

'Mission England' - Is it Scriptural?

Malcolm H. Watts

[The following article was published in January 1984 and addressed a particular development at that time but the biblical principles stated and applied here are as relevant today as they were over 25 years ago. MHW]

During the last twenty-five years several attempts have been made to organize national movements of co-operative and ecumenical evangelism. 'Spre-e '73', short for SPiritual RE-Emphasis, was the gathering of thousands of people for a massive training programme, aimed at inspiring and equipping Christians to spread the Gospel. 'Power' was an intensive programme of evangelism for the period from Easter 1974 to Easter 1975 which had as its slogan 'Together we can change things.' In 1976, the year after the two Anglican Archbishops had issued the 'Call to the Nation', Dr Coggan, then Archbishop of Canterbury, convened a meeting for 'all who were seeking a way forward in evangelism on a national scale.' As a result of this meeting, the 'Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism' (NIE) was born.

A news-sheet prepared by the Board for Mission and Unity reported that 'all the major Christian Churches – the members of the British Council of Churches, the Evangelical Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church – have set up the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism to stimulate and encourage effective evangelism throughout Britain.' Altogether the following churches and organizations were involved: Anglican, Afro-West Indian, Baptist, British Council of Churches, Congregational, Evangelical Alliance, Methodist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and United Reformed. It was claimed at the time that 'such a breadth of Christian support for positive evangelism is without precedent in the history of the Nation.' A Council of Reference was formed in 1978 representing most of the denominations and groupings mentioned, including the British Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The Council then appointed an Initiative Committee for England under the chairmanship of the Rev. Donald English. Its members also were chosen to ensure an ecumenical approach to evangelism. In January 1979 the dedication service of the NIE was held at the chapel of Lambeth Palace and leaders of Churches involved were present, including the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

It was in this same year that the Evangelical Alliance called for a 'Decade of Evangelism' and a national plan for the enterprise was publicly outlined. From the start it was made clear that Decade of Evangelism was part of the NIE. 'Idea', the Quarterly Broadsheet of the Evangelical Alliance, stated: 'The EA Decade of Evangelism is a contribution to the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism, and both Clifford Hill and EA general secretary Gordon Landreth have given time during the year as consultants to the Initiative Committee, on which the EA appointed members are Sylvia-Mary Alison, Roger Foster, Gavin Reid and Tom Houston.' This identification with NIE was confirmed by advertising literature which said that it was being 'sponsored by the Evangelism and Church Growth Unit of the Evangelical Alliance as part of the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism.' This Decade of Evangelism was launched in the Spring of 1980 at a National Congress of Evangelism held at Prestatyn, North Wales, Dick Lucas being the main speaker.

'Mission England' is one of the projects belonging to Decade of Evangelism. In a Mission England press statement, Dr Graham alluded to this and said 'they are trying to extend this across the decade.'

The original idea was conceived by a group of individuals associated with the Evangelical Alliance. According to Clive Calver, General Secretary of the EA, 'the idea was to encourage

local churches to three years of mission, with Billy Graham coming in the middle of that period to give a national focus and awakening of interest among non-Christians in the Christian message.’ Apparently Dr Graham rejected initial invitations but when Clive Calver, Brian Mills and Gavin Reid visited him in Nice, he agreed to conduct five regional missions in 1984, in the North East, North West, the Midlands, the South West and East Anglia.

Mission England began under the direction of Gavin Reid (Church Pastoral Aid Society), Brian Mills (Evangelical Alliance), Eddie Gibbs (Bible Society) and Clive Calver (Evangelical Alliance). A Federal Council has been formed to oversee affairs and this consists of representatives from the various regions.

The programme, which leads to the Billy Graham Missions in 1984, includes: *Training Courses* for church leaders entitled ‘Is my church worth joining?’ and ‘Caring for new Christians’; *Retreats* with emphasis on the need for ‘effective ministry’ and ‘personal renewal’; *Prayer and Praise Nights* for ‘celebration’ and ‘worship’; *Triplet Prayer Groups* in which three professing Christians meet together, each to pray for three friends or relatives; *Nurture Groups*, which are in process of being set up, and which are designed at providing care for ‘enquirers’ and ‘professing converts.’

