

God's Mission or Ours?

East Window, February 1999

The 'Decade of Evangelism' is drawing to a close and so it is timely to evaluate what impact it has had upon us, as we have sought together to become more 'Missionary Congregations' than in the past. As I journey from parish to parish I have to rejoice to see so much progress. There seems to have been a "mind-set" change. Rarely now do I encounter a hesitancy to accept that we live in missionary times. Very few parishes are content any longer to have a Church which is merely an inward-looking club for people who like religion as a Sunday hobby-outing. We recognise now that we are a people with a mission. We cannot yet claim that all our congregations are achieving what they would wish for in their mission, but we do know that there is a job for us to do 'out there'. Yes, we thank God for the Decade of Evangelism.

But in precisely what sort of mission should we be engaging? A sure answer can be found if we concentrate our attention on what sort of mission it is in which God engages.

For God's Mission has been to create our world and then to have an intimate relationship with it, relating especially to all those endeavours of our lives which seek to care for creation. Therefore God is concerned about our political decisions and how we make them. He is obviously interested too in how we run our economy, use the natural resources of the earth, how we create our cultural norms and ways of life. All these, his concerns, are precious elements of his overall mission to care for the world he has made, and there is vast biblical witness to show that this is the case.

And God bids us, who are made in his image, to play our part in all these elements of our life together, so that our concerns become his concerns - and that we join him in *his* mission.

The Church however, sometimes gives the impression that the only things it is interested in are very Churchy concerns - whether we worship this way or that, whether we have clergy enough and whether we have enough members to keep the show on the road. The beautiful truth however is that the Church - and by that I mean all the Christian people themselves - are "at large" in God's world, with the lay people of our congregations located in all the places of God's Mission of care for the world - in shops and schools, factories and offices, government and social welfare, in the homes of our nation, and so on. These are not Churchy issues, but the stuff of the life of the world God has made. Sunday worship and Church life should therefore inspire and alert all Christians to their responsibilities out there in God's world, and teach them how to be involved in God's Mission of care and justice in their daily lives, rather than instructing us all in how to do Churchy things. Indeed, if the Church is not helping us to think of God's mission out in the world, and inspiring us with prayer and liturgy to worship God there, then we can expect to be accused of being irrelevant to God's purposes - engaging in our own Churchy mission and not in the Mission which is God's.

+ *Laurie Bradwell*