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possibly lead to God when he prayed with representatives of other faiths in Assisi. But the Church of England has not *officially* rejected her Reformation principles enshrined in her charter. Until she does this, and until other National Churches do so officially, it seems to me that there is no reason to abandon ship. Further, a National Church is in a unique position to be the conscience of the nation. In Switzerland, the pastor is often invited to speak to the entire town or village, and this is an unparalleled opportunity of reminding the populace of the requirements of our creator God.

The arguments of Bucer are of course typical of Christians in what we have come to call Christendom. We now live in what is acknowledged to be a post-Christian era. Do we still need National Churches? It is clear that they can be justified only where the State is anxious to fulfil its responsibilities as servants of God in the light of [Rom. 13](#). In fact, we are seeing most National Churches becoming progressively more confessing. To the best of my knowledge there is [p. 36](#) no national Church that does not practice infant baptism. Is there not a good reason in the light of the present day post-Christian situation, where many non-believers require baptism for their children out of tradition, for those who believe that the baptism of children is biblical to refrain from baptising them as a form of witness?

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The Church in Europe

Peter Cotterell

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INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement that the Church in Europe is in a poor state of health. It is not difficult to find statistics to support that contention: for example it is said that some 1.8 million people in Europe leave the Church each year.¹ This appears to mean that according to some system of counting church members or church attendance there is a net decline each year of 1.8 million. Even if we accept the figure of 300 million as representing the total nominal membership of the European churches it is clear that such an enormous defection cannot long be sustained without seriously undermining the effectiveness of the Church's outreach.

Nor must we be lulled into a sense of security by the developments within the House Church movement, or the proliferation of conferences which attract thousands of people. These features of contemporary life are, in fact, the visible evidence of the malaise within the churches, an unheard protest against the general irrelevance of what passes for

¹ Press release from the Association for the Promotion of Church Growth in Europe, now the European Church Growth Association, ECGA, January, 1987.

church in contemporary Europe. In a vivid characterization as far back as 1974, Jan van Capelleveen referred to the attitude of the younger generation about the churches: 'they speak warmly about them, like one speaks about his own grandmother who spends her last days in a room full of portraits of the past. It is wonderful to visit her for just a short time; it would be impossible to live with her.'²

HISTORY

Perhaps the greatest burden borne by the Church in Europe is its history. Four aspects of that history may be noted:

The Ecumenical Councils It was the Councils (particularly of Ephesus and Chalcedon) which identified heresy and codified orthodoxy, leaving us with creeds which expressed the agreed doctrines of the church, particularly in the area of christology. However, the credal statements are today in good measure irrelevant in their scope. Not that the creeds do not deal with vital issues, nor that p. 38 those issues are settled beyond dispute. But the non-professional Christians have learned to repeat them without understanding them, and many professional Christians have learned to repeat them without believing in them. There are new issues confronting the church today, of which the creeds necessarily say nothing: oppression, racism, poverty, abortion, euthanasia, AIDS, homosexuality and so on, scarcely find even a passing mention in them. And this is no fault of the creeds: rather it is the fault of the Church which has been content to allow the creeds to remain unchanged, petrified witnesses to arguments long past. The creeds lack bite: we have learnt to affirm them without any challenge to contemporary secular values.

The Reformation It could be argued that the Reformation gave shape to the church in Europe, a shape which was to continue essentially unchanged for four hundred years. The Lutheran and the Reformed churches in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church still virtually monopolise Christian resources in Europe. And yet in spite of the very Reformation terminology that is traditionally used to describe European church history it would not be difficult to argue that the churches remain with the task of Reformation barely begun. Clericalism remains, and the dichotomy between clergy and laity still firmly in place, and the magical element within the liturgies not exorcized.