Future plans include *Christian Life and Witness Classes*, a five-session training programme (Feb. 1984), designed to provide counsellors for the stadium meetings; and a major *Conference*, to be held at Brean Sands holiday camp to ‘encourage and sustain revival’ (Oct. 1984).

A Basic Principle: ‘God’s work done in God’s way’

Now we believe with all our hearts in evangelism. Reaching souls with the Gospel is so supremely important that Scripture stresses it as the church’s great duty. All Christian believers should accept it as a call from God and intensify their efforts to evangelize the nations. Our Lord and Saviour’s last command summons us to continuous and persistent action until people everywhere hear of that salvation which God has provided in His Son for all who repent and believe the Gospel. By the grace of God we are therefore committed to the work of evangelism.

Mission England, however, is a campaign of evangelism in which we cannot co-operate. Conscience does not allow us to do so because clear scriptural injunctions as to the methods of evangelism are being bypassed, and we can devote ourselves only to true New Testament evangelism, which means ‘God’s work done in God’s way.’

A Basis of Truth Essential

If there is to be any co-operation in evangelism, that evangelism at every point must be based on biblical truth. There, and there alone, can be found the platform upon which fellowship and testimony can be built. It is therefore essential to have a precise declaration of fundamental doctrines accepted by all participating parties. Mission England does not have such a doctrinal statement and no formal assent to the fundamental truths of the Faith is required of those wishing to be involved. ‘We have not adopted a basis of faith’, says Brian Mills, the Assistant National Director.

The Evangelical Alliance, from which the original initiative emerged, does have a Basis of Faith, but in the development of Mission England there has been no insistence on commitment to it and the result has been an increasing tendency to seek a co-operation destitute of theological agreement.

Eddie Gibbs, the National Training Director, tells me that ‘Mission England is an evangelical initiative with all those of us on the Federal Board able to sign the Lausanne Covenant.’ This Lausanne Covenant is a document expressing a consensus of the mind of the International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, and attended by

approximately 4,000 professing Christians, representing 151 countries. In some ways it is a helpful document, including in it a number of important evangelical doctrines; but it is not a very satisfactory basis because of its rather alarming omissions, including a complete lack of testimony to justification by faith alone.

There is no reference in it to the fact of the Fall (merely the statement that ‘men are perishing because of sin’). It has nothing to say about a personal devil (it speaks of ‘principalities and powers of evil’). It does not mention the Virgin Birth (our Lord is simply described as ‘the only God-man’). It is completely silent on the matter of Christ’s sinless humanity. It does not clearly affirm substitutionary atonement (‘He gave himself as the ransom for sinners’ can be understood in a non-substitutionary sense: ‘it cost the life of Jesus Christ to bring us home to God.’ William Barclay). It fails to assert justification by faith alone (that doctrine is neither properly defined nor sufficiently stressed. All the Covenant affirms is the need for ‘the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith.’ Romanists will find that acceptable. The Council of Trent speaks of being ‘justified by faith’ but ‘on this account, that faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification.’ Sess. VI. On Justification, ch. viii. What therefore ought to be asserted is the biblical and Protestant doctrine which, according to Rome’s Tridentine Statement, she not only denies but utterly repudiates: namely, that ‘justifying faith is nothing but confidence in the divine mercy remitting sin on account of Christ’ and that ‘this faith *alone* is that by which we are justified.’ Ch. x. It is at this vital point that the Lausanne Covenant is inexcusably vague. In 1531 Luther said: ‘I see that the devil is continually attacking this fundamental doctrine... Well, then, I, Doctor Martin Luther, unworthy herald of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, confess this article, that faith *alone* justifies before God; and I declare that it will stand and remain for ever.’) And it nowhere avers the everlasting punishment of the wicked (‘eternal separation from God’ fails to safeguard biblical truth and to exclude the error of Conditional Immortality).

Clearly, the Lausanne statement is quite inadequate, but whether this be so or not is quite beside the point because, after stating that the members of the Federal Board are able to sign this Covenant, Mr Gibbs goes on to say: ‘In fact we have not required the signing of the document as we trust one another as brothers in the Lord.’ But surely this is to be naïve. If there is no insistence on a formal and signed declaration of belief, there can be no reasonable guarantee of orthodoxy even on the Federal Board.

