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The Decade of Evangelism in a Multi-Cultural Society

JOHN ROOT

The good news of the Decade is that England, and English Christianity, is more multicultural than ever. The bad news is that the vitality offered by such riches is not well represented in the life of our church. Uncertain about evangelism to and converts from other faith traditions, hampered by our social and cultural links with the past, the Church of England is failing to address its call to be a viable church for all people in this land. Nevertheless, John Root believes that, with courage, energy and imagination, the Church could still fulfil its national role to welcome peoples of all nations into faith in Christ.

There is considerable ambiguity about whether Britain is or is not a Christian society. Not only are different responses found within otherwise broadly similar theological positions; even the same person can adopt different standpoints when faced with different issues.

However, the naming of 'A Decade of Evangelism' in a society that once regarded itself as uniformly Christian, implies a clear, specific conviction: England's standing as a Christian country has been so far eroded that the country needs to be challenged again to commitment to Christ. Part of the hostility that the Decade has aroused in some quarters is, therefore, due to unease at the assumption that England needs evangelising. In this context, the fact that Britain has become visibly multi-cultural in the past half-century is particularly significant. It may be hard for an English person to say they resent being evangelised; it is much more acceptable to say they resent adherents of other world faiths being evangelised.

Thus the multi-cultural (or more specifically, multi-religious) nature of British society has taken on a significance out of proportion to the numbers of people involved. It is an Achilles heel, which can make the whole project seem crass, insensitive and inappropriate.

In this article, I want to make some preliminary observations about the nature of Britain as a multi-cultural society, and then look at some of the characteristics of the Church of England as they relate to evangelising that society.

Preliminary Observations

Firstly, as has already been implied, the size of cultural minorities with overseas roots is frequently exaggerated, as the most recent survey of the sociology of religion in Britain has pointed out.[1] For example, whilst the 1991

1. 'The presence of pluralism in Britain should not be exaggerated'. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Blackwell, Oxford 1994, p 25

Census suggests a South Asian population in Britain of 1.6 million (the chief, though certainly not the only source of adherents of other major faiths), estimates of the size of religious minorities often far exceed this base, as for example David Edwards' estimate of 3 million other faith adherents in the *Futures of Christianity*. Furthermore the piety and faithfulness of those of other faith backgrounds is often unrealistically assumed. Professor Alan Gilbert's claim that 'By 1987 perhaps a third of the Britons who practised their faith were Muslims, not Christians' is an extraordinary, though not uncommon, example of over-blown estimates of the extent of other faith adherence.[2] In reality not only are the absolute numbers of people from other faith backgrounds in Britain still relatively small, we also have little measurement of how devout those groups are. My own impression is that the impact of hedonistic and secularised British culture has been very powerful.

A second preliminary point is the growing diversity of ethnic groups in Britain, especially as asylum has become a major cause of immigration. In the 1960s most multi-racial parishes typically included significant numbers of people either from the Caribbean, or specific areas of South Asia, plus possibly transient West African students. Today the picture is considerably more diverse, with groups from different parts of Africa (including French or Portuguese speaking), the Middle East, and other parts of South Asia. When I arrived in my present parish in 1979 the main ethnic groups were Gujerati, and fewer but more long-standing Afro-Caribbeans. Today there are probably approaching 1,000 Sri Lankan Tamils in the area; apparently 10% of the local school is Somali; and Africans, who were almost non-existent in the area ten years ago, are now a sizeable minority in our church.

A final preliminary point, and perhaps the most important, is that using the phrase 'multi-cultural society' to describe developments of the past half century, deflects us from recognising that Britain has never been a culturally homogeneous society. In particular the Church of England's historic association with established power has been a considerable encumbrance to its witness to those who have not shared the culture of the establishment. The challenge set before the Church of England in *Faith in the City* has been in part a challenge to 'cross-cultural' witness amongst the white urban poor that is more substantial (and in the long run possibly more intractable) than the challenge to witness to those with cultural and religious roots overseas.

