

Editorial

NO doubt the resignation of their orders by a number of evangelical clergymen of the Church of England in recent months, is a cause of gratification to the anonymous author of the preface to the latest edition of *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (published by the Oxford University Press) who, tediously treating the terms "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" as synonymous, warns his readers with some pomposity of "the 'fundamentalist' menace to the Church of England". For our part, we deeply regret the loss of these men to our church. They are godly men, diligent pastors with a dedicated concern for the souls of others, and as such they are men whom the church can ill afford to lose. But for reasons of conscience they have felt obliged to depart. Mislikers of their evangelical persuasions can hardly deny that they have acted honourably and indeed manfully. If it is hoped that others will follow them, we do not share this hope. We would, rather, urge in particular any who are worried with doubts concerning the doctrine and practice of infant baptism to study in depth the baptismal teaching as expounded by the Reformers and their successors in the English Church, and to remain in their parishes and work constructively for the removal of the scandal of the indiscriminate administration of this sacrament. Of course, we would not ask any man to disregard the dictates of his conscience: but, whatever action he takes, a man should be sure that he is yielding to inward persuasion before God, and not to influence from without.

These secessions are symptomatic of the considerable feeling of disquiet that exists over the trend of affairs in our church. But this feeling is by no means confined to evangelicals. It has come to expression, for instance, in the criticisms, emanating from many different quarters, of the Paul Report with its advocacy of the bureaucratization of Anglicanism and of the scheme proposed for bringing Methodists under the Anglican umbrella. It came to the surface dramatically in the bold resignation of so prominent a layman as Mr. George Goyder, both from his membership of the Standing Committee of the Church Assembly and also from the chairmanship of the Church Information Office. He is concerned because of the accumulating evidence that, despite fine words from its leaders, the church is being carried away from the goal of genuine synodical government. Thus in a statement made to the Church Assembly, of which he has been so assiduous a servant, Mr. Goyder deplored as wrong and foolish the passing of the resolution limiting thenceforward all speeches from the floor of the House to a maximum of ten minutes, because, *inter alia*, it would "make synodical government—or any government short of dictatorship—more difficult". He deplored, further, the astonishing manner in which this proposal had come before the Assembly without

any consultation with the Standing Committee, in complete disregard of the fact that that body is responsible for advising the Assembly on matters of policy.

Mr. Goyder mentioned another decision, taken at the same time, "after three minutes' introduction and with no debate", namely, that the Standing Committee should in future meet only four times a year and that in between times its work should be done by a sub-committee of nine, of whom five were to be *ex officio* members. This decision, he declared, "goes a long way towards handing the government of the Church Assembly over to officials. Far from increasing the participation of the laity, which is what synodical government is about, it reduces it. As a result the Standing Committee will be weakened as a policy-making body at the very moment when it needs to be reinforced. It is another example of this church of ours looking in one direction and acting in another".

"I could give other examples," said Mr. Goyder, after further amplification of his complaint. His restraint was indeed remarkable for it might well have been expected that he would cite the action, if anything even more disturbing than the things mentioned, which involved the publication and distribution of a tendentious document bearing the name of the Secretary of the Church Assembly and purporting to deny that there was any drift towards Romanism on the part of the Church of England—and this without prior consultation with, let alone the knowledge and approval of, either the Standing Committee of the Church Assembly or the Church Information Office! The Archbishop of Canterbury's assurance to the Assembly that this had been done with his prior knowledge and approval, did not improve the situation. The whole unfortunate incident smelt of bureaucratic levity and irresponsibility. It is little wonder that Mr. Goyder felt constrained to resign his positions on both the Standing Committee and the Church Information Office.

Another disturbing "revelation" has been made by Mr. G. E. Duffield, who is also a member of the House of Laity of the Church Assembly, in a letter to the *Church of England Newspaper* (published on 20 November last, after copy for the December *Churchman* had gone to press), concerning his experience at the British Faith and Order Conference held in Nottingham in September. We cannot do better than quote the letter *in extenso* :

Last week's C.E.N. contained references to criticism at Nottingham of the Service of Reconciliation [in the Anglican-Methodist Report] and to a clear preference for the Church of South India method. Both comments were somewhat stifled by the end. When I raised this in Church Assembly, the Bishop of Winchester, one of those directly involved, accused me of grave distortion. The matter is so important for the integrity of ecumenical discussion that I venture to explain more fully what happened.

The incident concerns the unification of ministry sub-section of which I was a member. We were, I think, fully representative as a group—a Scottish Episcopalian chairman, a Methodist secretary, the Church of Scotland chairman of the Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations, an Irish bishop, and so on. We knew the difficulty of our problem with no

clear consensus of Christian opinion on the unification method. We also knew the possible repercussions of our statements.

To our astonishment we came to a unanimous conclusion (only one member absent) that the Anglican-Methodist proposals were open to serious objection and that C.S.I. was preferable. The unanimity was achieved after one episcopalian confessed he had originally opposed C.S.I. but now thought it the right way forward. I have not imagined our unanimity, for I have the typescript in front of me and, unless we are to cast doubt on the integrity of the secretariat which produced it, it remains an accurate record.

Then came the fireworks. Next morning four extra people joined the group, identified publicly in Church Assembly by the Bishop of Winchester as himself, the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Harold Roberts, and Dr. Rupert Davies. It will be observed that three of them signed the Methodist Report and the fourth is a vigorous campaigner for it. According to the bishop, they came at the invitation of the chairman to clarify "matters of fact". This latter in itself is somewhat odd, as our group already contained some very experienced ecumenical statesmen who can read and study reports, and in any case most of us had been to preparatory conferences.