It is claimed that thousands of Christians in their local churches are already involved in Mission England, but what steps have been taken to ensure that these are faithful to the essentials of the Faith? No subscription to a doctrinal standard is required from any of them. Whoever wants to join in appears to be welcome. Mr Mills writes: ‘Mission England is an evangelical initiative which is offered to all who may wish to associate with it.’ As far as I can ascertain, there are just two safeguards and these are mentioned by Mr Gibbs: (i) ‘Anybody from a Trinitarian church professing Jesus Christ as Lord is welcome to participate.’ This is desperately inadequate. It ignores distinctive evangelical truth and leaves the door wide open to all except the Unitarians! It is similar to the formula of agreement for the World Council of Churches: ‘The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ (ii) ‘Any who can identify with the evangelistic message preached by Dr Graham and are in sympathy with the objectives are welcome to participate.’ But Dr Graham’s ‘evangelistic message’ does not spell out in any detail, or with any preciseness, the vital doctrines of the historic Christian Faith. Consequently some past and present churchmen and theologians with heterodox views have felt quite able to ‘identify’ with his preaching: Dr A. M. Ramsey, Dr Leslie Weatherhead, Bishop James Pike, Cardinal Cushing, Norman Vincent Peale, Bishop Hugh Montefiore and Pope John Paul II, and this is to name but a few.

Obviously this is no touchstone whereby the Faith of churches or individuals can be judged. As for 'sympathy with objectives', Gavin Reid says that 'Mission England has as a basic aim making a quality improvement in the continuing evangelism of our churches.' The generality will probably think that a good idea. Once again, there is nothing here to ensure the evangelical character of Mission England.

The Scriptures tell us that soundness of doctrine is important (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1-2). Co-operation can only take place within the framework of sound doctrine, clearly defined (Amos 3:3; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3; 2 John. 1). Bible-believing Christians are not at liberty to unite in evangelistic ventures with those who deny or oppose important Christian doctrines. The Word of God forbids it (Romans. 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:20-21; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10).

Ecumenism

Mission England is a venture in ecumenical evangelism. Its advertising literature extends the broadest of invitations: 'Mission England does include you! If you wish your church to become involved in this exciting project, please drop a line to...' (Leadership No. 3). Evidently Mission England's approach is inclusivist and anti-separationist. The object is to bring all together in one grand evangelistic effort. A 'mixed multitude', therefore, ecclesiastically and theologically, will be involved in support. What is this if not ecumenical?

The organizers deny it, but their denials are somewhat qualified. Clive Calver underlines the fact that 'Mission England was conceived as a totally evangelical initiative.' This, in itself, suggests that it was evangelical only in the origination. He goes on, however, to say: 'It was not seen *primarily* as an ecumenical activity in any sense at all.' (Italics mine) That speaks for itself. 'The project', according to Eddie Gibbs, 'is not "ecumenical" in the sense of being a consortium of church hierarchies.' In this very narrow and restricted sense, this is no doubt true; but clearly it is ecumenical, as that word is generally understood, because in it professed Christians of all religious shades will be working together.

Evidence for this is not wanting. I will give just two examples. The new Archbishop of York, John Habgood, addressed a meeting last October at Durham 'under the Mission England banner.' In January, Bishop John Baker is to give the 'Call to Mission' and head a question-and-answer session for Mission England Salisbury Area. Now neither of these men, so far as I am aware, would describe himself as evangelical, but here they are, actively engaged in the work of Mission England. Is this not evangelism of a very ecumenical brand?

The 'Church of England Newspaper' of April 15th, 1983, carried an article written by John Williamson, Regional Co-ordinator for Mission England in the North West, entitled 'Mission England ... why now?' In it he revealed the ecumenical nature of Mission England. He wrote: 'We have seen the recent failure of efforts to bring major denominations into structural unity. The world usually sees the church divided and arguing with itself, but could not evangelism give us a unique opportunity to present positively and powerfully One Lord and One Faith?' He went on to say: 'Mission England is not and must not be limited to support from evangelical churches.' His article concluded with an impassioned plea to the general readership: 'I would like to urge ministers to participate – ministers hold the key, and without the evident support of the minister, individuals are unlikely to make much impact – and I urge them, regardless of denomination or tradition or churchmanship... May I commend Mission England to all who read this – come and help us.'

