

Editorial

IN a recent review in the *Manchester Guardian* of the book *The Practice of Evangelism*, Canon Peter Green ("Artifex") paid a notable tribute to the author, Canon Bryan Green of Birmingham. "When, more than forty years ago," he wrote, "I made my first experiments in parochial evangelism, I served as assistant to four or five of the leading missionaries of their time. But when, after conducting a good number of missions myself, I acted in 1936 as assistant to Bryan Green at a Cambridge University mission, I had no hesitation in ranking him as the greatest I had ever met".

Here is high praise indeed; and it is in the light of such a tribute that we are compelled to assess the value of these Moorhouse Lectures, delivered at St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, during the summer of this year. Bryan Green is first and foremost an evangelist. For some thirty years he has devoted himself to the task of winning others to the knowledge of Christ; and now out of a rich and varied experience he has given us this book, which comes as a trumpet call to the church of our day to devote itself with a renewed sense of urgency to the task of proclaiming the Gospel as God's saving truth to a world which is so palpably lost.

Evangelism is a subject which can scarcely fail to be of interest to churchmen who claim the title of Evangelical; and yet as Canon Green is compelled to point out, a sense of responsibility for the task of evangelism and a belief in the necessity and reality of conversion are not the prerogative of any particular party within the church. These things cut across all shades of churchmanship. "Within all the Christian Churches we have tended to think of churchmanship in horizontal lines—high, central and low. There is apparent to-day another line, this time vertical—on the one side there are high, central and low churchmen all united in a passionate belief that when the Gospel is preached conversions should follow; this is the object and aim of all their evangelism. On the other side of the line there are those who do not share this insight, but think that by training in the sacramental life, the teaching of Christian ethics, the disciplining of the human will, men will gradually grow into Christlikeness without the need for the experience of conversion" (p. 38).

The distinction here made is one which in all honesty cannot be evaded. It is a sheer illusion to imagine that evangelicals are the only churchmen who are seriously interested in evangelism or who are actively carrying out the work. Yet it needs to be said that the evangelical should above all things be a gospeller, a man with a living evangel to proclaim—and not simply a staunch protestant, who regards it as his chief business in life to contend earnestly for the faith (as he understands it). We have heard of the verger who, in endeavouring to explain to a visitor the difference between *his* church and another in the same town, remarked, "You see, sir, we here at St. Mary's are more evangelical than those at St. John's!" Would that all

¹ Hodder and Stoughton, 10/6.

evangelicals were truly evangelical! One of the tragedies of the ministry is when the fire of the Gospel dies out of a man's heart, so that while he continues to bear the name of evangelical he is in fact no longer an evangelist, but a mere ecclesiastic—or a moribund low churchman.¹ A man has no right to the title of evangelical unless the preaching of Christ's Gospel and the saving of souls matters *more* to him than questions of ritual, interpretations of Prayer Book rubrics, and theories of biblical inspiration. This is not to suggest that the latter are of no importance or consequence. It is simply to affirm that in the scale of spiritual priorities the propagation of the Gospel comes *first*, and to offer a salutary reminder that evangelicalism (of the wrong kind) can as easily degenerate into legalism as catholicism—again, of the wrong kind. The only thing that qualifies a man to call himself an evangelical is a passionate loyalty to the evangel which compels him to say, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

As to how this all-compelling duty of evangelism is to be translated into practice in our own day, Bryan Green has a vast amount of constructive help to offer. He begins by defining the precise nature of the evangelistic task, showing that evangelism proper lies between what may be termed 'pre-evangelism' and the pastoral work of the church. Next, in a chapter of particular value, he frankly examines the meaning and necessity of conversion—a subject of central importance to the evangelist, since evangelism is essentially a ministry of conversion. Having thus cleared the ground, the author develops his theme in various directions: from the angle of the local church, in terms of evangelistic preaching and personal dealing with souls, and in reference to the whole technique of mass evangelism and missions. Useful appendices deal with such matters as publicity for evangelistic missions, united evangelism, children's missions, and the training of the laity.

This is the merest sketch of the contents of a book of extraordinary importance for the church of to-day. It should be read and studied by the laity and the clergy alike. The religious condition of our country at the present time is a summons to all Christian people to redouble their efforts to spread the Gospel among those outside the church. Bryan Green's book will provide both the inspiration and the direction for the fulfilment of such a task.

¹ It needs to be stressed that 'evangelical' and 'low church' are not synonymous terms. This is one of the points brought out by G. R. Balleine in his *History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, a new edition of which has just been published (Church Book Room Press, 12/6). "It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the Low Churchmen and the Evangelicals were quite separate bodies" (p. 173; see also footnote, p. 165). Historically it could be argued that evangelicalism has most in common with the High Church tradition in the Church of England, as represented by John and Charles Wesley.