In his foreword to Leonard Verduin's *The Reformers and their step children*,³ H. L. Ellison comments of the Anabaptists of the 16th. century, 'It is an error to call them reformers, for it was a new beginning they wanted', and goes on, 'Until recently their history has been known to us mainly through vilifications of their opponents, both Roman Catholic and Protestants.' In 1981 came invaluable work on the Anabaptists by Walter Klassen, *Anabaptism, neither Catholic nor Protestant*.⁴ Franklin Little of Temple University, in the foreword to Klassen's book, confirms Ellison's assessment of the Anabaptists:

The Anabaptists were condemned and defamed by spokesmen of the sixteenth century establishments because they refused to support the power systems then emerging.... Today we can see that the Anabaptists/ Mennonites' testimonies were very important for both church and state. While much of the teaching of the Roman Catholic and Protestant

² 'Western Europe in the Seventies', in J. D. Douglas (ed.) *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Minneapolis, Worldwide Publications, 1975.

³ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans; Exeter, Paternoster; 1964.

⁴ Ontario, Conrad Press, 1981.

p. 39 theologians of the sixteenth century is today unreal and irrelevant, what the Anabaptists thought about mutual aid, peace, discipline, religious liberty, lay witness, etc. is as fresh and important as it was fifteen generations ago.

The World Wars Two world wars have left their mark not only on Europe in general, but on the Church in particular. The clergy of both sides in both wars blessed the weapons and lent a religious gloss to the policies of the politicians. Padres earned a confusing reputation: for extraordinary devotion and heroism (one actually winning two Victoria Crosses), and for being 'wet'. Some saw through the intentions of the politicians very quickly and refused to be used. Others were pliable under the flattery of officer status, privilege, badges of rank, medals and ribbons and apparent influence. The British General, Montgomery, explicitly employed his padres as part of his resources: the troops were to be urged on as crusaders, and lacklustre padres who could not produce the necessary rhetoric were soon dismissed by him. However, during the war the combatants on both sides had time to think, and even to become philosophers of life. Their padres were often unable to give intelligible answers to the often cynical questions they were asked, and there was no other authority who could give such answers. There was a widespread abandoning of religion after the First World War, and continuing through and beyond the Second, and it was abandoned because it was seen to be irrelevant and unbelievable.

The rise of Marxism Karl Marx was a German, who spent much of his life studying social conditions in England, and whose theories were put into practice first in Russia and then in Eastern Europe. Marxism made its appeal primarily to the working classes, although there were some intellectuals too who were attracted to it. Its later development, Marxism—Leninism, provides the primary division within Europe, between East and West, and the church has a totally different image in these two contrasting Europes. If in the West it is irrelevant, in the East it is perceived by believer and unbeliever alike as representing the major challenge to materialism, offering a new and powerful alternative dynamic. It simply cannot be denied that under persecution, Christianity has shown a power to survive; and more than survive, to outlive and outlove the strengths of Marxism—a power it has not demonstrated under the threat of affluence in the West.

CHURCH IN EUROPE NOW

Although the United Nations recognizes four Europes, the suggestion P. 40 made by A. Morgan Derham of a division into five zones⁵ has generally received approval amongst Christians. The five are:

Nordic: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland. The high percentage of the population nominally associated with the Lutheran Church in these areas is characteristic: Norway and Denmark 92%, Finland 93%, and Sweden an astonishing 96%, astonishing primarily because it is freely admitted that in fact at most 5% of the population actually attend any church more than once a year.⁶ The Pentecostal churches with a membership of just over 100,000 have been growing steadily over the past decade, and there are several with attendances of more than a thousand. Sweden has an Institute of Church Growth.

Norwegian Lutherans have developed a unique but potentially confusing dual system, with evangelical Prayer Houses (or 'Mission Halls') operating alongside the official

⁵ See the MARC Monograph number 11, *European Churches and Western Missions*.

⁶ W. Detzler, *The Changing Church in Europe*, p. 15.

Lutheran Churches. They operate their own schools and at Fjellhaug a fine seminary, and represent the abiding values of Lutheranism. Norway has a Church Growth Association.

Germanic: West Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Although there are clear cultural ties between these countries, there is no common pattern of church life. Switzerland is the richest country in Europe, its population of some 6.5 million diluted by almost a million foreigners. Almost one half of the population is notionally Protestant, and 96% of those would associate with the Reformed Churches.

