

Editorial

The Layman's Church?

IT is often interesting to speculate what future historians will make of our own generation. It is almost impossible for most of us to have a clear perspective about our own age, and it is hard to tell whether those who claim such insight will in due course be proved right or wrong. But it would be a fair speculation that historians of the twenty-first century looking back on the present period of the life of the church may find it to be the time at which the laity came into their own. It is true that some churches have for generations known a far better partnership between clergy and laity than has the Church of England. The latter, even at its best, has too often thought of 'using the laity', as if it were the clergy who had the ultimate responsibility in a parish, some of which could be delegated to lay people. Yet to revert to first principles would be to suggest that it is the people of God in any given place upon whom by their Christian calling to discipleship is laid the responsibility for the work of the Gospel in their area. In order to discharge this responsibility more fully they may invite someone to be set aside full-time for a ministry among them. But he is a minister—of the church as well as of God and the Gospel—a servant for whom they have responsibility. He has come to help them in the first instance rather than their being there to help him. If he is called elsewhere they still have the responsibility of maintaining the church and preaching the Gospel, even though in due course they may find someone else to help and inspire them in their task.

If the ordinary churchgoer could think like that, how different the church would be! But such thinking would require something of a revolution, theological, psychological and organisational in the church. It looks as if there is only one way in which this might be brought about and that is through inflation. The staggering increases in diocesan and parochial quotas are due to a large extent to the increase in the cost of the ministry and the fact that inflation has eroded the value of the endowments of former generations. Churchpeople are now being asked to make a more realistic contribution to the cost of their clergy

(by no means the full amount however, as the Church Commissioners are not yet bankrupt!). It is widely assumed that this will be very difficult if not impossible to achieve. Therefore there is a planned cutback of parochial jobs and the recent Sheffield report on the deployment of the clergy has recommended that men be spread about dioceses according to need, which in broad terms means a movement from the South to the North. The recent conference of the staffs of theological colleges discussed the theme 'The Vanishing Clergyman?' and it is clear that the full coverage of the country with full-time parochial clergy is a thing of the past.

It is vitally important that the church tries to face up clearly to the issues of whether this is basically a good thing or not. Is this a judgment upon the church which God might reverse if we repent and learn to be faithful? Or is it God's means of restructuring the Church of England (and the other churches which are in a similar state) to fit it for its role today? In a Grove Booklet which is soon to appear entitled *Inflation, Development and Job Prospects of the Clergy*, Colin Buchanan follows up his *Job Prospects of the Anglican Clergy* published in 1972 with another trenchant analysis of the confusion of the present situation. As the Archbishop of Canterbury calls for more ordination candidates, and his call and that of others is heeded, so the number of jobs available for them in the parochial sphere declines. It is of crucial importance that a very thorough official examination of the various sets of figures being produced should be undertaken so that we can all see which way we ought to be pulling. Even so of course the financial problem will remain. But this could drive us to a major reunion scheme (though such a scheme must be theologically right not just economically prudent) and to a proper shifting of responsibility in the church from the clergy to the laity. There would be many consequences of this. Ordination would have to be used much more widely to give authority to members of local churches to minister in an unpaid part-time basis. The whole concept of lay celebration of the Eucharist would have to be seriously reopened (it is good that the recently published report of the Faith and Order Group of the Board for Mission and Unity entitled 'The Theology of Ordination' at least looks at this problem though it does not solve it). The whole attitude of the laity towards giving for the maintenance of the church and its ministry and for its mission would need to be transformed. If this is the way that God is working then perhaps there will be an advance of the Gospel such as will enable more men and women to be called to and in due course employed in a full-time ministry but on a different understanding of responsibility. At the moment talk of the layman's church needs severe qualification.

Ten Propositions

SINCE the failure of the Anglican-Methodist reunion scheme to gain the necessary support further work towards church reunion in England

has been going on more quietly behind the scenes. The Churches Unity Commission has now produced its second report which features ten propositions on which the member churches are asked to comment and to which, wherever possible, they are called to give their assent. It is clear that a good deal of progress has been made and the evident desire to reach a reunited church by a theologically acceptable route is much to be welcomed. It is good that the churches should be asked to enter into a covenant to seek visible unity and to accept each others members and ministers. It is particularly important that the free churches should hold fast to this last principle as many Anglicans have come to see that unity with non-Episcopalians may be attained through their being in communion with the bishop rather than through each individual minister having episcopal hands laid ambiguously upon him. (See the article by G. W. H. Lampe: 'The "Limuru Principle" and Church Unity', *The Churchman*, Vol. 88, No. 1, January-March 1974.) If the latter way is adopted there is bound to be widespread dissent and opposition. There is also some stress in the report on local action. While this is happening encouragingly in some places, frequently all the contacts with other denominations are limited to a very small range of joint activities which most church members do not attend. Perhaps it will in the end be only inflation, used by the Spirit of God, which can turn the ten propositions into the ten commandments.

The Churchman

WE enter 1976 a little behind schedule as the Editor adjusts himself to new responsibilities in Nottingham, but with plenty of good material for the year. The next issue should contain some important contributions about the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches and about the charismatic movement. The series on modern theologians and what they have to say to Anglicans (to which Robert England's article on Küng belongs) will continue.

With the recent demise of *Frontier* and the changing of *Theology* from being a monthly to a bi-monthly publication, we are again forcibly reminded of the economic problems of academic journals. The distribution of *The Churchman*, which has been undertaken from Bristol for the last four years, has now returned to a restructured Church Book Room Press at Dean Wace House. We are most grateful to Mr. Michael Cansdale and his organisation for the way they have sorted out a most complicated tangle and returned things in far better shape. There may still be the occasional problem over distribution and anyone affected should write to the sales department at Dean Wace House. We are planning to produce a new cover and a new promotional brochure. As an acceptable design has not yet been finalised the new cover will have to wait for next year. Any reader who feels inclined to submit a modern design, preferably containing some acceptable symbol, is invited to send it to me by March 31st.

R.E.N.