Characteristics of the Church of England

A parish-based church

The parochial system has always formed the basic structure of the Church of England's ministry. The consequence is that each church has (or ought to have) its agenda set by the community in which it is placed. In many ways

2 *Secularisation and the Future, in A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, Sheridan Gilley and V. J. Shells (eds), Blackwell, Oxford 1994, p 521. Even though at the start of the same article he had warned 'Empirical evidence about religion is always slippery'.

in a multi-cultural society, this makes it an idea whose time has come. It ensures that people and communities from every ethnic minority are the responsibility of some clergyman. Something like the parochial system is pointed to from a number of directions at present. Thus the burgeoning ambitions of independent and particularly charismatic churches have meant a gradual shift of focus from gathering eclectic churches to a concern to plant local churches relating to each area, as evidenced by the DAWN 2000 initiative, or the church planting of Icthus or Kensington Temple. From quite another direction, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of place and locality both by biblical theologians, and by other writers, such as the historian Simon Scharma .

The Church of England's vision of a church in every community (and preferably much smaller communities than those faced by large urban parishes) is a fine one. It is unlikely that *Faith in the City* would have been produced by a non-parochial church. It is the Church of England's commitment and persistence to minister in every part of the country, and to refuse to accept 'no-go' areas, that gives the report integrity.

However it also needs to be recognised that in culturally fragmented parishes the parochial system is designed to tantalise. Whilst churches that work seriously at being multi-cultural communities can hold together English-speaking Anglicans from different backgrounds, when it comes to reaching out beyond those who will come to us easily, much more time and energy are required, so that it is difficult to relate to more than one or two other groups. Our church has regular services in Tamil and occasional services in Urdu; but only a very little contact with Gujeratis, the largest ethnic group in the area. And how do we begin to share faith in Christ with Somali Moslems? Or how do we minister to the Portuguese- (but not English) speaking African woman who called at our house looking for work?

The result is that despite the commitment to minister to every person in the country through its parochial system, large numbers of people from cultural minorities are not within realistic reach of the Church of England. This has important theological consequences. For many Anglicans the conversion of people from other faith backgrounds looks well nigh impossible: the church has so little meaningful contact with them. Since most people's theology (not entirely without justification) is shaped by their experience, widespread Anglican pew theology is that we shouldn't expect people of non-Christian backgrounds to become Christians. The theology of the New Testament (which is inescapably clear that people of every cultural and religious background are to be called to faith in Jesus) is suppressed by the experience of parish churches.

There are several possible solutions. One is that given its diocesan and deanery structures, the Church of England could co-operate at these levels to co-ordinate ministry to different cultural minorities, for example so that different churches might focus on different ethnic groups despite parish boundaries. However it is at this point that Anglican comprehensiveness becomes a serious evangelistic problem. Lack of common purpose (most

obviously in this context as regards evangelising those of other faiths) makes co-operation slow and scarce.

A second possibility is through 'super-churches', which are able to have congregations for various ethnic groups, worshipping in different languages. There are several American examples; the most obvious British one is the 5,000 member Kensington Temple, which has 'satellite' congregations based not only on locality but also on ethnic or linguistic groups. (Thus it has services our Portuguese-speaking neighbour would be able to attend). I know of no Church of England church that is presently able to minister like this.

A third, and most likely, solution is for like-minded churches of different denominations in a locality to co-operate, often with a jointly-sponsored worker. Interserve's 'Ministry Among Asians in Britain' often facilitates such clusters, as in Derby, Moss Side or South London. Such co-operation opens the way for some sort of 'comity' arrangement in ministering to different ethnic and linguistic groups.

The parish system, then, provides a basic pattern for evangelism given the cultural diversity of many parts of England, but one that needs supplementing to account for the considerable complexity that many parishes now face. On one level this is simply a question of human resources: calling, training and paying for people (ideally themselves from a mixture of ethnic backgrounds) who can minister amongst the very varied cultural and religious mosaics of our large cities.