It is undoubtedly ecumenical and, what is more, it is likely to condition some evangelicals for the acceptance of the ecumenical movement. In a Newsletter sent out by the North-East Committee of Mission England, the Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt. Rev. Kenneth Gill, Chairman of Mission England North-East, referred to tensions arising over doctrinal differences but, he added, 'one spin off is a deepening Christian unity.'

We believe that ecumenism, involving as it does the recognition of unbiblical and non-evangelical churches, is nothing more than a denial of the New Testament Gospel and the betrayal of the Protestant Reformation. What is needed today is not concession and compromise for the sake of superficial unity, but the exposure of false doctrine and the fearless declaration of 'the whole counsel of God.' (Matthew 23; Mk. 7:9; Acts 20:27; Galatians 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Jude 3).

Liberals and Roman Catholics

In the bulletin 'Leadership', for June 1983, appears a photograph of Hugh Montefiore, Bishop of Birmingham, and underneath, a quotation from his Diocesan news-sheet: 'I think we all need a bit of a jolt if we are to have a new spirit in this secular land of ours... I would like to commend Mission England to the parishes of Birmingham diocese, and I hope that everyone will take the opportunity which it presents to deepen their faith and to share it with others.' The Bishop is also quoted as promising to give his personal backing to Billy Graham. 'I will support him', he says.

Over the years Bishop Montefiore has achieved notoriety on account of his heretical public statements, perhaps the very worst being in 1967 when, in an address to the Modern Churchman's Conference in Oxford, he made a blasphemous and highly offensive suggestion concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. More recently (February, 1983), addressing clergy in Stepney, he expressed his view that salvation could be found outside Christianity. His remarks stirred a controversy. He later defended what he had said and spoke further on the subject. 'The hidden Christ', he said, 'may be known by those who cannot name him.' He then asserted that Jews could be saved without actually becoming Christians. To avoid all possibility of misunderstanding or misrepresentation, I will quote a part of the Bishop's comment: 'I do not believe that salvation is denied to my dear father [he was Jewish] who truly loved God. (Do you believe that?) I will always remember talking to a Jewish student society and their amazement and interest when I told them they were not consigned to Hell, as their zealous Christian fellow students had informed them.' It is profoundly disturbing to know that a churchman with such views is participating in Mission England, but it is even more disturbing to see that he and his comments are being used for advertising and promotional purposes. It is a grave error to admit the testimony and support of such men. Christ will suffer no patronage from those whose deny the truth (Mark 1:24-25; 3:11-12; Acts 16:16-18).

On the matter of Roman Catholic participation, Brian Mills writes: 'There are no attempts made to involve the Roman Catholic Church as such with Mission England in the evangelizing of the nation. However, *if individual Roman Catholics wish to participate in prayer and in training*, and if Roman Catholic churches want to encourage their members to attend Mission England events, including the Billy Graham meetings, *they are at liberty to do so.*' (Italics mine) According to a report by The British Council of Protestant Christian Churches, Bishop David Sheppard of Liverpool has already attended preparatory meetings for Mission England in the company of the Roman Catholic Archbishop.

Again, this is alarming. The dispute between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is not about trifles. The Gospel itself is at stake. There are two entirely different answers to the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' – Rome's and the Bible's. It is as ridiculous as it is dangerous to contemplate evangelizing with Roman Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church.

Let us not be deceived by the friendly gestures and addresses of the present Pope. The man is a convinced traditionalist and he is determined to maintain all the errors and superstitions of the corrupt Roman system.

As soon as he took office he proclaimed Papal Supremacy in no uncertain terms. 'Today', he said, 'the new Bishop of Rome solemnly begins his ministry and the mission of Peter... Rome is the See of Peter... And how could one not tremble before the universal mission of his See of Rome?' Since that time he has not only persistently made such claims but he has even elevated this false dogma to a position alongside the Gospel itself. Addressing the South American bishops on Christian Unity, he said: 'It is unity around the Gospel, the body and blood of the Lord, and Peter living in his successors, all of which are different signs, but highly important signs of the presence of Jesus among us.'

He has given personal and powerful impetus to the cult of Mary, making pilgrimages in her honour and repeatedly paying to her idolatrous veneration and worship. In a Papal encyclical he described her as 'the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Church.' 'By entrusting yourself to Mary', he has said, 'you receive Christ.' He is doing all he can to encourage Mariolatry or creature-worship, and the result is neither more nor less than 'baptized' paganism.

