

Obituary

Alan Flavelle was a man of great gift and generous spirit, singularly devoted to Christ and his Church.

He served two pastorates in Mourne, Kilkeel, and Finaghy, Belfast, with distinction and considerable prowess. But while his years in Mourne were notable and productive, and had a profound effect on the whole community, it was his Finaghy ministry that marked the maturing of his powers and impact.

Here in a mixed urban setting he grappled with the relevance of Gospel and Church in Ireland today. His struggle led him in sermons, addresses, papers, discussions and conversation

- to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ over history, politics and life
- to warn that what stares us in the face today in Northern Ireland is the judgement of God. 'We turn to God for help when the foundations of our life are shaking only to discover that it is *he* who is shaking them.'
- to bemoan the tragic dichotomy between faith and life which has been brought about by shallow and superficial teaching over the years and is now endemic to the Northern Ireland Christian scene
- to insist in face of monstrous indifference and smart cynicism that prayer, above all else, can bring about a radical change in the present tragic situation. 'Eager to fight God's war with man's weapons . . . the disciples fumble with the weapon that counts' (Earle Ellis).

The life of the Church also deeply concerned him. And this concern persuaded him increasingly to stress the nature of the Church's ministry as preeminently a ministry in, through and by every member. This every member ministry he implemented in Finaghy with much success.

But basic to every member ministry or 'body life', he believed, lay the necessity of adequate training for those who professed to be Christ's which would enable them not only to play their part as responsible and adult members of the Church but to articulate their faith and live it out in daily life — witness his introduction of Adult Christian Education in Finaghy.

Two other recurring themes in his ministry which should be mentioned were:

(1) *the cruciality of worship*

Worship for him was that which gave the life of the Church not only its motivation and inspiration but provided the context for the teaching of the Word and its authoritative and gripping application.

(2) *the importance of evangelism*

'In a world in which the very foundations are being shaken, in which all

faiths, all ideologies are called in question, in which is it loudly proclaimed that God is dead and that man's existence has ultimately no meaning — the one and only important theme is surely to proclaim the gospel of the loving God and to call men to that repentance which leads to newness of life . . . And does that not imply that direct personal evangelism comes first and that the issues of life in society are secondary? Can a new and better society be built with men who have no faith, no hope?' (W. A. Vissert Hooft).

Alan Flavelle, though, was not only a leader in his own Church and denomination. His allegiance was first and foremost to the universal Church of Christ, and therefore he involved himself in the Keswick Convention movement, OMF, visiting Indonesia on their behalf, and with UCCF (formerly IVF) and other similar groups. Indeed he was never more at home than with students, for they gave him the opportunity to propound, lucidly and forcefully, the truth of the gospel and its implications for life, and to share his worries about and hopes for the cause of Christ in our world.

Hence he warmly and actively encouraged the allied work of the Irish Christian Study Centre in its desire to promote a Christian critique of the assumptions, values and standards of our day in thought, politics and life, and to formulate a Christian response to the challenges they present for faith and our obedience to Christ.

Then at the height of his influence, so it seemed, he was struck down with illness. He fought fiercely and valiantly, refusing to give in until 'he was no more, because God took him away' (Gen. 5:24).

To God be the glory, and to Anne, his wife, and his loved ones, our sympathy and prayers.

J. BRIAN MOORE