More radically, there is a need to supplement the simple, single thrust of an exclusively parochial strategy. People identify themselves in different ways. For example in London some people will buy a locality-based paper, such as the 'Wembley Observer'. But others will buy ethnically based papers such as 'The Voice','Asian Times' or a plethora of Asian language papers. Yet others will buy subculturally-based papers; 'Time Out', for example, appeals to a young, broadly 'progressive' sub-culture. We need to consider whether churches should follow broadly similar patterns of identification. Some churches will be locality based, but others run along the networks provided by ethnicity or sub-culture. Building on people's network of relationships is not the same as targeting specific groups, as in the Homogeneous Unit Principle, but rather encouraging witness and evangelism to happen along natural patterns; though there is still the danger of churches conforming to rather than transcending human divisions.

A close identification with English society

The Church of England once claimed to be the church of all English people. The closeness of the relationship between church and society (which the parochial system of course fosters) is a major feature of the Church of England. It creates bonds of identification, sympathy and understanding which can be of mutual benefit. It can not unreasonably be portrayed as an expression of incarnational and sacramental theology, and may well explain why Anglicanism (for good and ill) has a persistent bias towards those theological themes.

Thus the radical rejection of any culture sits uneasily with Anglican experience, self-understanding and theology. The tendency is always to a sympathetic acceptance of a society and its people as they are, rather than virulent denunciation.

Of course, rapid social change, bringing fragmentation and division, raises acute choices for such a commitment. The Church of England constantly struggles with the tension of its 'one Nation' commitment, alongside its establishment instincts. In the greater fragmentation brought about by the arrival of new cultural and religious minorities, the church has tended to want to retain its culturally affirming orientation, and take a positive approach to the other faith communities in its midst. Whilst its concern for a theology that takes scripture seriously gives it a memory of proclamation, and where need be, confrontation, its experience as very much the church of one specific culture inclines it to acceptance and respect for other cultures. (Thus 'confrontation' may seem an ugly and hard word to many Anglicans, so easily do we forget how thoroughly confrontation with both Judaism and Greek paganism is written into the Acts of the Apostles.)

Such mellowness has advantages. The Church of England has avoided a posture of aggressive evangelism towards other faith communities, and was quick to disarm fears expressed by Jewish and Muslim leaders at the start of the Decade that this was to be their fate. Relationships of trust within the one society are still intact. The policy that the Decade was to seek a general shift in the church's orientation concerning evangelism , rather than to promote specific evangelistic enterprises was a sound one.

Whilst this may seem an insipid approach to some independent evangelicals, it is surely wise. The Church of England's national standing may reasonably require of it some restraint in relating to minorities of other cultures. Anglicans who are all too conscious of our diminished place in national affairs need to recognise that to outsiders we do look still to be extremely powerful and influential, especially to religious groups whose own background assumes close identification of religion and society. (When a local Muslim leader greeted me in the street with the enquiry 'How's John?', it transpired he wasn't asking after my health, but that of a newly-elected Liberal councillor. He took it for granted we were in league together.)

Furthermore the Church of England's closeness to society, and particularly the social coverage that the parochial system facilitates, has helped it hear people from ethnic and religious minorities, and to be somewhat more aware of their experience than other institutions often are. The Church of England does have generally a chastened awareness of the racism in our society, and this has held it back from thoughtless and unduly confrontational evangelism amongst ethnic minorities. All evangelism involves confrontation to a degree, but there is a need for special alertness when the evangelism is from the socially powerful to the weak, which is careful not to add to people's sense of vulnerability and injustice.

Being a church which is strongly linked to the host culture, can make us therefore careful not to threaten or damage the cultures of others. But such

sensitivity has its pitfalls. We can collude with the secularised outlook which sees religion as merely a subset of culture. Such neutering of religious faith is attractive to a secular society in that it makes inter-religious controversy difficult (for it can only be seen as crass cultural imperialism), and clears the ground for secular and political disputes to be seen as all-important. Thus at a Brent Council meeting where Conservative and Labour councillors had squabbled disgracefully all evening, the only accord came when there were all-party murmurs of approval for an inter-faith mayoral service. Unlike politics, religion was not worth disagreeing over!