He has also set his seal to the false Romish doctrine of the sacraments. Speaking in Westminster Cathedral, he asserted that 'in baptism we are drawn into the community of faith. We become part of the pilgrim people of God.' And in his encyclical on 'The Holy Eucharist' he reasserted the dogma of Transubstantiation, insisting that the bread and wine 'become truly, really and substantially Christ's own body that is given up and his blood that is shed.'

This is Romanism; surely the worst of all apostasies. To associate with it in evangelism is to sacrifice every biblical principle and to incur the guilt of blatant disobedience to the Word of God.

Entertainment

There has been a marked tendency in recent years to combine both evangelism and worship with entertainment. Musicals and dramatic presentations have become acceptable to many in the modern church and they are being introduced increasingly as important parts of the church's programme.

Certainly this seems to be the case with Mission England.

Last spring, as an introduction to the venture, 'Prepare the Way' was staged in approximately forty major cities. It was advertised as 'a combination of worship and prayer, drama designed to illustrate the possibilities of personal, conversational evangelism, together with the clear preaching of the word.' There was a follow-up to this in the autumn, at least in some places, called 'Here is your God!'

'Something to Celebrate' was part of a four-day project held early last year in Norfolk and led by Gavin Reid, Mission England's National Director. According to the report given, Gavin Reid 'headed-up an all-Norfolk team of talented musicians and actors. And a dance-drama group from a local school took part in the final meeting at Norwich Cathedral.'

Bristol also had a week of 'evangelistic preaching, drama and music', followed by a music festival.' On the Isle of Wight there was a presentation of 'Toymaker & Son', 'the gospel story... outlined in colour and movement.' Elsewhere 'the professional dramatists "Straight-forward"' have appeared, along with nationally known musicians.

Now this may be typical modern evangelism and typical modern worship, but we are bound to ask: Is it biblical? With Scripture in our hands we can only answer, 'Emphatically not!'

Scripture alone must govern the church. Christians are not at liberty to introduce into matters of worship and evangelism anything for which they cannot produce express warrant in the Word of God (Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:6). 'It is not a property of the church', as Calvin once wrote, 'to disregard the limits of the Word of God.'

Some, of course, would claim that they have scriptural authority for these things. They would appeal to the worship of the ancient Jewish church, with its musical instruments and its meaningful ritual. The argument will not hold. The ceremonial worship of the Old Testament, designed to symbolize and teach certain spiritual truths, has been fulfilled and abolished in Christ; and it therefore provides no model for the Christian church today (Acts 15:10; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:13; 9:10). New Testament revelation, in which the symbolic and material has given place to the spiritual (John 4:23-24), is the God-given rule for New Testament church practice (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:1-2; 14:37). Musical celebrations and theatrical productions are nowhere authorized by God in the New Testament and they ought not to be used in the church's service. 'There is no middle ground', says Professor Girardeau, 'between submission to God's revealed will and a worship dictated by the fancies of sinners.'

Billy Graham

Dr Graham, who has preached in person to well over eighty million people, has been undoubtedly used of God to bring thousands of them to Christ. This naturally makes us reluctant to express disquiet and criticism, but a man's success should never blind us to his mistaken policies, neither should it silence us when protest and reproof are needed. The apostle Peter was incredibly blessed by the Lord in the days of the early church, but when, through compromise, he ran counter to the truth of the Gospel and thereby threatened the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul 'withstood (opposed) him to the face, because he was to be blamed.' (Galatians 2:11; cf. Leviticus 19:17; 1 Timothy 5:19-20; 2 Timothy 4:2-3).

The fact is that over the years Dr Graham has changed his position.

In 1951 he said: 'We do not condone nor have fellowship with any form of modernism' (reported in 'The Northwestern Pilot'). The following year, in a letter to Dr Bob Jones, Senior, he was able to say: 'The modernists do not support us anywhere.' This is not the case now. Dr Graham's present position is stated by him in an open letter. 'I do not believe', he says, 'that the ground of our fellowship is to be the inerrancy of Scripture but, rather, the ground of our fellowship is to be the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ... While holding a firm theological position, yet in the proclamation of the gospel there is flexibility of fellowship.' Now it is our unyielding conviction that the basis for fellowship must be an explicit commitment to the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. It is this alone which ensures the integrity of united witness to our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Clearly Dr Graham is willing to associate with non-evangelicals (Modernists and Romanists) in his evangelism. In an interview with the editors of 'Christianity Today' in July 1981, he confirmed that this was so. He said: 'I have no problems working with anyone, under any label, as long as he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and is living the life of a Christian disciple.' This may sound fine but it actually allows those who deny vital biblical doctrines to co-operate with him in evangelism.

