Editorial

The 'Sheffield' targets

Amidst new emphasis on the importance and desirability of achieving 'Sheffield' targets, it is perhaps worth raising again the appropriateness of 'Sheffield's' analysis. The objectives of the Sheffield Report are easily summarized: 'providing for all dioceses a fair share of the full-time clergy in the services of our church' (General Synod, Ministry Co-ordinating Group, *Deployment of the Clergy: Progress Achieved Towards the Sheffield Targets*, GS Misc 109,C10: London 1979, p 1). Such an objective seems to be eminently worthy, but there have always been those who have argued that, under its reasonable façade, it involves change which is neither fair, reasonable nor particularly wise in the overall missionary strategy of the Church of England. The case against the 'Sheffield' analysis is at least threefold.

Firstly, it can be argued that the Sheffield Report was seriously distorted because it did not regard it as possible to recommend taking the ecumenical factor into its formula (General Synod, House of Bishops' Working Party, *Deployment of the Clergy*, GS 205, C10: London 1974, p 7). It gave no weight to the fact established in its own appendices that when 'full-time clergymen of all the main churches are taken into account, as they are deployed at present, the difference between town and country, and between the two provinces of Canterbury and York, are not as great as is sometimes claimed.' (ibid., p 24) For instance, the fact that the combined strength of non-Anglican clergy was 63 per cent in Liverpool but only 21 per cent in Hereford (ibid., p 23) has been, for practical purposes, ignored. Thus Hereford has to lose clergy and Liverpool hopes to gain, in an operation which seems to reflect the thinking of static Anglican imperialism rather than of dynamic and realistic ecumenism.

Secondly, it can be argued that the Report was distorted because it emphasized the population factor at the expense of area and electoral-roll membership. In the formula population counts for 53 per cent, while area is allowed less than 7 per cent and electoral roll 20 per cent (ibid., p 18). Yet area is crucial in the rural context. One of the very real successes of the Victorian church was to reorganize itself and to shake off the corruption and lassitude of the Hanoverian era, and to provide a pastorally orientated and resident clergyman in most natural communities. Thus the ravages in church allegiance brought about by defective pastoral attention were effectively contained, so much so that for the Victorian period the growth of the Church of England more than kept pace with the rapid population

growth (A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914*, Longman: London 1976, p 29). The practical implications of 'Sheffield' are the re-creation of non-residence and pluralism on a larger scale than would have happened without it. In some, particularly rural, communities there is every reason to think that the effects of non-residence will be even more disastrous than they were in the eighteenth century. The eminently wise report of the Sheffield Urban Theology Unit (UTU) argues that the apparent shift from rural to urban areas 'could accelerate the rate of loss of clergy in rural areas, the poorest of which may then experience the total collapse of church life as they have known it, without any balancing benefit to the urban areas' (Urban Theology Unit, *Deployment for Mission,* Sheffield 1975, p 9). It also questions the relationship between 'area of population' and Anglican ministry, and asks whether the 'notion of "chaplaincy" to a geographical area of population' is accepted by most Anglican clergy (ibid., p 17). Clearly it is by some, particularly those with manage-able areas; but many feel frustrated. Their sense of vocation is primarily to enable the church to minister in the world, and they feel that this is threatened where the emphasis seems to be largely on administering the *rites de passage* to satisfy the residual religious convictions of the general population.

Thirdly, it can be argued that the Report was distorted because it assumed that middle-class clergy were the most effective expression of the church's presence in urban areas. One of the most notable mis-takes of the Victorian church was to believe that a Christian presence in the inner urban areas could impose itself in the same way as it had done in rural and suburban worlds; that the provision of plant and clergy were all that was necessary to attract a Christian community. It was not so, and the failure of the working classes to attend the churches built through the zealous endeavours of, for example, Bishop Blomfield was as great a sadness, and as profound a mystery, to him as it is to many twentieth-century churchmen. The results of the nineteenth-century efforts can be seen, as the UTU is unkind enough to point out, in 'the large scale numbers of inner city churches which are being closed on or about the date of their centenary celebrations.' (ibid., p 13) The reasons for this 'failure' are manifold, but they do seem to include ministry through men who had no cultural identification with those to whom they ministered. The social profile of the clergy has not greatly changed and so, if 'Sheffield' succeeds in marginally increasing the Anglican urban presence, there is no reason to think that this presence will be more successful than previously. Thus the limited success of the past is endangered and, even more seriously, the impression is given that a key to the failure of urban mission is the paucity of middle-class clergy. There is no evidence for this, and much to the contrary, like all wrong solutions,

it diverts attention from the search for a better answer. All the church has to do, it appears, is to display that great British virtue, fairness!

