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# Dr Runcie and the Anglican Evangelical Movement

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*Eryl Davies*

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The cover is attractive, the contents disconcerting and the price expensive! I am referring to *THE UNITY WE SEEK* which was published in 1989 by Darton, Longman and Todd at £7.95 (only 161 pages and paperback). The book is a series of addresses delivered by Dr Robert Runcie and compiled/edited by Margaret Pawley. But not all the chapters deal with unity. In fact, it is the first eight addresses only which are grouped together in the first section under the title *Unity*. Only two of these eight addresses actually touch on unity so the book's title is misleading.

Part Two of the book contains 15 addresses of varying length under the title *Service*. The material here is not particularly significant nor stimulating. However, two of the addresses in Part One on Unity merit attention here.

The first and also longest article is **The Nature of Unity We Seek** (pp 3-21). This address was given by Dr Runcie at the 1988 Lambeth Conference. You may remember that the bishops of the Churches in the Anglican Communion gather at Lambeth every ten years at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss and debate contemporary issues. In his opening address to the 1988 Conference, the Archbishop spoke of unity in three contexts: 1) unity within the Anglican Communion, 2) ecumenical unity among the Churches and 3) the unity of all creation.

What about the unity within the Anglican Communion? The 1988 Lambeth Conference was certainly divided on many key issues and, at times, even the survival of the Anglican Communion itself appeared doubtful. Dr Runcie's advice is neither profound nor biblical but diplomatic and conciliatory. He feels that national/provincial autonomy or 'dispersed authority' is a safeguard. The most profound expression of Anglican unity, according to the Archbishop, is in worship. 'In liturgical worship the Scriptures are proclaimed, the creed is confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, and all is given order through an authorised episcopal ministry' (pp 7-8). Would that the Scriptures were not only read but also preached by all Anglicans and the creeds universally believed! Dr Runcie argues that the creative use of conflict is part of the process of discerning the truth while provincial leadership furthers ecumenical dialogue. But interdependence, not independence, he insists, must be their relationship pattern.

The next section on *Ecumenical Unity Among the Christian Churches* has been more extensively quoted and discussed over the last year or so. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, he responds to ecumenical apathy by stressing the creative ecumenical work done at local level by many Churches. Secondly, he questions the legitimacy of denominational federalism and co-existence. Here, he adds, 'I look forward to a major contribution from Evangelicals because of their unwavering and biblically grounded conviction that there is One Lord and One Faith' (p 13). Thirdly, Dr Runcie regards the historic episcopate as an important instrument of unity and sees for the Pope 'a

new style of Petrine ministry: an ARCIC primacy rather than a papal monarchy' (p 17). This idea arose when Runcie visited Assisi with other leaders of World Religions in October 1986 at the invitation of the Pope. In words which have been used and misused on many occasions since, the Archbishop commented:

Pope John Paul welcomed us, including other Anglican primates present here at this Conference, but then he became, in his own words 'a brother among brothers'. And at the end we all bundled into the same bus and the Pope had to look for a seat (p 17).

This is what Runcie calls a 'presiding in love' for the sake of the unity of the Churches. In the final section, The Unity of All Creation, Robert Runcie touches on global unity and the inter-faith dialogue.

What is more interesting to us is his address entitled **The Anglican Evangelical Movement**. The text is fascinating but the implications are disturbing.

In words which are profoundly accurate, the Archbishop declares, 'since *then* evangelicals have changed'. What is the historical reference here? Well, Dr Runcie observes that the rather fixed boundaries between High Church, Modernist and Evangelicals which existed several decades ago 'are no longer fixed'. Sadly, we agree that this is true. How did it happen? The Archbishop explains: 'The National Evangelical Anglican Celebrations have reflected this change as well as causing it. One thousand attended Keele (April 1967), two thousand came to Nottingham (April 1977), the attendance here at Caister may be something nearer three thousand. It was at Keele that an image was changed...' Dr Runcie suggests that Anglican Evangelicals were affected, like others, by the 'heady excitement following the Second Vatican Council (1962-5)'. He describes the Keele Conference as 'a catalyst of change' (p 44) which reaffirmed the authority of Scripture but was also prepared to challenge 'the most cherished evangelical traditions. John Stott's leadership was crucial... Keele in 1967 was the birth of a new evangelical movement within the Church of England...'