This is exactly what has happened. He has allowed himself to be sponsored by, and he has willingly worked with such convinced and unrepentant Modernists as Dr G. F. Fisher, Bishop Mervyn Stockwood, Dr John Sutherland Bonnell, Bishop James Pike, Henry van Dusen, Bishop Gerald Kennedy, Dr Robert Schuller, and a host of others.

His increasing involvement with Roman Catholicism must also be a major concern to evangelical Protestants. In October 1979 he appeared on the Phil Donahue Show and said: 'I think the American people are looking for a leader, a moral and spiritual leader that believes something. And he (the Pope) does. He didn't mince words on a single subject. As a matter of fact, his subject in Boston was really an evangelistic address in which he asked the people to come to Christ, to give their lives to Christ. I said, "Thank God I've got somebody to quote now with some real authority."' In the 'Christianity Today' interview, referred to above, he

mentioned that while at the Vatican he had attended a Roman Catholic vesper service. This he described as 'very inspirational and Christocentric.' Is it any wonder that the Roman Church is prepared to back him? 'A great part of our support today', he says, 'comes from Catholics.' (A press conference during his crusade in San Antonio.) 'The Catholic Voice' for May 4th 1972 reported Dr Graham as saying: 'I think it's wonderful for Catholics to come in and get involved in evangelism.'

What is even more alarming is Dr Graham's practice of encouraging Roman Catholic enquirers to remain within the apostate Roman Church.

When the Pope decided that St. Christopher was no longer a 'saint', a confused Romanist wrote to Dr Graham expressing his concern over the fact that 'many of the old confidences are being shaken' and he asked the Evangelist: 'Where will it all stop?' Dr Graham replied to him through the 'Billy Graham Answers' column of the Chattanooga Free Press, and said: 'Your church is going through turbulence which both lay and clergy forces are bringing about... Practices of worship may change, but the sincerity of our devotion need not be altered... Above all, don't pull out of the church! Stay in it, stay close to the Lord, and use these experiences as an opportunity to help your church be what God intends and what the world needs.'

For years now, in the Billy Graham Crusades, the policy has been to refer many professed 'converts' back to the Church of Rome. In 'Faith for the Family' of November, 1982, it was reported that: 'Following the New England Crusade, thousands of those who came forward are now in the process of being integrated into the Catholic Church. Meetings have taken place between the Graham Association and Catholic clergy for the transfer of these people to the Roman Church. One such meeting took place at Pope John XXIII Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts, on the evening of June 9, 1982, when the names of 2,100 inquirers were given to priests and nuns.' After one large Crusade in San Francisco, the Billy Graham Association investigated the results, and of the 1,300 Roman Catholics who had 'come forward' less than one out of twenty had left the Roman Catholic Church.

Modern Evangelicals would do well to consider what Dr Lloyd-Jones has written about the Church of Rome: 'It is indeed a form of antichrist, and it is to be rejected, it is to be denounced; but above all it is to be countered. And there is only one thing that can counter it, ... namely, a biblical, doctrinal Christianity. A Christianity that just preaches "Come to Christ" or "Come to Jesus" cannot stand before Rome for a second. Probably what that will do ultimately will be to add to the numbers belonging to Rome. People who hold evangelistic campaigns and say, "Ah, you Roman Catholics, go back to your church", are denying New Testament teaching. We must warn them.'

