

Editorial

It is the acknowledged genius of the Church of England, as of the nation it serves and represents, to mask fundamental change in the garb of the familiar. Venerable institutions are restructured from the bottom up, but the top layer remains visibly untouched, or almost so. The latest institution to experience this kind of facelift in reverse is *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, now published by the Church of England, but retaining one important feature which successive generations of Church-watchers have come to take for granted—the famous anonymous Preface, written in the latest edition by the same person who penned the previous one!

The Preface to *Crockford's* aims to highlight and comment on the significant developments in Church life since the previous edition, which in this case means the period 1982–85. It was a time when ambitious schemes were being ditched, when prominent personalities were making headlines, and when sex and politics—the stuff of so much everyday life—were more prominent in Church affairs than ever before. The Preface reflects all these things, and brings a generally balanced judgment to bear on all of them. Its overall approach to the indecisiveness of the period is optimistic; the writer allows himself the luxury of hoping that if the trumpet is making an uncertain sound, it may in reality merely be undergoing a thorough retuning, which will equip it for the battles ahead.

On specific matters, there is much which we must applaud in the latest Preface. The writer frankly recognises that Evangelical strength is growing; that one of the main reasons (and results) of this is a renewed stress on evangelism at local level, of which he thoroughly approves, and that some of the activities of Anglican and ecumenical bodies are far removed from the real concerns of most Evangelicals on the ground. In many ways, the Preface draws attention to the remoteness of the Church's administrative machine from the people in the pews, though it does not point the way to any solution of the problem.

On specific issues, the Preface gives a judicial summary of the failure of the Covenant proposals (how remote they seem now!) and brings out the importance of Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox for future ecumenical dialogue. He is appreciative of Pope John Paul II without being blind to his faults, and recognises that the new conservatism in the Vatican is liable to stall any real moves towards Church unity in the near future. He does not express any opinion on this, except to note—as too few people do—that lay opinion in the Churches is generally more hostile or indifferent to ecumenism than its enthusiasts would have us believe.

On the subject of doctrinal diversity, he comes out strongly against Don Cupitt and David Jenkins, without actually going so far as to unchurch them. He believes that neither man can defend his public position as a representative of the Church whilst maintaining the views which he does, and censures the Bishop of Durham more forcefully than the Dean of Emanuel College, Cambridge, on the ground that the Bishop's responsibilities to the flock are greater. In particular, he points out how hypocritical it has been of the Church to reject fellowship with the Methodists and other Free Church people whilst embracing virtual atheists in its own ranks, a point which is not always made with great clarity!

The Preface is especially sensitive to the strains on the clergy, and comments movingly about David Watson's last struggle. He is generally favourable to the Ordination of Women, though he recognises the difficulties that will bring. On all these matters, the Preface treads a middle way whilst remaining positive in its general thrust—a characteristically Anglican position!

If weaknesses must be found, they lie largely in the sense of leisure in the face of difficulties which will simply not go away. We must heartily endorse the final plea for more evangelism, but what is the content of the Gospel going to be? Can we really accommodate David Jenkins and at the same time pray for men and women to be won to Christ? Doctrinal orthodoxy is not just a position which might legitimately be taken on a series of given issues; it is the lifeblood of the Church's proclamation. Here the Church of England has allowed comprehensiveness to become a weakness rather than a strength, and the assumption that the radicals represent 'theology' is deeply worrying. Yet if Evangelicals must criticise this attitude, we must also recognise that we are largely to blame for it ourselves. By neglecting theology, we have left it in the hands of the ungodly; by stressing experience(s) over truth we have opened the door to unfaithfulness even within our own ranks. We must be grateful to the writer of the Preface for giving us such a balanced picture of the state of the Church today, but we must also commit ourselves afresh to exploring once again what it means to present the everlasting Gospel afresh to this generation.

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