

The Church Press We Want

BY GEORGE GOYDER

IN June 1953 a resolution was passed in the Church Assembly recommending Church people to read a Church newspaper. Some of us felt unable to accept the resolution and voted against it. We did this, not because we were opposed to the reading of Church newspapers, but as a protest against the poor quality of the Church of England press, and in the hope that criticism might lead to the production of a newspaper more worthy of the National Church.

Nearly three million people have signed the electoral roll of the Church of England. At least two million more are either occasional churchgoers, or being under eighteen are not yet eligible to sign the roll. Yet the combined sale of the three Church of England newspapers is under one hundred thousand copies a week. Although outnumbered by four to one, Methodists buy more copies of the *Methodist Recorder* than the combined sale of the three Church of England journals. A comparison with Roman Catholic newspapers is even less favourable. Four hundred and fifty thousand are read weekly by approximately three million Roman Catholics, or seven times as many per member as in our own Church.

In part, this failure of members of the Church of England to read the Church press is no doubt due to its national character. Minorities are always prone to be closer-knit and more self-conscious than majorities. There is also the fact that a certain amount of writing by Churchmen finds its way into the secular press. Bishops occasionally contribute articles to national newspapers, and local church news is sometimes reported, particularly if there is an element of scandal. Utterances by the Archbishops on subjects like divorce and re-marriage, relations of Church and State, racial problems and related subjects are usually well reported in both national and provincial newspapers. In recent years the secular press has given increased attention to debates in the Church Assembly, as coming closest to expressing the mind of the Church on social problems like gambling and horror comics. But when all is said and done, the place of the Church of England in the eyes of the general reading public is very small, and it is confined to snippets of information unrelated to any general theme.

While it is desirable and important that information about the Church should appear in the national newspapers, it is impossible for a person reading them to form any consistent, or whole, view of the work and relevance of the Church. This is a reason why the Church seems irrelevant to so many people. To present the work and life of the Church as a whole is the function of a Church press. The unpleasant fact has to be faced that the job of presenting the Church to the Nation is simply not being done at present. An analysis of content, based on column space, of four recent consecutive issues of the *Church Times* and *Church of England Newspaper* (with the Australian weekly newspaper *The Anglican* and the U.S.A. weekly periodical *Christian*

Century thrown in for comparison) gives the following results :

Percentage of column area

	<i>Church Times</i>	<i>C. of E. Newsp.</i>	<i>Christian Century (U.S.A.)</i>	<i>The Anglican (Australia)</i>
	%	%	%	%
CHURCH NEWS	15	14	25	40
Editorial comment	9	13	14	7
Editorial Features	9	23	24	11
Sermon	2	2	0	4
Correspondence	5	5	4	7
Book Reviews	6	7	13	3
Competition, photos etc.	8	5	0	3
Film Review	1	1	0	3
Advertising	45	30	20	22
	100	100	100	100

What strikes one about the above figures is the high proportion of editorial matter to news. In this respect the two English Church papers compare unfavourably with their overseas counterparts. A comparison with secular journalism would show an even greater contrast. The *Christian Century*, although a periodical, devotes a much higher percentage of its space to news than either English Church newspaper. The amount of space devoted to editorial features in the *Church of England Newspaper* (13%) is nearly as high as in the *Christian Century*. One is led to the conclusion that neither English journal is in reality a newspaper as the term is ordinarily understood. This points to the fact that what may be wanted in England is a good weekly Church periodical, like the *Christian Century*. The latter, incidentally, is inter-denominational.

Possibly the most significant fact about the Church of England is its comprehensiveness. Neither of our weekly Church newspapers is comprehensive in the same sense. Each is rather the organ of a Church party than of the Church as a whole. The fact that we do not possess a true Church newspaper or periodical in the Church of England is doubtless the main reason why so few people read the Church of England press.