The 'Local Church' By-passed

'Evangelism begins and ends in the local church.' So Dr Graham says. His words are quoted approvingly by Paul Berg in the last bulletin I received. The statement is, of course, absolutely biblical (Acts 13:2; 14:26-28; 15:40; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). But is it true of Mission England? Did Mission England begin in the local church? Not at all! I am told that it was 'a private initiative taken by individuals with no official church representation.' The plan was developed in consultation with Dr Graham and the BGEA team. Some time later the concept was shared at five publicly advertised meetings in various parts of the country, as a result of which groups of people joined together, each formally to invite Dr Graham to their region. Then again, does it end in the local church? There must be some doubt even about that. To help those who respond to the evangelism, thousands of 'nurture groups' have been set up. These 'provide a caring group that will understand the needs of new Christians and show them real love.' The implication certainly seems to be that the local church, in and of itself, is quite unable to perform this function. It is therefore by-passed.

Mission England is yet another of those ‘big events’.

‘A great mission’; ‘the largest evangelistic project of the century’; ‘the biggest ever event’; and so the claims continue to be made. Leading Christian personalities have been, or are being, imported: Joni Eareckson, Evelyn Christensen, and Arthur Blessitt, to name but three. The publicity, couched in the most extravagant terms (e.g. ‘The vision for Mission England *is* God-given. The strategy and timing *are* right’; ‘I believe England is on the edge of a spiritual awakening’ – and we seem to have heard that before) is massive and extensive. In the early part of last year, Gavin Reid suggested that the bill for this three-year project ‘could well top a million pounds.’ That might well prove too conservative an estimate.

One well-known evangelist wrote to me and referred to ‘the depressing continuance of the “big event syndrome”, to the detriment of the continuing work of the local church.’ ‘Nothing’, he went on to say, ‘has gained prominence in the “popular” Christian press in recent years except those things organized by central committees embracing broad ecclesiology; the local church seems to have been reduced to the role of ticket agent!’

We believe that if the man-power, enthusiasm and general resources involved in this venture were directed to real biblical church-based evangelism, a great deal could be accomplished in our land. The Bible calls us back to local church evangelism. Let Christians everywhere obey that call. Divine blessing rests upon obedience.

Follow-up in the Nurture Groups

Mission England’s extra-church ‘nurture groups’ present us with further difficulties. In order to have a nurture group in a church, all that is required is for someone from that church to attend the ‘Caring for New Christians’ course, which consists of five 80-minute sessions. Since there is no basis of faith, and since churches of all persuasions are to be involved, it is conceivable that nurture groups will be linked with churches far removed from the evangelical faith. Eddie Gibbs admits this, and says: ‘The nurture groups will be set in participating churches which may include non- evangelical as well as evangelical churches. An enquirer who is not a regular church member will be referred to a participating church near to his home.’

Even though efforts will be made ‘to ensure that the enquirer is located in a church able to provide biblical teaching and personal fellowship’, the fact remains that some and perhaps many enquirers are going to find themselves in non-evangelical churches. To refer them to nurture groups in such churches is surely unscriptural and irresponsible.

In the Great Commission our Lord commanded His people to go and make disciples and baptize them, ‘teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.’ (Matt. 28:20) How is that command to be fully obeyed if new Christians are directed to churches which do not firmly adhere to the historic Christian Faith? We read in Acts that the early ministers of the Gospel exercised a godly and jealous care over new converts, and the possibility we are now considering would to them have been altogether unthinkable (Acts 14:22; 15:30-35, 41; 18:23; cf. Matthew 7:15; 15:14; Galatians 1:6-9).

What of those evangelical churches which, for reasons given in this article, feel unable to identify with Mission England, and so have no nurture groups? Brian Mills says: ‘If the church from which they (the enquirers) come has no nurture group, they will be redirected to the nearest church within their denomination that has a nurture group in operation.’ It is only right to say that the ministers of those churches will be informed, but the fact remains that those evangelical ministers and churches in all other respects will be by-passed.

For our part, we are unable to see how consistent evangelicals can become involved in this venture. Nor can we understand how any can adopt a position of neutrality. Mission England,

sadly, is more than a compromise. It is a wholesale departure from scriptural principles and standards.

In saying this, we do not deny the sincerity or the zeal of those who are involved. Many of them have a genuine and obvious devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ and a fervent desire to see the increase of His church. Such we would love in Christ, even though we must strongly disagree with them. In concluding, therefore, we would emphasize that it is with malice towards none, but because we believe that evangelicals *must* be alerted to the facts, that this article has been written.

The Lord grant us in this nation a mighty spiritual awakening and move His people, as never before, to engage in *true New Testament evangelism*, to the glory of His holy Name!