

Editorial

By the time this edition of *Churchman* appears, readers will probably have become familiar with the contents of an important new book by Michael Saward, *Evangelicals on the Move* (Mowbrays, London, 1987, £4.95). It is a short book, only 99 pages with footnotes, but it deals with a subject which, as observers of the Church of England are increasingly being forced to recognize, will not go away. This is the extraordinary rise of the Evangelical movement within the Church, which is now producing slightly more than half the ordinands in training for the ministry and which contributes a hugely disproportionate share of the Church's income.

As Michael Saward points out in his book, none of this has meant that Evangelical influence has increased to any substantial degree. The agenda of Church business is still largely determined by Liberal and Anglo-Catholic priorities, with the former gaining the upper hand on the latter. Although there are some Evangelical diocesan bishops, they are not very vocal or influential as *Evangelicals*, and the second tier of the hierarchy—the suffragans, archdeacons, provosts and so on—are virtually Evangelical-free. This means that the future leadership of the Church is not being drawn from the ranks of its liveliest element, and that trouble is in store sooner or later. Either the Evangelicals will revolt (perhaps by withholding quota contributions, as has already happened in one or two cases) or—and this is more likely—they will split into those who are prepared to compromise with the establishment in order to obtain preferment, and those who will dig themselves deeper into the laager of pre-1928 retrenchment.

Another danger, which Michael Saward brings out, is that the Evangelical movement will be increasingly hijacked by the super-spirituals, whether or not they are explicitly 'charismatic', and that the whole nature of Evangelicalism will be transformed from within. This is a particular danger confronting those aspects of Evangelicalism which are most exposed to the media-minded public, for example N.E.A.C. 1988, but it can probably be assumed that the more deeply-rooted Evangelical societies and parishes will resist the trend and go on presenting an image which is lively without going over the top. It is not often realised, and even Michael Saward does not seem to have grasped the fact with sufficient clarity, that Evangelicals have entrenched themselves within the structures of the Church in such a way as to ensure their continuing presence. What they have not done, and in the Church of England may never be able to do, is develop ways of taking over those structures.

Perhaps the deepest tragedy of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism is that it came to be seen as a party within the Church, rather than the

Church in its purest, most Cranmerian (or whatever) form. The tragedy of the twentieth century is that Evangelicals themselves have accepted this labelling, and ceased, by and large, to believe that their views ought to be held by the Church as a whole. Modern Evangelicals, having been marginalized by others, have now marginalized themselves, and many even suppose that if they are to have a ministry in the wider Church it is incumbent upon them, and not merely expedient for them, to leave their Evangelical distinctives behind.

We should make it clear at the outset that we are not talking here about clerical dress or other matters which worry the clergy far more than anyone else. We are talking about the fundamental truths of the faith which all Christians ought to share and which Evangelicals believe they are emphasizing in the proportion laid down by Scripture. These are the final authority of the Bible in all matters of faith, the priority of the Gospel of justification by faith alone in preaching and teaching, the need for repentance and conversion, and the commitment to evangelize (and not merely scold, or ape) the non-believing world. We are not interested in scoring political points but in glorifying God by being faithful to his revealed Word. *This* is what makes an Evangelical what he is, and it is a pity that Michael Seward has not emphasized this more clearly in his book.

What he has given us (apart from a running autobiography, which disfigures his general argument) is a politician's approach to the subject. We are not surprised to discover that he is most at home among the 'powers that be', as he calls them, wielding whatever influence he can to get more statements drafted, more committees formed, and more third-rate hymn books published. Evangelicals who do not share his outlook are caricatured and pigeon-holed in ways which are grossly unfair and do nothing but add to the generally journalistic flavour of the book as a whole, which can only be described as an unashamed exercise in party politics.

Whether Evangelicals will accept this book as a statement of their position remains to be seen, but if they do, it will be a tragedy for the movement, which will probably see itself decline again to the position of a beleaguered minority, in which it was for the first half of this century. What is more, it will deserve to decline in that way, because it will have forgotten the spiritual roots which have nourished it over the centuries. If an unthinking pietism, and a reactionary puritan-protestant theology threaten us at the moment, this is because the middle ground has failed to see that lasting influence is based on theological principle backed up by spiritual experience, not on the number of votes one can muster in General Synod.

The tragedy of the present day is that the guardians of traditional Evangelicalism have been pushed out, even insulted, by Michael Seward's 'powers that be', rather than encouraged to develop a modern style which could bring a sense of theological seriousness to

the trendy generation. The result is that the latter are fed on choruses and miracles, with nothing to tide them over from one emotional high to the next. Can the movement as a whole change direction in a way which will reconcile the extremes, not drive them farther apart; or must we drift into open disunity and ineffectiveness before a more definite, but more soundly based Evangelicalism can emerge to fertilize the Church with its message?

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