A national church in particular is under pressure to paper over the cracks of genuine religious disagreement in the name of national unity. So it has a major need to find ways to avoid offensive and aggressive confrontations without surrendering the foundational commitment of the Christian church to declare the gospel to all peoples. This can be done. In my experience some people who have become Christians from other faith backgrounds can do so with considerable subtlety and skill; both because of their instinctive understanding and their lack of encumbering guilt. Such gifts are precious at the moment, for the uncertainty about whether the Decade of Evangelism should mean evangelism of people of other faiths needs to be answered by the job being done sensitively and well.

An example of reticence about the Decade's aim was shown by the Archbishop of Canterbury when speaking to an Inter Faith meeting at Lambeth Palace in June 1991: 'The task facing the churches is to bring vitality to Christian faith, to fan the embers into a living worship and service of God'. Portraying the Decade as only an internal exercise within Christendom (and the Archbishop's address never spoke of it as more than that) is either to mislead other faith leaders or to be unfaithful to our evangelistic mandate. Indeed the Lambeth bishops originally stated 'We acknowledge afresh our responsibility to share the Gospel with people of other faiths and none, always remembering the need for sensitive listening to and dialogue with them'.[3]

In this respect the Archbishop's refusal to be patron of The Church's Ministry among the Jews must rank as the Decade's most spectacular own goal. The implication could only be that Jewish people were now officially outside the church's evangelistic concern, and it has been widely taken as such both by Jews and Christians.[4] An inevitable consequence of such withdrawal of evangelistic intention, tacit or explicit, is that it immediately makes an anomaly of Christian converts from such faiths. Thus an immediate response to the Archbishop's action came from a leading Jewish Anglican, Dr

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3 *Progress in Partnership*, p 9.

4 'There is a growing sense among many Christians that it is particularly inappropriate for a Christian to seek to convert a Jew away from his ancestral faith. This view was endorsed by the decision of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Carey, in 1992 to withdraw his primatial patronage of The Church's Ministry among the Jews.' Professor Paul Badham, *Religious Pluralism in Modern Britain; in A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, op. cit. p 496.

Martin Goldsmith of All Nations Christian College, who asked whether Jewish Christians were therefore an embarrassment to the Church of England. Indeed, it is hard to see how their birth into the new creation can be seen as anything other than illegitimate, unwanted, and the result of improper evangelistic promiscuity.[5]

The Church of England cannot hope to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare on this issue. Either it pleases both the ethos of a secular society, and leaders of other faith communities, by renouncing evangelism and abandoning Christians from other faith backgrounds; or it holds firm to the vision of calling people of 'every nation, tribe, people and language' to cry out 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'. (Revelation 7:9,10). As regards this marginalising of converts, Professor Lamin Sanneh, a Christian of Muslim background, has written 'Western writers have tended to polarise the issue between a Christianity that is opposed to culture and a Christianity that is culturally determined... Converts have *ipso facto* capitulated to western imperialism, and... their sins have been visited on their children who are condemned to an ambiguous identity, being born, as it were, with a foreign foot in their native mouth. Converts may for that reason be considered cultural orphans and traitors at the same time'.[6]

Anglicanism rightly wants to score a few points amongst people of liberal outlook by pointing out that the majority of Anglicans world-wide are now non-white. But it can't duck the corollary that those Anglicans have been converted within only a few generations from other faith backgrounds, which liberal opinion may be less impressed with. (Nor, I hope, will it be assumed that the Africans don't count; as though the religion of an African village was in some way less worthy of preservation than the religion of an Indian or Pakistani village).[7] An established church in a racist society must be prepared, then, for some muting of its evangelistic thrust, but not to the extent of remaining silent on the topic, or, worse still, renouncing it. By so doing it simply falls victim to another sort of racism and treats converts from other faith and ethnic communities as though they don't count, and their experience is a mistake. More than that it reneges on the gospel committed to the world church in every sort of context, in order to buy some popularity in our own specific context. To amputate the evangelistic mandate by removing any group (first the Jews, then other world faiths) from its scope is to cause a potentially lethal haemorrhage to the gospel of faith in Christ.