According to Dr Runcie, Keele did two things. First, it affirmed Anglican evangelicalism. 'There had been a tendency for evangelicals in the Church of England to see more in common with those who share similar views in other denominations than with their fellow Anglicans. The establishment of the Church of England Evangelical Council in 1960 marked the beginning of a new identity...' (p 45). Secondly, Keele showed 'a new openness to other traditions... The value of ecumenism, liturgical change, social action and sacramental life were central to the statements that followed those three brief days at Keele...'

The Archbishop next proceeds to criticise the 1977 Nottingham Declaration of Intent for 'a notable absence from the document of any strategic ecclesiological thinking' (p 47). He then used the Pauline imagery of the body of Christ to draw attention to a major eucharistic reference (1 Corinthians 10:16-17) and also the need to avoid division. Finally, Dr Runcie suggests four areas in which evangelicals can make a contribution to ecclesiology.

First, the rediscovery of the '*Church as Sacrament*, expressed in the remarkable resurgence of liturgical scholarship and interest' (p 54); here, some members of the Evangelical Alliance have made a contribution which 'has been significant' (p 55).

Second, their belief in the *Church as Signal to the World of the Word of God* and the way which they take the Bible seriously.' Third, recognition of the *Church as a Society*, a fellowship of believers (p 56) and, fourth, the notion of the *Church as Servant*, involving social concern.

The reviewer's comments are hardly necessary. However, Dr Runcie's reference to the significance of Keele 1967 is accurate. Furthermore, his remarks draw attention again to the importance of the period 1960-1967 for an understanding of evangelical relationships in the late sixties, seventies and eighties. This period also helps to explain the negative response by many Anglican evangelicals to Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' address to the National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966. His address was misunderstood; even worse, it was misrepresented and rejected for reasons which are questionable. This is a vital period in contemporary Church history in Britain. More research needs to be done.

Have we hitherto failed to appreciate the influence of Vatican II on Anglican evangelicals in the mid and late-sixties? Why was the influence of John Stott so dominant? What were the principles and reasons which turned Anglican evangelicals away from their brethren in other Churches in favour of a comprehensivist and ecumenical alliance with those who denied the gospel? Different attitudes are now emerging towards Keele '67 and our Anglican brethren need our prayers and encouragement as they seek to express a biblical ecclesiology which avoids the compromise of past decades and centuries.

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## **Archbishop Robert Runcie and Jewish Evangelism**

The appearance in December 1988 of evangelistic advertisements in the British press from CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO ISRAEL created a heightened awareness by British Jews of other attempts to 'convert' them. At a press conference on 5th January 1989 Jewish leaders said that the Archbishop should 'take appropriate action' against the Church's Ministry Among the Jews and called on him to reconsider his position as the society's patron.

Dr Runcie's spokesman responded by defending the right of Christians to engage in Jewish evangelism. 'Christianity is a missionary religion, whilst Judaism is not', he said. 'The call to make disciples is clear in the New Testament record. The Archbishop, however, does not approve of covert missionary operations but he has not received any firm evidence that the Church's Ministry Among the Jews engages in such covert activity.'

Is such a carefully worded statement full archiepiscopal endorsement for cross-cultural evangelism? The current direction of mainstream Anglican opinion seems to deny this, favouring the open-ended approach of General Synod approved inter-faith dialogue. Perhaps the SPECTATOR'S Michael Trend was not too far wide of the mark when he interpreted the Lambeth statement to mean, 'Christianity and Judaism were, after all, probably different religions: sorry about this — its just one of those things.'

When seeking further elucidation of the Archbishop's views on Jewish evangelism, I was firmly assured by the Lambeth press officer that Dr Runcie's published thought had not progressed beyond the official statement.

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