Missionary strategists, of the more discerning sort, have always been suspicious of the sort of mathematical analysis on which 'Sheffield' is based. In 1865 Henry Venn, that great CMS secretary, challenged the arguments of those who pressed for the even distribution of missionaries throughout the non-Christian world. The objective should rather be, he urged, the establishment of churches within communities which would be 'self-extending' to the wider community (cf. Max Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel,* Eerdmans: Michigan 1971, p 118).

Fair shares for all is a concept which needs much deeper analysis than 'Sheffield' provides. It involves profound questions about urban mission strategy, and about the background, function and training of the clergy. Are they to be storm-troopers ministering on behalf of the church and, if they are, should they be spread or concentrated? Or, are they enablers so that the members of the body of Christ may minister more effectively in the world? While these and other questions are scarcely answered, a revolution of some consequence takes place before the statistical logic of 'Sheffield', married to the claims of fairness. Fairness, however, relates to need which must be decided, as the UTU argues, not *'by discussing what needs to be done with and for the clergy of the Church of England',* but by learning *'what needs to be done in the cities of England.'* (UTU, op. cit., p 13) What is the point, the UTU asks with a stark logic, of distributing clergy more equitably *'over areas where they are not wanted, to do jobs which are not specified, in the absence of Christian community to support them?'* (ibid., p 17) Yet, in the name of fairness, changes are enforced with a degree of bureaucratic precision foreign to the character of the Church of England, and a degree of moral pressure which would carry greater force if it appeared to be based on a more convincing strategy.

'Possession' and exorcism

Demon-possession and exorcism are subjects where Anglicans do not share a common mind. Questions occur much more readily than answers. Are the biblical examples of demon-possession psychological maladies described as 'possession' because no other terms were available? How far is the New Testament engaged in a process of demythologizing? If all illness is, in some sense, a result of evil, how does 'possession' differ in any significant way from other types of illness? Even granting that 'possession' and exorcism are ineradicably intertwined in the ministry of Jesus, what relevance does that have to the western scientific mind of the late twentieth century?

It is because we believe that these questions are important in a society which, though in some sense secular, has far from abandoned an interest in the spiritual dimension—which it often interprets with a generous and dangerous mixture of religious heterodoxy—that most of this issue is devoted to answering at least some of them.

Those at either the rationalist or the supernaturalist extreme have little difficulty in answering such questions, but for our contributors the reality is more complex. They are not always in agreement, which is hardly surprising as they have written entirely independently of each other, but there is general consensus that illness can have a spiritual dimension and, consequently, that healing should incorporate such a dimension. 'Treatment of illness', writes Dr Dunn, in collaboration with his research student, Mr Twelftree, 'must take serious account of the different levels or dimensions of illness and to be effective may well need to operate at all levels.' This may involve a ministry of exorcism. This is not a possibility for Dr Barker, at least under the name of exorcism, but he does allow that special public services, involving 'prayer and a declaration that Jesus is Lord', may be appropriate for those who have been caught up in the occult. There is a role then for Christian ministry to those who have come particularly under the bondage of Satan, though its nature is not a matter on which our contributors have achieved unanimity. This is perhaps a further argument for decent caution. Ministers must face the reality of evil as it presents itself in varied manifestations, but they must be careful lest they sanction too quickly a form of ministry which sometimes has a fatal attraction for the more simple-minded Christian.

The whole question is further fascinating because it raises the relationship, as Cupitt points out, 'of religious truth to cultural change' (Don Cupitt, *Exploration in Theology 6*, SCM: London 1979, p 53). Evangelicals have sometimes translated 'truth' with little thought of the context either at the biblical or contemporary end. It is to be hoped, therefore, that this number will help not only in the clarification of the issues it tackles, but in the framing of a methodology for the understanding and contextualization of God's Word.

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