

Editorial

Crown Appointments

OF ALL THE aspects of establishment of the Church of England the right of the Prime Minister to advise the sovereign over the appointment of diocesan bishops and deans seems the least logical. It is of course a hangover from the Reformation settlement when the only alternative to the appointment by the pope was appointment by the crown. It had some genuine appearance of logic when England was not only a Christian but an Anglican country as far as religious observance went. Since the various acts of toleration of dissenters and more recent changes in the climate of opinion in society, the Church of England can no longer be taken to represent the whole nation at prayer. While an earlier generation of clergy felt the tremendous weight of personal responsibility for their apparent failure to get their flock to worship, the modern generation tends to accept the fact that they must start where they are, thankful for the faithful who are there, and build up from that point. Such a view of course makes for a fairly radical reappraisal of the role of the church in society, but it is both more realistic and healthier for the cause of the Gospel in the nation. It is not a necessary consequence of this attitude that a strict policy should be adopted for the use of the church's rites of passage. Nor is it a necessary conclusion that disestablishment should be sought. Many clergy know that it is possible to start from the 'folk religion' of many of their parishioners and lead on to the 'apostolic religion' which is true Christianity. There is therefore a good deal to be said for the retention of the establishment, and this is accepted by many people who are neither Anglicans nor clearly convinced Christians, though of course it is strongly resented by others. There are cogent reasons for keeping the Church of England established, reasons which are more concerned with service than with status.

What about crown appointments however? The Church of Scotland does not have bishops (at any rate of the traditional kind) and it is not

subject to crown appointments. But the Church of England is currently making a radical review of its parochial patronage system and it is inevitable that the greatest anomaly of all—its appointment of bishops—should be brought under scrutiny. Nobody doubts the thoroughness and care of the present system but in fact it still leaves the Prime Minister with the last word. In 1974 the General Synod passed a motion affirming the principle that the decisive voice in the appointment of diocesan bishops should be that of the church. The proposals announced by Mr. Callaghan on June 8th would involve the setting up of a small standing committee by the church who could draw up a short list of two names, which could be in order of preference but the Prime Minister would retain the right to recommend the second name or to ask the committee for a further name or names. This may be a gain for the church, but it is certainly not a great one as the Prime Minister, rather than the church, has the decisive voice. The constitutional arguments advanced by Mr. Callaghan were not very convincing. Bishops do not have to sit in the House of Lords and some way could have been found to avoid the constitutional difficulty caused by this, and it could also be arranged that in this case the Queen would take her advice from the Archbishop of Canterbury as a member of her Privy Council.

Non-Anglicans in England and non-English Anglicans will either smile or groan at the Church of England and the extraordinary anomalies of its position. In some ways the present system has thrown up some great men for the episcopate who might well have been overlooked under other systems and it does help to ensure that national as well as local needs are considered. It would be naive to suppose that an elective system would be much better. Yet it is to be regretted that the Standing Committee of the Synod has so quickly come out in support of such an apparently small change. The Synod as a whole will need to give very careful scrutiny to these proposals. They can hardly be said to fulfil the intention of the resolution of 1974.

Charismatic Literature

A GREAT deal of ephemeral literature has poured off the presses in the last few years in the wake of the charismatic movement. It is a pleasure to refer to two brief but important recent publications. In *The Charismatic Prayer Group* (Hodder, 1975, 159 pp., £0.60) John Gunstone provides a valuable and sensible handbook with practical suggestions. John Richards has already written on exorcism in *Deliver Us from Evil* and he now gives us *Exorcism, Deliverance and Healing* (Grove Books, 1976, 24 pp., £0.30). Unless you wish to dismiss the whole subject out of hand, this will prove to be a sane guide to what is involved.

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