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THE GOSPEL AND THE MAN IN THE STREET

REFEREE'S INTRODUCTION

Our two contributors approach the subject from two very different angles. Mr. Ellison, ever supple, comes in on the sociological path. Mr. Galyer, and evangelist of many years experience in the Open Air Mission, advances by way of systematic dogmatics.

Let us question their assumptions to the roots. Has the expression 'man in the street' a class connotation, or does it stand for what is sometimes called the 'average man'; a non-existent abstraction from men in the concrete? Is there a form and content of the Gospel appropriate to this denuded cipher, this television interviewee who faithfully reflects the loaded questions put to him, or ought we to deny this and preach rather a chameleon evangel as protean as man himself in all his unrepeatable uniqueness? Is our real problem not that we stratify men socially, but that we attempt to stereotype them and push them all through an identical conversion experience?

Mr. Galyer, who cannot be thought to be talking without experience, makes similar basic assumptions. Ought we to think of the message as an unalterable thing, which perennially makes the same appeal to what is essential in man: provided only that we vary the methods by which it is sauced? Or ought we to regard kerygmatic continuity as a mere skeleton for a fresh enfleshment in every age, and human nature as a non-existent entity outside its concrete embodiment in men, who are now actually different from what they were in say A.D.50?

Then again, is it the inevitable corollary of these assumptions that we should address and reduce our gospel to the lowest common denominator in man? Is Mr. Ellison rather too optimistic in supposing that he will hold together in one local church the somatic and the cerebral? Would not a sounder sociological approach recognise that social and cultural differences are real and presumably indissoluble until the New Jerusalem?

Does the technical schoolboy's difficulty, cited by Mr. Galyer, justify the Bishop of Woolwich's recent plea in his 'Honest to God' for the scrapping of the old theological language?

Let us ask our correspondents to produce letters to force Mr. Ellison and Mr. Galyer to defend their every statement. Some correspondents may care to go further, and in an exploratory and tentative fashion reach out beyond them to ask, for example, whether we need the equivalent in the Brethren of the Worker Priest experiment, or whether we are afraid lest some might defect, or it offend the Establishment.

Alan Willingale.