

Editorial

The Lambeth Conference

All the articles in this issue are given over to the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, which takes place every ten years and this year is to be held in July at the University of Kent in Canterbury. We have taken as our starting point the Lambeth Conference 1978 preparatory articles *Today's Church and Today's World* (Church Information Office: London 1977, 297pp, £3.50 ISBN 0 7151 4560 6) with a special focus on 'The Ministry of Bishops'. So much have we become obsessed with futurology that it is a surprise to read a book like this with the word 'Today' in the title rather than 'Tomorrow', though it is fair to say that a number of articles are trying to probe into the future. For it is vitally important that, in view of the size and expense of a Lambeth Conference, something should be done to stimulate the vision of our episcopal leadership—which so easily tends to emphasize the priestly at the expense of the prophetic role. The selection of contributors has seemed somewhat random. As Bishop John Howe says in the preface, 'The book consists of articles which may be found useful for preparation or discussion. A comprehensive survey has not been sought, nor was there any recommended point of view. The writers were asked for comparatively short articles that might be informative and stimulating, and if the author wished, provocative.' The end result is an unsatisfactory hotchpotch, with some of the abler writers constrained by lack of space which is taken up by other material of little insight. It is to be hoped that the review articles by John Taylor, David Gillett, John Poulton, Anthony Hanson and George Marchant will provide a more satisfactory overview of Sections II to VI of the book.

Meanwhile it is my task to refer here more briefly to Section I: 'A Look at the Way Things Are'. These articles remind us that Anglicanism is a worldwide expression of the Christian faith, for 'People, the Church and Bishops' are seen through African, Asian, Australian, English, North American, South American, South Pacific, Welsh and West Indian eyes. It can be appreciated at once how difficult it must be to do justice to the viewpoint of a whole continent, and the writers involved have issued the necessary disclaimers. Edward Fasholé-Luke from Sierra Leone in fact starts the collection off well and reminds us that 'despite the political independence of many African nations, the churches still operate on a dependence/domination axis and are still in many cases the agents of

western colonial mentality and cultural imperialism. Too many of the mission-founded churches are content with imported theologies, church structures, liturgies, spirituality and patterns of ministry. Perhaps the Anglican Church in Africa is most guilty of this.' He points out significantly that 'African independent states need theologies of liberation as much as, if not more than, the blacks in the occupied territories of Southern Africa.' A. C. Oommen from Vellore says that bishops often appear as an anachronism in a newly independent country. 'a continuation of an authoritarian government, often foreign, which the nationalistic movement has thrown out.' He points out the dangers of bureaucracy and institutionalism.

Most of the other articles seem to have some axe to grind about local cultural problems but Samuel Escobar, who is Associate General Secretary-at-Large of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, provides a stimulating piece from South America. 'We were used to the image of bishops—usually fat and old men—performing perfunctorily official duties at fixed dates of the year... Not so any more!' He shows the way in which bishops are really giving leadership to the church in the very difficult political conditions of South America: 'No one would have dreamed that university students, the intelligentsia and journalists would avidly wait to hear and read the latest pronouncement of a bishops' assembly. But that is what I have witnessed in Peru, Brazil and Argentina in the last couple of years.' He points out that 'several protestant bodies in Latin America are experiencing now a need for bishops.' He wants them to be evangelical: 'This I understand to be people with a sense of mission, a clear idea of what the evangel is and concern for the material and spiritual hunger of masses inside and outside the churches.'

It is good that this conference will be properly residential for the first time, and that for the first time nearly every province is autonomous with almost entirely indigenous bishops. The intention is to discern the will of God for the world as it is now, for the church and for the bishops. It is no easy matter for a conference of this kind to make coherent and significant pronouncements which will make people listen as they do in South America. We must pray for our bishops that they will not be swamped by secondary problems, like the ordination of women, but be touched and inspired by the Spirit to promote the work of the gospel in the world. Now that the prelacy has been stripped away, the ministry of bishops is much more effective and more widely appreciated than it used to be. May Lambeth 1978 significantly further that process.

Churchman

We have been suffering recently from an embarrassing surfeit of good articles submitted to us as well as those which we have commissioned. We hope that the October issue will now contain three articles on women's ordination, two of which were originally planned for this issue. Colin

Craston will be writing in favour, and Tom Howard and Gordon Wenham against. With the General Synod decision coming in November, members of the Church of England need to be clear in their thinking, though not to assume too arrogantly that the Anglican Communion does not ordain women if the Church of England does not!

We are due to reach our centenary in 1979 and it is hoped that the January issue will contain a number of important articles to celebrate that event. Issues have changed considerably since 1879 but we shall never understand the problems of the present and the future without a proper appreciation of the past.

ROBIN NIXON