

NEAC II.

The 2000-delegate National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Nottingham University has come and gone but the ripples which it created on the surface of the Church of England are likely to go on spreading for some time to come. The three preparatory volumes for the congress under the general title of the congress, *Obeying Christ in a Changing World* (Vol. 1 *The Lord Christ* ed. John Stott; Vol. 2 *The People of God* ed. Ian Cundy; Vol. 3 *The Changing World* ed. Bruce Kaye, all published by Collins, Fount Books, £0.65) provided in most cases sufficient intellectual and spiritual material to get the delegates going. But after all the process of responses by delegates and working out draft statements by study groups, it was clear that the congress members, who had a high proportion of lay people among them despite the low proportion among the speakers and committee members, were not going to be steamrollered. *The Nottingham Statement* (Falcon Books, 1977, 77 pp., £0.48) indicates the untidiness of the process, but it was thought preferable to issue this 'as a faithful expression of the mind of the Nottingham Congress' rather than aiming at a comprehensive and authoritative survey of Evangelical belief. The intention of the publication is 'as a stimulus to ourselves and others to continue the debate and as resource material for this'.

Much instant comment has already been made on the congress but it may take some time to see it properly in perspective. In one way it was not perhaps such a landmark as NEAC I, the Keele Congress of 1967. It was then that a substantial body of Evangelicals started saying out loud what previously a number had only been thinking privately. There was something of the element of surprise at discovering what the situation really was. At Nottingham the views which were expressed were well enough known, at least among those who in any way kept in touch with leading Evangelical thinkers, and there was much less self-consciousness about the proceedings. By and large it was a relaxed and happy congress, extremely well organised and providing an atmosphere which made most of the observers, who came from a wide range of different traditions, feel welcome, accepted and in many areas 'at home'. There are obvious dangers of triumphalism or casualness facing an Evangelical movement in the Church of England which has grown so much in so many different ways in recent years, but the general impression

Churchman

of the observers and the press seems to be that what was displayed at Nottingham will be for the good of the church as a whole in years to come.

Meanwhile the Anglo-Catholic movement, which has had such a dominating influence in so many aspects of the Church of England's official policies has come into some disarray. The present mood of anti-traditionalism and anti-institutionalism, which is in abroad in Western society as a whole, has hit the 'Catholic' approach very hard. A group of leaders in the Anglo-Catholic tradition have now organised a congress at Loughborough next spring. It is likely to be somewhat different in style and scope from NEAC and there will obviously be places where it takes quite different lines. Yet there have been enough signs recently that in many areas Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics can see themselves as allies and not opponents (as e.g. in the current Christology debate) to give rise to hopes that this will be truly complementary to the Nottingham Congress. Both groups are here to stay in the Church of England today and in any re-united church of the future and the more mutual understanding that there is between them the better it will be for the cause of Christ. Groups of church leaders of different denominations and different aditions have been talking to each other over a wide range of subjects recently. The Archbishop of Canterbury has just suggested that the Church of England and the Church of Scotland should set up a team for this. Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics have done so sporadically in the past. Perhaps it is time for a small group to be set up to do so again and indicate areas of agreement and of disagreement. It is vital that we should all be less concerned for our labels than for the truth.

Theological Colleges.

Perhaps few institutions in the Church of England have been so much reported on, threatened, reprieved, closed, amalgamated, revived, moved, praised or reviled as the theological colleges. They are creations of the nineteenth century and must not be regarded as being prescribed (or even described!) in Holy Writ. Yet when the facts are faced they perform an essential function in the training of the ordained ministry. In a modern increasingly secular state it is very hard to see what could be substituted for them if we are to have clergy properly trained in theological understanding as well as in ministerial skills. This is not to say that everyone who is to be ordained should necessarily attend a residential institution, nor that such institutions should remain exactly of the size and in the location that they are. The recent General Synod report *Theological Training: A Policy for the Future*, The Guildford Report (GS Misc. 57, CIO 10 pp., £0.20), proposes the regionalisation of ministerial and lay training in England. There is much

to be welcomed about this concept in general but some of the ways in which it is expressed are open to serious question. Despite ecumenical affirmations it is in effect largely an Anglican exercise. It cannot claim a genuine ecumenical character unless the other churches are consulted at the highest level nationally and regionally without being presented with an Anglican *fait accompli*. There are also suggestions that the distinctive character of the various colleges, especially in churchmanship, is an obstacle to proper planning of theological training. In today's climate, where there is an attitude of genuine friendship and sharing between the staffs of the different colleges, it still remains the fact that colleges need to stand for something definite in their ethos if they are to create enthusiasm for them amongst present and future staff and students. The genius of the Church of England has been to live with differences and to accept and often encourage the work of voluntary societies. This should not lightly be abandoned. Nor should the very real financial pressures on the synods lead to our having what could be an inferior form of training for our ministers purely on economic grounds. If financial pressures lead us to better forms of training which we would not otherwise have thought of, well and good. But it is important to be reasonably confident about that before drastic steps are taken. Expenditure on clergy training is still less than 1% of the total spending of the Church of England at all levels.

Those who wish to have a detailed historical perspective on these issues would do well to consult *A History of Training for the Ministry of the Church of England and Wales from 1875 to 1974* by the late F.W.B. Bullock (Home Words Ltd., 1976. 177 pp., £9.50/£8.50). The facts are largely chronicled with accuracy, though they could have been tabulated more clearly, but interpretation is minimal. A review of the period 1875-1974 by the editor, T. Elliott, helps to give a little more perspective. This will be a valuable source book for someone who may want to write a more interpretative history in the future, but even librarians of theological colleges, in these days of inflated book prices, may hesitate before paying almost five pence per page for a paperback book.

Churchman.

We apologise again for production problems in the April number and in particular for the omission of the vital question mark in the heading of Bishop Moorman's article 'One Fold or One Flock?' Other errors were fairly obvious to discerning readers.

The secretary of the EFAC (Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion) Literature Fund wishes to thank those who gave generously towards the cost of sending *Churchman* to the Third World.

R.E.N.