Ordinary Christian men and women to-day want reliable information about the thinking and activity of the Church. They want to know what are its claims upon their hearts and minds, and to see its activity manifested in parish, university, factory, government and the world. The ordinary Christian is not interested in Church politics. Intuitively he knows truth has more than one side and expresses this in ordinary life by the term "fair play". The equivalent in Church affairs is comprehensiveness. The Church of England is at once catholic and protestant, and it merely confuses the issue to substitute "evangelical" for "protestant". To be a member of the Church of England is both to respect the historic continuity of the Catholic Church and to recognize in Holy Scripture its primary source of authority. It is

both to revere the richness of our historic faith and worship, and to recall constantly to mind the need for "the simplicity that is in Christ". To hold these truths together, and to strive constantly to bring them into right relation, is to be loyal to the Church of England. Not one of our present Church newspapers succeeds in doing this. With occasional honourable exceptions, each caters for, and thereby enhances, party spirit instead of comprehensiveness. Although within its limits the *Church of England Newspaper* has at times made valiant efforts to be catholic, the obverse cannot unfortunately be said of the *Church Times*.

It has been stated that a paper taking a balanced view of Church affairs would be dull and could not hold the reader's interest. The truth of this statement depends on how one understands the meaning of balance. To balance on a five-barred gate may be dull, but balancing on the edge of a mountain is dangerous and thrilling, as every mountain climber knows. It is a question of height and outlook. To most people outside ecclesiastical circles the outlook of the party Church newspaper is like standing on a five-barred gate, and the range of vision about as great. In these papers the editorial outlook on issues facing the Church may be foreseen from week to week; and the correspondence columns are as inevitable as a marriage guidance counsellor's column in a woman's weekly. On the other hand, a truly balanced editorial outlook would hold its readers in suspense from week to week. The mere intention to strive for balance would promote that moral authority which comes with the genuine search for wholeness. A balanced editorial outlook, scriptural, and catholic in the true sense, would also make for sensitivity to criticism, for balance requires the centre of gravity in an argument to be the product not only of the present but also of the past and future. Here vision enters the scale, and prophecy becomes intuitive insight into the events and problems of to-morrow, based on knowledge of the present and experience of the past. The Church desperately needs such a vision and such prophecy to-day in its journals and in its men.

If the Church of England is to present the challenge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord to this generation, it must become a good deal more sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the nation. As a sign of the breakdown of the Church as a national influence and the yawning gulf between Church and people there is growing up a clericalized mind in the Church. It can be seen at work in Convocation and Church Assembly and is not confined to the clergy. It is a mind remote from the thinking of ordinary people in those areas of the national life where the living witness of the Christian takes place; in local government, industry, the trade unions, the civil service and the nationalized industries. If the Church is to face the challenge of our time, it urgently needs to find the means of continuous communication between those with special training in theology and the experience and needs of ordinary Christians in their working lives. There is here, abundant work for a Church newspaper.

But there is a still more pressing reason why the Church must approach closer to the people. The Government's acceptance of, or at least acquiescence in, a moderate but steady rate of inflation as an

apparently ineluctable consequence of full employment, means that an ever larger financial burden must fall on the laity as time passes. For the Church the effect of inflation has thus far been cushioned by successful investment by the Church Commissioners. But the Church cannot always rely on successful investment. Sooner or later the challenge to support the Church will have to be taken to the laity as it has not yet been done. If it is to be done effectively we shall have to bring men and women into a more active partnership of mind and heart with the work of the Church, or the Church will die. Many men and women to-day earnestly wish to serve and are willing to be known as Christians, but feel themselves cut off from and in no essential relation to the Church of their forefathers. A Church newspaper could help to re-establish the relationship.