Austria represents a sad commentary on the history of the Reformation: in the decades after the Reformation the country was 80% Protestant, but is today 83% Catholic.

The church in Germany is a major employer of labour, with an estimated quarter of a million employees. But it is typical of the Lutheran Church in Germany that the majority of these owe only a nominal allegiance to Lutheranism. The Church Growth Movement will almost certainly have a major role to play in the coming years: *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Gemeindeaufbau* (AGGA), based in Giengen, has led parties of German pastors to visit growing churches around the world, and plans a Ministers' Conference this year which is expected to attract up to 5,000 Lutheran Ministers.

Western: U.K., Republic of Ireland, The Netherlands. Again, despite some measure of cultural affinity between the three members p. 41 of this group, church life in each is very different. Holland has three dominant churches, the Roman Catholic, the Netherlands Reformed Church (the NHK), and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (the Gereformeed, or GNK Church). This last has remained plateaued at about 9% of the population in membership, but with a steadily declining pattern of attendance. The general mobility of the Dutch peoples makes leaving the church relatively simple: on arrival at the new location the head of the household registers at the City Hall but denies church membership.⁷ The Roman Catholic Church in Holland faces a massive decline in clergy: from 1970 to 1981 a decrease from 3433 to 2285, a drop of 33%. This reflects a massive defection from actual belief: only 54% of Catholics indicated a belief in Christ as Son of God, compared with 70% of the Reformed, and 94% of the Gereformeed.⁸ Holland has joined those countries which have their own Church Growth Association.

In the U.K. the principal churches continue to show a decline in attendance of the order of 1-2%, although it is possible that the Salvation Army and the Baptist churches in England (but not in the U.K. as a whole) are growing slightly.⁹ The House Church movement has grown so that in membership it probably equals the Christian Brethren; but the movement is splintered, with some 21 separate groups. Indeed this splintering is typical of the U.K. church scene: although there are fewer members and fewer churches, there are more denominations than ever before. Perhaps the most valuable commentary on the Church of England is *The Church in Crisis*, by Charles Moore, A. N. Wilson and Gavin Stamp,¹⁰ the title of which speaks volumes. Of all its crises there is perhaps no one more poignant than that confronting its theological colleges which have been radically criticized steadily over the past two decades for their general irrelevancy.

Latin: Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Malta. In this grouping the theme must be that of fragmentation. It may be that we have simply a

⁷ K. G. Pederson, 'Wearing Joseph's Coat in a Secular Society', unpublished paper Circulated from Lelystad, June 1986.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ See Paul Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson, *Turning the Tide*, London, Bible Society, 1981, and the Bible Society's *Prospects for the Eighties*, 1980.

¹⁰ London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

manifestation of the individuality of the Latin Character, but it is a fact that in these countries it is exceedingly difficult to obtain anything in the way of an overview of the Church. p. 42

In France all of the Protestant groups together constitute less than 2% of the Christian community,¹¹ and yet there are some 60 such groups! And it is estimated that 32,000 towns and villages have no Gospel witness. By contrast it has been estimated that there are one hundred mediums to each Christian worker in France.¹² We must take seriously the growing influence of the occult throughout Europe.

Eastern: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia. This division is probably the most significant of all those associated with European Christianity. The problems of the West are not those of the East. What is of enormous importance, however, is the clear evidence that the Church has outlasted doctrinaire Marxism in Russia and China, and the changed politics of those nations as far as religion is concerned must now inevitably be worked out in the European satellites. In this respect Hungary has led the way. In June 1988 the Hungarian Communist Party not only dethroned the veteran party leader Janos Kadar, but appointed as president a non-Communist intellectual, Professor Bruno Straub. It is significant that this movement actually *preceded* the Moscow Communist Party Conference, anticipating the new liberalizing policies of Russia, where since Mr. Gorbachev came to power some 300 religious communities have been officially recognized.

SIX PROBLEMS FOR THE EUROPEAN CHURCHES

A number of problems for the church in Europe have been noted in the brief survey above. Just six have been selected for further consideration.