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5 Whilst the context is quite different, it is sobering to remember that the first act of betrayal by the German church under Hitler was to abandon Jewish converts, and to accept society's demand that religious distinctions be re-aligned with ethnic ones. See Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb*, Blackwell, Oxford 1976.

6 In *Encountering the West*, Marshall Pickering, London 1993, p 16.

7 Whilst I find Robert E. Hood, *Must God remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1990 an unsatisfactory account of Christian theology, he complains legitimately that 'Africa south of the Sahara and its traditional religions have been largely ignored as participants in inter-religious dialogue' p 121.

An Episcopal Church

'Congregational' and 'sect' tend to be dirty words for Anglicans. Much as it lauds the virtue of its comprehensiveness, at the same time the Church of England strives to retain a single identity (which has, of course, been sorely tested by the ordination of women). The tension between comprehensiveness and centralisation leads to different outcomes, depending on the nature of the issue. Thus there is considerable diversity about what ministers believe; far less diversity about the sort of people who are leaders. If a distinct Anglican theology is increasingly hard to identify, a distinct Anglican style is somewhat more recognisable. This means that broadly it is as a social entity that the lines around the Church of England are most closely drawn, and exclusion most likely. A 'shire and spire' ethos is still remarkably powerful in the Church of England, and its hold subtly limits the church's ability to establish itself in culturally different communities.

This is a long-standing problem that has undermined the church's strength in working-class communities. It continues with ethnic minorities, where, for example, styles of leadership can be very different from the Anglican norm. So leaders who are mightily effective in black pentecostal churches simply wouldn't be at home, or function effectively in Anglican churches. This is not a case of deliberate exclusion; simply that the hegemony of one culture makes it hard for other cultures to find space.

A similar dilemma is found with styles of worship. Anglican liturgy is not irredeemably alien to most non-white cultures, but it doesn't always sit easily with them. The need for personal and emotional expressiveness, spontaneity and a sense of occasion mean that pentecostal churches often show greater congruence with non-white expectations.

Allowing greater diversity in worship or leadership selection and style is difficult if the Church of England is not to pull further apart, but such a risk is necessary if the Church of England is to make substantial impact on the cultural minorities in England today. Moving from uniformity to cultural diversity in these matters requires considerable skill and experience. It can only happen as the Church of England listens to and values the experience of non-white members. Only then will it become a tree in which all sorts of birds can nest.

Rational theology

Such a description of Anglicanism is not meant to be pejorative! Thinking seriously and logically about faith is vital, and the Church of England should be proud of its tradition. Whilst the 'Signs and Wonders' emphasis of the 1980s saw post-Enlightenment rationalism as a major hindrance preventing the western church experiencing the sort of miraculous healings that were seen amongst non-westerners, I do not have the impression that attempts to surrender indigenous rationalism by English Christians have led to sudden explosions of unequivocal supernatural power.

Amongst other things, it is rationality that helps us make sense of cultural difference, interpret it, and allow for it. It is lack of analysis that can obscure cultural distinctions, and press all into one common mould. Thus the fact that black pentecostal churches find it difficult to evangelise out of their own cultural milieu, and into that of other cultural and religious groups is in large part because the whole of church life is seen as God-given, with fewer conceptual tools for identifying what may be simply cultural. Having said that, the most successful ethnically-diverse churches are also Pentecostal, with Kensington Temple as the flagship, but by no means the only example. Nonetheless a key question for the world-wide spread of fundamentalist pentecostalism is the extent to which it can indigenise itself into vastly different cultures, or whether it will always have the taste of America about it; only making headway in the slipstream of Coca-Cola, amongst local groups that are attracted by the prospect of buying into western culture.[8]

The problem with a rational approach to theology is how it relates to other theologies. It tends to be implicitly imperialistic, confidently expecting to eventually swallow, or at least marginalise, other theologies which lay less stress on human reason, more stress on personal experience of God's power. Such confidence has been increasingly undermined by growing uncertainty that the writ of western liberal thought runs without limit — a presumption questioned by Alasdair McIntyre in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*. Evangelicals have tended to welcome the rise of post-modern suspicion of western rationality as curbing the latter's imperious pretensions, though such scepticism is a two-edged sword. Whilst it relativises western liberalism as also sociologically given, it correspondingly threatens the standing of any norm or orthodoxy in theology.