I have set out the text of our report before and after the visit of these gentlemen in my chapter in *Evangelicals and Unity*, where it will be seen that by the end all criticism of the Methodist Report has gone, and the clear preference for C.S.I. has been watered down greatly. Whether the four stuck to "matters of fact" will remain a matter of opinion. They told us, for example, that the Service of Reconciliation was not ambiguous, as we had said. Is that fact or opinion?

What is indisputable fact is that at the adoption meeting of the full section there was considerable discussion about pressure being brought to bear on the group, a motion to exclude the press (mercifully defeated), and a statement from the sub-section's secretary that there had been pressure. If, of course, the Bishop of Winchester regards this letter as gross distortion, he will doubtless say so and, as he did not in Church Assembly, give his evidence.

The disturbing feature in all this is that events seem to show that ecumenical discussion is only really free when the unwritten and unspoken caveat is entered "provided the latest scheme is not criticized too severely". What a pity the Bishop of Bristol's opening comments were not taken more seriously. He said the conference was "to take the lid off the problem of reunion, to dare to look inside, however much it shocks us, however much disagreement it provokes".

As Mr. Duffield remarks in the book *Evangelicals and Unity* (Marcham Manor Press, p. 88), "to ask a group to express its judgment on the various unification patterns, and then to emasculate its findings through outside pressure, makes one wonder just how seriously Bishop Tomkins' admirable comments were taken and just how far diplomacy weighs against truth and freedom of expression". There, for the moment, the matter rests. Mr. Duffield's charge remains unanswered.

The nameless Crockford preface-writer pontifically dismisses as "idle irresponsibility" the suggestion that the South India pattern is a better way forward if a recognizably national or regional church is to be restored in England. The fact that Anglican officialdom has refused to enter into a relationship of full communion with the Church of South India is a scandalous blot on the name of Anglicanism and

an affront to the ecumenical achievement of our fellow-Christians in South India. It must now be plain to all that the guilt of unprogressive obstructionism, not to mention idle irresponsibility, belongs elsewhere than to those who favour the full recognition of the Church of South India and the application of its pattern in England. And it is certainly idle irresponsibility to insinuate that it is only certain evangelicals in the Church of England who want to follow the lead given in South India. The indications are that a plebiscite of church members throughout the land would reveal a substantial majority in favour of this course as a preferable way forward.

The Crockford mouthpiece, however, regards evangelicals who have the courage of their convictions with a steady animosity. He smears their name with the offensive title of "fundamentalists", which, as everybody knows, is reserved for those on whom it is wished to heap the most scornful obloquy. The damaging slander is invented that they are only "prepared to tolerate their fellow churchmen until such time as they are sufficiently numerous to override them". Refusal to co-operate with churchmen of other schools of thought is precisely the reason, we are informed, "why men of this group should not be made diocesan bishops". The lie to this calumny has been given in the past decades by such saintly and definitely evangelical diocesans as J. C. Ryle (Liverpool), Handley Moule (Durham), E. A. Knox (Manchester), and J. R. S. Taylor (Sodor and Man), who, notwithstanding their theological convictions, were genuine fathers in God to "a very diverse family". But the voice of oracular prescience now warns that the door to preferment must be closed against men of like convictions.

A worse example of embittered intolerance it would be difficult to imagine. So much for the vaunted "comprehensiveness" of the Church of England, when conservative evangelicals are described as a "menace" and are therefore treated as intolerable. But it seems that all else is tolerable, from the depths of humanistic anti-supernaturalism to the heights of extreme sacerdotalism. It is significant that in the Crockford preface there is no overt reference to the appearance of the small book, *Honest to God*, which, coming from an episcopal pen, shook and shocked so many, both within and without the church's fold. Nor is there any mention of the dignitary who, in the presence and with the connivance of his diocesan bishop, and inside the cathedral itself, openly declared his inability to assent conscientiously to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and thereupon acted a lie by formally giving his assent and subscription to them. Incidents like this do great damage to the church and cause it to sink very low in the estimation of the ordinary man-in-the-street. Apparently, however, they are so tolerable that they do not deserve comment in Crockford's survey of ecclesiastical events and developments; while the evangelical who can assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles without embarrassment, who approves the doctrines of the Book of Common Prayer, who holds to the Bible as the Word of God, and who is intent on proclaiming the saving and sovereign grace of Almighty God in Christ Jesus to his fellow-men is an intolerable menace.

The convinced evangelical cannot condone the blatant denial of

the basic articles of the historic Christian faith or the repudiation of the ethical absolutes of the decalogue and the New Testament. He is too concerned for the integrity of the Christianity which he professes. But in this he does not stand alone : there are many fellow-churchmen who, though they do not carry the evangelical label, will stand with him and say a cordial Amen to all this. And the convinced evangelical holds out the right hand of fellowship to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as God and proclaim Him as the only Saviour of mankind, however much they may differ in ecclesiastical and liturgical outlook. The shrivelled bigotry displayed in the Crockford preface is not, fortunately, characteristic of the general attitude in the Church of England. It would be most regrettable if so ungracious an elucubration should cause some evangelicals to conclude that there is no longer a place for them in the church of their fathers.

This is a day when it is urgently necessary for all who hold to the cardinal verities of the faith of the New Testament, the great objective realities of our redemption in Christ, to which our credal and liturgical confessions bear witness, to stand together, no matter what ecclesiastical tags they may carry, and to testify unitedly to the power of the salvation they profess.

We know, indeed, to our grief, that there is much in us which is unworthy and open to criticism. But no true Christian, evangelical or otherwise, is waiting for the moment when he will be able to ride roughshod over those who do not see eye to eye with him in every point of doctrine and worship. For his own good and in the interests of Christian harmony, we suggest that henceforth the unnamed perpetrator of this uncharitable calumny should place himself under the penitential discipline of a vow of perpetual silence. P.E.H.