A comprehensive Church newspaper would relate the teaching of the Church to the outstanding questions of the day. It would encourage contributions from competent laymen and from theologians who can write intelligibly on the great spiritual issues facing our generation. The main theme at Evanston, was "Christ the Hope of the World". At Evanston we saw this hope as the eschatological or final hope of what Christ has promised to do for His people and the world. Ordinary churchmen have hardly heard of the eschatology of the Bible and its interpretation by the Church. But they have heard of Jehovah's Witnesses and of the numerous other sects which preach the close Coming of the End, and they are puzzled by the silence of the Church on the subject. This is work for a popular but serious Church journal. It is being done superbly in America by *The Christian Century*, a weekly periodical which manages to combine news and special articles with breadth of outlook and in such a way as to make each illuminate the other, from week to week. Another task for a Church newspaper or weekly periodical is to make a steady appraisal of the secular institutions which exercise a commanding influence over men's minds to-day. They include the national press, the cinema, television and sound broadcasting. The church newspaper we want would also try to give its readers guidance on the moral problems facing the nation, such as gambling, the problems of coloured people and the refugees, the automatic factory, and the responsibility of employers and trade unions. It would look at events in Africa and Asia through the eyes of enlightened Christian men and women who can speak from personal knowledge and relate the events they report to a background of fact and place. It would try to be Christian while avoiding churchiness.

In its writing, a Church newspaper of the comprehensive kind needs to strike a balance between the popular and the academic. The editorial standard should be high but readable. The problem is that faced by newspapers like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Observer*. As to circulation, it should not be difficult for a well-edited Church newspaper or periodical to secure a sale of at least one hundred thousand within two years and double or treble this within five. Format could be similar to that of the *Times Educational Supplement* and like it, should be available at the main news-stands.

As to the editorship, if one were at liberty to chose the general editor from the past, the obvious candidate to this writer would be

Desiderius Erasmus. That is to say the general editor needs to be a scholar and a journalist, a writer of distinction and a wit, trained in theology and with a knowledge of the classics, above all a student of the Bible, with a reporter's touch of the cynic, and a Churchman's faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, a man of eirenic temperament and of ecumenical outlook, an observer of nature and of his fellow-men, prone to friendship, and equally at home at All Souls' College or in Wembley stadium. He must be a man filled with a sense of the Church's authority and continuity and convinced of the need to restate the faith radically and in contemporary terms. To choose an editor from the past is a pastime; to find his modern counterpart is a difficulty and a hazard. Success in this would go far to solving the problem of launching a truly Church newspaper or periodical.

The Church of the Gospels

BY THE REV. D. H. TONGUE, M.A.

AN unfortunate misunderstanding seems to hamper New Testament studies: it is assumed quite uncritically that Christ built only a very small church, comprising a mere handful of fishermen and women. There are repeated indications to the contrary in our documents; references to great multitudes of disciples, to 70 evangelists, to 500 "brethren—witnesses" of the Resurrection and so on; but these are quietly ignored, or at best ascribed to the author's love of exaggeration, so that not even professed conservatives really take them seriously. The purpose of this article is to register the conviction that Christ built during His earthly lifetime a church of considerable dimensions, and Himself organized and trained that church for its world mission. We shall trace in detail the growth of the Gospel Church, beginning with a brief background study, and later examining the Gospels.

We have all reasoned hitherto that the Jews were divided into Pharisees, Sadducees, and common people: the first two groups were hostile to Jesus; the third were amiable peasants who yelled "Hosanna" or "Crucify" according to the mood of the moment. Hence there was no large supply of human material available to Jesus for building a church, and He had to be content with leading twelve rather fractious disciples on a camping tour of the Holy Land, and training them as the embryo of a church which would take definite shape after Pentecost. Recent research work on our Jewish background to the N.T. has modified this naïve conception, by revealing the existence of several heterodox groups like the Zealots, the Essenes, the Minim, the Therapeutæ, the Covenanters of Damascus, the Samaritan heretical Gnostic groups, and the followers of John the Baptist. Research further reveals that not only did these groups share with the Nazarenes a common antipathy to the Pharisees and Sadducees, but that many of their teachings and practices bear striking