Notwithstanding, it makes the disagreements over the role of the supernatural in present-day Christian experience a more equal contest. Westerners, with Anglicans in the vanguard, have tended to take it as given that belief in miracles, healings, exorcisms, revelatory dreams and the like belong to a pre-rational phase of church life which will eventually lapse with the slow advance of more rational theology. Certainly there is evidence of that happening, but also evidence of it not happening, and western confidence that theirs was the only true account is also eroding.

The controversy over Morris Cerullo's healing campaigns in London illustrate the conflict well. It is not just a dispute between logical, objective rationality and simplistic, gullible, over-blown fundamentalism. It is also a dispute between white logical, objective rationality and largely black simplistic, gullible, over-blown fundamentalism. Some relief from an ethnic emphasis to the conflict can be had by characterising it as social instead — Cerullo's appeal is then to those communities with the poorest health and health resources. But that does not explain the difference entirely — it is

8 The jury has been out a long time. Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, SCM Press, London 1972 was undecided; so is David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, University of Columbia Press, 1990.

increasingly clear that theologically sophisticated or materially prosperous black Christians still tend to operate within a more overtly supernaturalist mental framework than do white Christians.

Serious and open dialogue between the different emphases is important, especially if the Church of England is not to be further discredited in the eyes of black people. Thus the sort of research done by Dr Peter May into the nature of Morris Cerullo's healings is a valuable counter to the immodesty of his claims. It is interesting that the posters for Cerullo's 1995 visit focus on fuzzy-edged 'miracles', such as restoring marriages, or becoming pregnant, rather than the earlier emphasis on hard-edged miracles of the blind seeing and the lame walking. But it doesn't quite dispose of the issue. Why do people still come back year after year if nothing happens? There is, it seems to me, remarkable imbalance between the experience of white English people, and non-whites in the connected areas of healings, exorcisms, dreams and so on, which doesn't yield to simple explanations — either of black gullibility on the one hand, or crippling white scepticism on the other. (Dreams provide a fairly non-controversial example. I don't think I have met a white person who would claim to have been given a dream of specific revelatory importance; I have met several black people who can make impressive claims, including being delivered from dangerous situations, or being brought to faith in Christ.)

Certainly the Decade of Evangelism has seen church growth amongst ethnic groups who are open to a strong supernatural emphasis, and with churches (largely charismatic) that share that emphasis. That is no reason for the Church of England to lose its head; but it is strong reason to reassess our theological traditions and see how far they are limited by a culturally determined, and excluding, rationalism.

However suspicion of supernaturalism in theology presses in closer to the heart of theology than healing or dreams, for it threatens the whole idea of revelation. The result is that Anglican theology often sees itself as descriptive rather than prescriptive: an account of what Christians believe, rather than an attempt to reiterate what God has said. Descriptive theology underlies reports of the Doctrine Commission; it tends to be a leading theme of the retiring Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood. It saves the church from ill-considered and wild claims. But the theological liberalism of such an approach creates pastoral and evangelistic conservatism. It provides one way for those from a Christian milieu explaining, and perhaps retaining, their faith. However it has little persuasive power for those without a church background, most of all those whose roots are in another faith. It is hardly surprising that the world-wide spread of Anglicanism has not come out of this tradition. Descriptive theology is essentially domestic; thus the temptation in some quarters to make the Decade of Evangelism a solely domestic exercise also.