1. The problem of the State Church

The problem is highly complex, but contains a number of strands:

a. *The identity of the 'Christian' is confused.* In Norway, although a theoretical 97.6% of the population belong to the Lutheran Church, a mere 3% actually attend the weekly service in the State Church (and probably some 10% of the population regularly attend a weekly service in some kind of church). In England, although there are some 8 million confirmed members of the Anglican church, the average p. 43 weekly attendance at Anglican churches is only just over 1 million.¹³ Indeed a comparison often quoted is that proportionately more Russians attend church than do Britons!¹⁴

b. *The church becomes part of the social services of the country.* The distinction between Christian marriage and marriage as a social convention is lost. Baptism becomes a safety net, used by irreligious parents just in case there might be something in religion after all. Christian burial is offered for those who have shown no outward sign of involvement with the church, and expectations expressed at the funeral services which lack any biblical or theological foundation.

¹¹ Information from Howard Foreman, *Sous la colletière*, Catillon d'Azergues, January 1987.

¹² Information from Jean-Marc Lepillez, 425 rue Marcel Champion, Portes Les Valence.

¹³ See my *The Eleventh Commandment*, Leicester, IVP, 1981, p. 116.

¹⁴ Wayne Detzler, *The Changing Church in Europe*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1979, p. 30.

c. *The state may be involved in making church decisions.* In Britain Bishops are appointed by the Prime Minister¹⁵ or, more precisely, by the Queen (but then ultimately in Britain it is possible to blame the Queen for almost anything done by her government).¹⁶

d. *Church taxes are demanded of unbelievers.* This practice has increasingly been resented in Germany. The problem for the uncommitted is that burial under the Lutheran rites is still very much valued. Paying the tax is not. An increasing stratagem has been for the husband or wage-earner to leave the Lutheran Church while the other partner remains in the system, preserving the right to Lutheran burial.

e. *There is a division amongst Christians.* Those who belong to minority Christian denominations are in some sense discriminated against.

f. *The state may control or at least strongly influence the training of clergy through the universities.* This presents the church in Germany with a major problem: evangelical Christians called to Lutheran ministry find themselves confronted by a long, largely irrelevant, and spiritually disruptive period of what is termed theological training.

In Britain the appearance in 1965 of the Council for National Academic Awards opens up the way for a second stream of [p. 44](#) undergraduate training for Christian ministry: but at the same time it has tended to extend the grip of academic theology at the expense of the no less important practical training. A great deal has been written and said on the subject, particularly from the Anglican church, but so far virtually no move has been made towards a comprehensive solution.¹⁷

Here we have a major problem to be addressed by the leaders of the evangelical churches of Europe: to find ways of adequate training for evangelically minded candidates for ministry. Theological colleges in the United Kingdom *may* be in a position to help. Methodologically what is needed is the introduction of a curriculum *from below*, to replace that which imposed *from above*, that is to say by academics whose interests are necessarily different from ours. We are interested in a persuasion *elenctic*, not mere dialogue, in missiology and not in a mere comparison of truth claims.

2. The problem of nominalism

This is clearly related to the first issue. The existence of a State church, and the formalized mode of entry into the State church, inevitably leads to nominalism. The high proportion of nominal Christianity in Europe has no parallel anywhere else in the world. The decline in church membership *may be* no more than the long overdue shedding of non-Christians, the removal of the tares from the wheat. But what is now needed is a rediscovery of what it is to be a Christian. The answer to this vital question could be expected to come from one of the following:

a. *From Western orthodox evangelicals.* But so often we find ourselves the prisoners of our own histories, unable actually to discern from Scripture (and apart from the cultural

¹⁵ For details of the procedure followed in the appointment of Bishops in the Church of England see Paul A. Welsby, *How the Church of England Works*, London, Church Information Office, 1985, especially chapter X, 'Church and State'.

¹⁶ Anyone who still holds to the concept of an established church but who heard the brief debate between Mr. Wedgwood Benn, a left-wing politician, and the Bishop of Petersfield, in May 1988, must have had that belief severely shaken. If Mr. Benn knew why the church should *not* be established, the Bishop showed no sign of knowing why it *should*.

