

Editorial

Evangelism

Most of the mainline churches are committed to giving a particular emphasis to evangelism in the next decade. The Evangelical Alliance (EA) has announced its 'Decade of Evangelism'; in January, the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism had a service of dedication. The NIE brings together the British Council of Churches, the EA, the Church of England Evangelical Council, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the Roman Catholic Church. Such an amalgam of traditions committed to a common objective is in itself a remarkable event but the Board for Mission and Unity, in a response to the initial suggestion, made it clear that the existence of the NIE does not represent complete agreement on the nature and content of the gospel:

The universal agreement on the duty laid on all Christians to witness to and proclaim the gospel has not yet led to universal agreement on what that gospel is or how it should be presented. [*A National Initiative in Evangelism: The Church of England's Response to the British Council of Churches*, GS 347, London 1977, p 5]

Consequently a central aim, as far as the NIE is concerned, will be the discovery of 'convergence'. Donald English, the chairman of the Initiative Committee, in his address at the dedication service described convergence as being an 'advancing together in a discovery of what we have in common and acting accordingly.' He went on to stress that this did not 'require overall agreement on every point, but only in relation to those points which are mutually agreed.'

The NIE is thus launched on an ambitious and crucial task. One of the areas where convergence may be difficult is in reaching a decision as to whether evangelism should be entirely locally based, or whether a large-scale campaign with a well-known evangelist is also necessary. Evangelicals have frequently been enthusiastic for the latter approach and it may be right to continue to be so, but, as the Board for Mission and Unity remarked, it is part of the call to unity and mission to expose 'methods and concepts of evangelism' to 'dialogue and mutual evaluation' (ibid. p 7). It happens that Professor John Kent's recent study of nineteenth-century revivalism (*Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism*, Epworth: London 1978) is a timely 'exposure' of methods revered in many evangelical circles. If this sometimes brilliant book is decidedly unsympathetic to mass evangelism, it is always provocative and requires serious consideration by those who may want to reject the author's analysis at significant points. He shows how the critics of nineteenth-century mass

evangelism, who included evangelicals, argued that conviction, repentance and assurance could not be systematized and compressed in the way the evangelists typically required, and 'that to do so was to minimize the ethical and theological content of the event in order to highlight a petty drama of the will.' (p 365) He also demonstrates how Moody and Sankey shared the world-renouncing pre-millennialism common in the second half of the nineteenth century. They thus became, he argues, an important part of 'a flight from the problems of being religious in a sophisticated western society in the late nineteenth century.' (p 204)

As the NIE seeks convergence, it is to be expected that the evangelicals most involved will be aware of the weaknesses, as well as the strengths, of their traditions. It is fundamental that the methods evolved do justice to the gospel and thus communicate with men at the point of their deepest need.

Young writers

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in a thought-provoking address at the centenary meeting of *Churchman* in February, referred to the need to provide outlets for younger writers. It is a matter of fact that *Churchman* over the years has given just such an opportunity for new contributors to formulate and develop their thinking. It is a matter of gratification that the numbers of evangelical Anglicans engaged in post-graduate work in theological and related disciplines has greatly increased, and it is natural to expect that their work should be a factor in challenging, stimulating and directing the church at large and their theological tradition in particular. The appropriate specialist journals are the obvious outlets for the more technical and detailed presentation of their work, but a journal such as *Churchman* offers the opportunity of bringing the frontlines of such research to the studies of a much more general readership—mainly parish clergy and the more theologically-minded laity. This is important, not only because its readership has indicated, by its readiness to subscribe, its desire to wrestle with issues of current relevance, but also because it is as Christian theological scholars seek to keep their work in touch with the living church that they will serve it, particularly by hearing the questions it is posing. It is all too easy for the scholar to become remote and, for example, to distance the Bible from the church (cf. W. Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation*, Philadelphia 1973, p 24), to answer questions which only his scholarly peers are asking, and to fail to hear those questions to which 'ordinary Christians' are desperately seeking a solution.

If such contributors are more than welcome in the pages of this journal, it is perhaps necessary to say that when ideas have been worked out in the first instance in thesis form, some adaptation may be necessary. The aim here should not be so much to simplify

complex material and thus risk distortion, as to indicate objectives clearly and to explain, or avoid, technical terms which might not be readily understood by readers who can be assumed to have an intelligent working knowledge of theology and related disciplines. If we are anxious to encourage those who are engaged in specialist studies, we certainly do not want to exclude contributions from those involved in the parochial ministry. The thinking which is done in the context of a busy general ministry is not less important than that emanating from more cloistered atmospheres. If such a journal as ours acts as a bridge between academic thought and the parish, it must be a bridge which allows two-way traffic.

General Synod representation

The dominance of upper-middle class, middle-aged males on the General Synod comes as no surprise (George Moysers, 'Patterns of Representation in the Elections to the General Synod in 1975', *Crucible*, April-June 1979, p 78). It is natural both that lay representation should be strongest where the church is strongest, and that men who by training are most equipped to take advantage of the sort of forum that General Synod provides, should be elected to do so. The scale of the dominance is, however, more than a little disturbing. Whereas 25 per cent of lay candidates for election said that they came from working-class parishes, 77 per cent had upper-middle class occupations and only three of those standing could be described as working-class. Moysers does not specify whether any of the working-class candidates were elected but, in any event, it is clear that General Synod representation must be altogether unrepresentative of the Church's working-class membership. Realization of the problem is not of course new, but the survey is a timely reminder of its continued presence. The church is not bound to be an exact democracy in which every social, racial, political and theological grouping has a mathematically proportioned vote. It ignores, however, at its peril the fact that it is a multi-faceted body in which Jew and Gentile have become one in Christ but have not consequently ceased to be influenced by their environments and cultures and have, therefore, to work out a relationship which takes seriously the existence of resulting differences. This can scarcely be done in the absence of a significant cultural, racial or theological group from the chambers of power.

More surprising, though less disturbing, is the comparative smallness of rural representation in the synod. Only 23 per cent of the candidates came from 'mainly rural' parishes and Moysers concludes that, on this evidence, there is little left of the traditional rural base of the church (p 75). In that it more accurately reflects the urban dominance within our nation, this development can be welcomed,

though, as has been argued, there must be less satisfaction in the realization that it is the urbanity of suburbia rather than that of the city centre or the council estate.

PETER WILLIAMS

Attention Please

William Barclay Memorial Fund

Readers will no doubt be interested to know that the University of Glasgow has launched a memorial fund to the late Professor William Barclay, who taught there for many years. The aim is to provide a scholarship for an overseas student to study in the Faculty of Divinity of the University, and there is no denominational restriction. Contributions, all of which will be acknowledged, can be sent to the Finance Officer of the University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ and should be marked for the William Barclay Memorial Fund.