At the start of the Decade, Archbishop Robert Runcie told General Synod (November 1990) 'our tradition is to cast evangelism in the mould of pastoral care'. That is an excellent description of what actually happens in Church of England churches, and of where her strength lies. The church provides loose

edges, time for people to grow, and pastoral care at key moments in people's lives. But it also speaks silently of the Church of England's weakness, and the very great difficulty it has ministering to those who are outside our immediate constituency, (though certainly that constituency is now multi-ethnic, with those with roots in overseas Anglicanism providing the heart of many congregations.)

But for those either disconnected from the church socially (which means large numbers of working class whites, as well as younger blacks), or from cultures which have related to other faiths than Christianity, such an evangelistic tradition is inadequate. Anglican sensibilities tend to wince at more direct evangelism. In some instances for good reason, yet there is also a tendency too for mild Anglicans to focus on the aberrations and horror stories of direct evangelism, and so fail to learn from or work with attempts at serious, responsible direct evangelism. Yet such a need is urgent. Without learning how to evangelise those who are at a distance from significant contact with the Christian church, we limit ourselves to evangelising a constituency which is shrinking, and which, when it is not over 45, is very largely white and middle class.

Finally, rationalism leads to over-seriousness about theory and insufficient attention to what happens in practice. The Church of England has something of a history of attraction to good ideas which don't work. Thus non-stipendiary ministry or team ministries were both instituted as missionary initiatives; they have survived largely as financial expedients. So too in a multi-cultural society, inter-faith dialogue and inter-faith worship are canvassed as being the most appropriate responses to religious diversity; and evangelism across religious groups regarded with suspicion. Awareness of how effective evangelism takes place, commitment to intercession, readiness for spiritual and personal conflict, the development of positive apologetics towards other faiths — all vital parts of the world-wide spread of the gospel — are still comparatively little attended to in the Church of England.

A world-wide Communion

Anglicanism is an international faith. It is by now well known that there are more Anglicans in Nigeria than Britain. The Church of England therefore has world-wide links, and that ought to be a considerable resource for its ministry to communities who have come to Britain from other parts of the world.

In my experience it is less of an advantage than one might expect. One reason is undoubtedly the racism and lack of welcome that many experienced in English churches on their arrival. Stories abound, and affected far more people than the individuals immediately concerned. Even given that we never know how to respond to new situations until they cease to be new, the Church of England's early response to Commonwealth, Anglican migration was disgracefully bad.

Another reason is that Anglicans who migrated to Britain often came from untypical or conservative backgrounds. World-wide Anglicanism in the

heyday of migration in the 1950s or early 60s often still bore strong marks of the colonial mentality. This included a strong dependency on the minister and a distaste for responsibility or experiment. The 8am Communion rather than the Parish Communion or Family Service was the more natural home. The renewal, growth in confidence, and consequent indigenisation of the church, which has happened in Nigeria for example over the past few decades, had not yet taken place.

Also, Anglican migrants often identified with Englishness to the detriment of identification with their own community. Thus they were not material from which to build confident outreach to one's fellow migrants. (Unlike pentecostal migrants whose affinity with their fellows — even whilst rebuking their profanity — provided the setting for evangelistic growth.)

A further reason is that life in Britain changes people. Visiting ministers from the Caribbean do not relate easily to young blacks whose parents came here 40 years ago. The secularity, speed, cold and hardness of life in urban Britain have wrought their changes. (On the other hand because most Africans in Britain have a shorter history here, their affinity with preachers from 'home' is greater. So too with other more recently arrived groups, such as Sri Lankan Tamils).

All these factors mean that it is over-sanguine to rely on the ministry of leaders from burgeoning Anglican churches overseas as a means of reaching non-white people in this country. That is not to rule out such ministry. But it needs to work with and prime the ministry of people who are thoroughly rooted in present day Britain.

Nonetheless there is mileage for deploying world-wide Anglicanism's resources in evangelising in Britain today. Partly it is simply a way of breaking down misconceptions that Christianity is a white man's religion. There is still a surprising lack of awareness of the strength and vitality of world-wide Christianity. I have already referred to the pressure to subsume religion under culture: such pressure is undermined when the amazing variety of cultural contexts in which Christianity expresses itself is brought home to people.

