely to be friction between him and his fellow residentiaries, since he is basically the Bishop's man, working directly under him in his work with men for the ministry.

Perhaps one more point might be made. For the Chancellor there is a minimum of committee work. He is probably chairman of a Higher Education Committee: he is undoubtedly secretary of the Ordination Candidates Council (or Committee): he serves on the Board of Education, and on the Religious Education Advisory Council for the county: he will be on the committee of the local theological library; but he will not be burdened with the sort of programme endured by Archdeacons and even Bishops. On the whole a Cathedral Chancellor's lot is a happy one – with very few dull moments. I have no wish for a change of employment until I retire, because I can see a short-term end to work for, as well as the long-term end that all ministers of religion believe in. The preparing of men for the ministry, and the maintaining of an intellectual standard among both clergy and laity, young and old, is a short-term end which anyone can appreciate. After years as a parish priest seeing results mostly with the eye of faith, it is an uncovenanted mercy to finish one's life in a job which clearly justifies itself if properly done.

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