¹⁷ See for example *Theological Colleges for the Future*, Church Information Office, London, 1968, the report of a Working Party set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York; C. Moore, A. N. Wilson, G. Stamp, *The Church in Crisis*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

and historical accretions inevitable in churches with a long history) the true nature of what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

b. *From missionaries to Europe from the 'Third'*¹⁸ *World*. Third World Christians are almost invariably disillusioned when they p. 45 actually encounter European Christianity: to them, as to their colleagues from Marxist Eastern Europe, Christianity is holistic, it makes its demands on every part of the life of the disciple.

c. *From Eastern Europe*, where it has become clear that Christianity must have relevant comments to make on virtually every subject: on criminal law, on oppression, on bribery, on divorce, on free trade unions and so on. The Christianity of Eastern Europe is *not* irrelevant.

3. The problem of materialism

The world of Islam has criticized Western society in general for being irreligious, materialistic, humanistic, and without community. In measure these accusations must also be seen as directed against the church in Europe. Our Christianity, other than on Sunday, is almost invisible, where the Muslim is almost ostentatious in his display of his religion. And we are materialistic: the contemporary success of Prosperity Theology, open in the teaching of Kenneth Copeland and T. L. Osborn, implicit in the ministry of Reinhard Bonnke, and proclaimed to large congregations in London and Stockholm, bears witness to the success of the surrounding culture in penetrating the church.¹⁹ There is a need, here, for theological reflection: not so as to produce a theology of suffering for the sake of suffering, but so as properly to understand the extent to which the Christian is to expect to share in the ills of the world, and the extent to which his faith delivers him from them. Material, physical and spiritual prosperity are currently being offered in many churches as a guaranteed return for faith. Tragically many are abandoning their faith because it is clearly inadequate to the contract offered.

4. The problem of fragmentation

This problem is particularly associated with France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. In each of these countries a multitude of small groups is at work, but there are no leaders strong enough to claim the support of the whole. Missionaries sent in to France from America and Britain often operate in splendid isolation from existing churches. Jean p. 46 Lukasse speaks of missionaries being, as it were, 'parachuted' into Europe, often quite unaware of existing mission activity and unwilling even to seek help in language study.²⁰ The inevitable consequence of these activities is frustration for the missionary who retires from Europe after only a few years, leaving behind at best an embattled and leaderless congregation.

We desperately need a doctrine of the Church which will tell us from a biblical, and not merely from a historical, point of view, what the boundaries of evangelical association are. In particular guidance is needed with respect to the Roman Catholic Church, again

¹⁸ There is at least this to be said in favour of the alternative term 'Two-thirds World' that it reminds us of the numerical priority of this part of our world.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Fort Worth, Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974, on the one hand, and on the other, Jacques Ellul, *L'Homme et l'Argent*, Lausanne, Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1979 (English translation, *Money and Power*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1986).

²⁰ See Monica Hill (ed.), *How to plant Churches*, London, MARC Europe and British Church Growth Association, p. 91.

guidance that is more than a mere recapitulation of history, more than a reputation of outworn slogans.

Here particular attention is drawn to David Edwards' very important book *The Futures of Christianity*,²¹ especially Chapter Six, 'in Secular Europe'. Europe's malaise is so great that we cannot be expected to be taken seriously when our energies are dissipated in attacking one another.

5. The problem of pluralism

Two quite distinct problems must be recognized here: the problem posed by the macro-presence of Islam in Europe, and the problem of the more general phenomenon of eastern mysticism appearing actually *within* Christianity. On the former problem a vigorous debate has been taking place for half a century and the relevant literature is abundant.²²

However, it may well be that the second is the greater problem, since Islam is, at least, clearly *external* to Christianity. In an important new book Allan Brockway and Paul Rajashekhar deal with the multitude of New Religious Movements, and demonstrate a common origin in eastern mysticism, especially Hinduism and Buddhism.²³ But the significance of these movements is that they occur within Christianity, and represent a new option, Christianity *plus*. New p. 47 techniques are offered which relate directly to the contemporary demand for so-called 'counselling'. These techniques in turn build on theories of the nature of humanity which are highly speculative, subjective, and unrelated to any biblical doctrine of the human personality. There is much to be done by evangelical theologians in developing that biblical doctrine so as to protect believers from the sheer manipulation of many contemporary counselors.