The presence of Christians from other parts of the world is apologetically significant, both in relation to 'cultured despisers' of English background as well as to people of other faiths. This makes all the more depressing the readiness of so many Anglicans quickly to disparage what has been achieved in world mission, and dismiss it as merely an offshoot of colonialism. The dissonance between Britain's overseas commercial and political expansion and the missionary spread of the Christian faith, whilst certainly not complete nor as rigorous as it should have been, is nonetheless substantial, and the differences identified by several writers.[9] Innuendoes discrediting the missionary movement may help establish a person's credentials as a right-

9 As in the responsible surveys by Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions*, Lutterworth, London 1966, down to Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, Apollos, Leicester 1990.

thinking liberal; they show serious ignorance of subtle historical realities. For all its many flaws, the missionary movement of the last two hundred years has succeeded, albeit often unintendedly, in enabling Christianity to escape from western cultural dominance and establish itself authentically in a wide diversity of cultures.[10]

Lying behind the disavowal of both the missionary movement, and (as has been noted above) the converts it has produced, is a disabling sense of guilt about Christianity's impact on world history. Thus E. David Cook (referring particularly to the authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate*) speaks of 'a negative judgement about the impact of Christianity on culture and civilisation'. The materials for such negative judgement are readily at hand (witness the slave trade, economic exploitation, the holocaust, nuclear weaponry, environmental destruction); but Cook also asks 'Do we need to see the genuine benefits of science and technology stemming from Christianity and the positive gains brought by Christianity to the world and society?'[11] In relating to people of other faiths, who often have a strong sense of the social consequences of religion, the tendency of Christians to quickly vacate the field, and abandon any positive claims for the achievement of their faith in world history is most unsatisfactory, especially for proponents of an incarnational faith. We may wish to do no more than paraphrase Winston Churchill on democracy, and say that Christianity's impact on world history has been unsatisfactory, but the impact of other faiths and ideologies has been even more unsatisfactory.[12] Witness in a multi-cultural society requires more intellectual fibre and integrity from Christians than fashionable and easy writing-off of our past. We need both to confidently reassert the blessings the gospel has brought to humankind, not least in the era of world missions, whilst repenting and renouncing the many ways we have failed the gospel.

Conclusion

The good news of the Decade of Evangelism is that English Christianity, like world Christianity, will have become considerably more multi-cultural and ethnically diverse by the year 2000. Whether amongst Sri Lankan Tamils, francophone Africans, or the ubiquitous Koreans there is evangelistic vitality and growth. People from other faith backgrounds, notably Sikh, and to a

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10 A theme that Lamin Sanneh in particular has emphasised. See *Encountering the West*, op cit.

11 In "Truth, Mystery and Justice: Hick and the Myth of Christian Uniqueness", in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*, Tyndale House, Cambridge 1991, p 190.

12 Cook's rightful questions are explored not only by Lamin Sanneh, op cit, but also by Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1992. In a section on Competition in religion, Pinnock writes: 'The Christian message with its unique emphasis on the holiness and love of God, the value of the individual, and the importance of social justice, has already caused other religions to put aside numerous gross practices such as head-hunting, cannibalism, infanticide, temple prostitution, polygamy, widow burning, caste, purdah, karma fatalism, and holy war' p 125.

lesser extent Hindu, are becoming Christians. The numbers are not big, but the trickle is significant.

The bad news is that this vitality is not well reflected within the Church of England. Either theological diffidence, or sociological constraints, threaten the Church of England's traditional aspiration to be a credible church for everyone in the country.

This article has sought to trace the ways in which the traditional shape of the Church of England can both be a strength and a hindrance as it seeks to evangelise in a society and amongst people so very different from that which has formed it. With energy, serious thinking and a readiness to experiment, I believe that in a multi-cultural society the Church of England can continue to be a church able to welcome into faith in Christ people of every ethnic group. In so doing it also has the opportunity to take great strides towards the eschatological vision of one people praising God from every language, culture and ethnic group.

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