

Editorial

The search for a new Archbishop of Canterbury, soon to be followed by the appointment of a new Bishop of London, has brought the domestic politics of the Church of England into the limelight once more. This time though, we are talking less about controversial issues and more about potentially controversial people. What kind of Archbishop and Bishop does the Church actually need or want (the two being not necessarily the same thing). Recent publicity given to unrepresentative radicals on the episcopal bench has ensured that conservative candidates are high on the list of favourites. Both the Anglican Evangelical Assembly and the Church Union have called for a man who is loyal to the scriptures and the traditional teaching of the Church. Thoughtful people might reflect that such a demand ought normally to be met quite easily by any clergyman, and by most active laypeople. It is a sobering thought that it should be necessary to make such a statement at all, yet such is the grip of liberalism on the Church that it is by no means certain that these calls will or can be heeded!

Evangelicals, while naturally preferring someone of similar views to themselves, tend not to be too worried about episcopal appointments. When one does not believe that bishops are of the *esse* of the Church, it is always more difficult to get excited about who should be occupying the office at any particular time. Recently there has been a revival of interest in episcopacy in Evangelical circles, but it will probably be a long time before the issues involved excite anything like as much attention as say, a healing ministry, or an evangelistic campaign. It is easy to understand this attitude, particularly when the average bishop is little more than a diocesan administrator, and is quite out of touch with thinking at the parish level. It is perfectly possible for most Anglicans to live their Christian life without reference to a bishop, apart from confirmation, and so the average person naturally develops a rather different set of priorities.

But however understandable such an attitude may be, it neglects one increasingly important factor in Church life—the media. A bishop who would never come anywhere near one's parish might easily appear on a television programme and say things that everyone in the neighbourhood can hear in the comfort of their own sitting room. As we know from bitter experience, what is said on these occasions is seldom honouring to Christ or furthering the cause of the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, the media love to portray leading ecclesiastics as men who do not really believe what their flocks so blindly accept, as progressives who do little more than reassure the non-Churchgoing public that they were right all along.

It is of course quite true that the Church cannot control the media, and that often people are quoted out of context or presented in a bad light through no fault of their own. Yet it is equally true that wise and experienced people can learn to watch what they say, to demand the right to vet programmes in advance and if necessary, to refuse to appear at all. Better no archbishop on television than one who will deny (or appear to deny—which is just as bad) the basic elements of Christian faith.

Now the point here is that whatever we say or do, the media will go for the man in purple, because that is what looks good and appears to carry weight with the general public. There is little use preaching the Gospel faithfully to the converted, inside a church building, if the unconverted outside hear only the voice of the unfaithful shepherd coming across on the box. Religious broadcasting and interviews ought to be designed to attract people to the Church, to make them feel that by staying away they are missing something—not to confirm them in their ignorance, prejudice and laziness. Prominent Church leaders have a very real rôle to play in this, and it is essential that we do our utmost to ensure that the general public is not misled.

What goes on in the privacy (for that is what it is increasingly becoming) of our parish churches will probably not change very much, whoever is appointed to high office in the Church. But there is a very real possibility that on-the-ground evangelism will suffer if men of God, who submit to the authority of Scripture and honour the Church's traditional faith, are not appointed. It is this that we must bear in mind, and which must guide our prayers and our actions as Evangelicals in the difficult days ahead.

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