

BOOK REVIEW

HIGH & MITRED
PRIME MINISTERS AS BISHOP-MAKERS 1837-1977

By BERNARD PALMER
SPCK (1992) x + 358pp (paperback £20)
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A review by James Patrick, Barrister

It must strike the outsider as extraordinary that the selection of Bishops in the Church of England is, ultimately, at the whim of the Supreme Governor's Chief Minister, who, especially in recent years, is a career politician, and whose qualifications for office need (and often have) not included membership of the Anglican Church. This very readable book by a former editor of the *Church Times* seeks to draw together such material as is available to review the appointment of – in the main – Diocesan Bishops by Prime Ministers from Lord Melbourne until the establishment in 1977 of the Crown Appointments Commission during the premiership of Lord Callaghan. This is a huge task, and one which is accomplished well, with each Prime Minister being reviewed in turn, regardless of the number of times he held office.

It is a sad result of the 30 year rule that there is less material available for recent Prime Ministers and they are considered inevitably in less depth than their predecessors. The period 1963 to 1977 is dealt with in only 12 pages, slightly less than for the premiership of Lord John Russell between 1846 and 1852. That said, the writer succeeds in extracting sufficient to keep the reader interested to the end.

Whilst concentrating on the role of the Prime Minister in episcopal appointments, the sub-plot inevitably highlights the role of the Sovereign and the Archbishops. Queen Victoria, as might be expected, was often forthright in her views concerning the suitability of candidates. That Randall Davidson was appointed Dean of Windsor owes much to the regard in which he was held by one at Windsor Castle. Gladstone was to capitulate also over the appointment of Ernest Wilberforce to the newly created see at Newcastle. Asquith was to fare little better when Edward VII expressed his desire to see Pollock appointed to Norwich in 1909. However, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York were on the whole less successful in securing their desired appointments to particular dioceses. Cosmo Lang, who, we are reminded, was translated to the archdiocese of York from the suffragan see of Stepney, failed to persuade Chamberlain to appoint Talbot to Rochester. Further, Geoffrey Fisher (having announced his resignation as Archbishop of Canterbury) was not even consulted by Harold Macmillan as to who would replace his successor Ramsey at York.

This book again reminds the reader that there is nothing new in history. In 1847, Lord John Russell wished to appoint R. D. Hampden to the diocese of Hereford. The Bishop of Exeter, Phillpotts, described him as a 'setter forth of erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word'; no less than Newman remarked that a pamphlet of Hampden's made a 'shipwreck of the Christian faith'; and over half the Bishops on the English Bench signed a letter to the Prime Minister expressing 'the apprehension and alarm which have been excited in the minds of the clergy' by the rumour of Hampden's nomination. Nevertheless,

Hampden was consecrated Bishop in 1848. On his death, after 20 years as a diocesan Bishop we are told that his obituary in the *Church Times* read that he 'did only one thing after his promotion . . . he remembered the Apostolic saying that the man who fails to provide for his own household is worse than an infidel, and consequently he bestowed the best living in his diocese on a gentleman unknown save as his son'.

Palmer makes no claim to produce a textbook. He has, however, given us a splendidly digestible trip through the appointment of bishops during one of the most interesting periods of our Church's history. The reader is left gratified that generally so much trouble was taken to ensure the appointment of the best candidate. It was said of Asquith that no branch of the premiership interested him more than episcopal appointments. The author leaves his subject with a tantalising taste of the Thatcher years. No doubt that Prime Minister's appointments will interest the historian in years to come.

Lo Castro, Gaetano: Les Prélatures Personelles Aperçus Juridiques
Editions Bruylant, 1993, BEF 790, (paperback)
ISBN 2-8038-0027-6

A review by Hughie Jones

To review for an English journal the French translation of an Italian original, should argue for the importance of the work reviewed. It cannot in truth be asserted that this book will have a wide appeal to Anglican ELJ readers, though its subject was, of course, made more familiar by the early moves of former bishop Graham Leonard towards Rome.

Some eleven canons of the 1983 Revised Roman Catholic Code refer to the concept of personal prelature, while a short essay by Thomas H. Green in the *Coriden*, Green, Heinschel text and commentary (pp. 240-242) surveys the field.

It was Vatican II which opened the possibility of a structure for non-territorial groupings, primarily of clergy, but with room for laity, responsible to a prelate for their organisation and administration, always in obedience to the Holy See and in consultation with affected bishops. The device was intended to express the ability of Rome to add new structures to its hierarchical organisation for the better serving of peculiar needs.

Professor Lo Castro, a distinguished Italian jurist and canonist, brings to this study both his twenty-five years of expertise and a typically Continental approach. An introductory chapter on methodology is followed by one on norms and conciliar directives, while the remaining chapters attempt a theoretical reconstruction, freed from earlier criticisms and a final survey of residual problems. The roles – sometimes conflicting – of clergy and laity in accepting new institutions are freely and frankly discussed; for example, the difficulty of accepting that a *coetus fidelium* can constitute a prelature.

A good read for polyglots wishing to increase their familiarity with the thought forms and procedural intricacies attaching to new institutions within the Church of Rome.