6. The problem of the occult world

We have noted the growth of the occult influence in France, but there is no doubt of a growth throughout Europe. There appears to be a new strategy on the part of the Second Kingdom, a strategy of open challenge to Christianity. The new developments are an indication of a fresh interest amongst the peoples of Europe in the world beyond this world, in existence after death. Many of the leaders in the occult world are women, and Professor Ian Lewis has hinted at the possibility that where women are excluded from the main stream of spiritual leadership in a society it is very likely that there will be a compensating leadership in, say, spiritism.²⁴ This could direct attention to the current discussions on the ordination of women, and to the need for a biblical re-appraisal of ordination. Michael Green was surely wrong when he said:

When we talk of the Christian ministry today, we instinctively think of a man ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments: you either are a minister or you are not. The New Testament knows nothing of any such distinction.²⁵

²¹ London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987.

²² See, for example, Paul Knitter, *No other Name?*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1985, and the excellent work by Gavin d'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986. Both of these have valuable guides to further reading.

²³ *New Religious Movements and the Churches*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1987.

²⁴ *Religion in Context*, Cambridge, CUP, 1986, p. 27.

²⁵ *Obedying Christ in a Changing World*, London, Church Information Office, 1968, vol. 3, p. 69.

There is a clear biblical doctrine of laying hands as a sign of separation for specific ministry, but there is less clarity in the evangelical understanding of it.

In the matter of the occult, however, we need an understanding of the limitations of the power of the Second Kingdom, and we also need a doctrine to express the measure in which the Church has authority to withstand that power. The current practice of 'binding' that power (and even more the 'releasing' of the Spirit) raises many questions which demand biblical, and not merely pragmatic and existential, answers. [p. 48](#)

The issues raised in this paper are so great that we cannot reasonably expect any comprehensive response to emerge within the time scale of our conference. But a start may be made, and it may be that some way might be found so that the churches could be helped forward through these crucial times. [p. 49](#)

The Future of Australia's Evangelical Heritage

David Parker

Evangelical Protestantism as it was founded in Australia in the middle part of the 19th. century produced good results in a remarkably short time. Despite the notoriously degraded nature of the society in the days of the penal colony and the low level of church affiliation, by the end of the century, most of the country's 3.7 million citizens were at least nominal Christians (96.5% by the census figures), churches and denominations were firmly established across the entire continent and Protestantism was recognized as broadly evangelical, although, even then, there were signs of changes to come.

To jump a few decades to the middle of the 20th. century, despite widespread secularization of society at large, evangelical Christianity still seems to be thriving with scores of organizations, many church buildings, colleges, missionary bodies and evangelistic groups. Admittedly, it did not share the same prosperity and popularity on a national scale as evangelicalism in the United States, and it had no history of large-scale awakenings which had shaped the culture of the country, but it was still an impressive result. All the same, by the time of the bi-centenary, some leaders spoke of the apocalypse of secular humanism while others, perhaps surprisingly, have gone on as seeing signs of a coming nation-wide revival.

There is no doubt that, in the 1880s, when the churches were firmly established, Protestantism was at the height of its power as a social force. It was also strongly evangelical in character, clearly aware of its own nature and universally recognized as such. But 'evangelical' is a notoriously slippery term, especially in the hands of the secular media and others who do not understand it! It may mean evangelistic, reformed, fundamentalist, revivalist, neo-evangelical, Protestant, wowserish, a 'Bible basher' or just simply someone who reads the Bible for inspiration and guidance. It is time to look at this term more closely in the context of Australia's Protestant heritage and to try to define its local form.

In the first place, Australian Protestantism is evangelical because it has formal *historical links* with the 18th. century evangelical revival through the Anglican church and