

Editorial

Upturn?

By all accounts religious interest and attendance at Church services has taken a slow upturn in 1987. Statistics are notoriously hard to come by, and the data they contain are almost impossible to interpret with any real assurance, but the new mood of confidence seems to have been picked up by the secular media, which suggests that there is more to it than the usual wishful thinking from committed churchgoers.

The real question we have to ask ourselves is whether this revived interest will lead people back to the Gospel, or whether it is merely a kind of dabbling in spiritual things which becomes a trend from time to time and then fades away. One encouraging sign of a deeper awareness is the recent publication of two books on the cross — John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* and Alister McGrath's *The Enigma of the Cross*. Both have sold widely and have examined a subject which has been increasingly submerged in recent times. John Stott pointed out in the preface to his book that the cross has not been the subject of a major study for a whole generation, and this at a time of great Evangelical expansion. If this has happened at a time when the heart of our faith has scarcely been mentioned, at least in the publishing world, how great is revival likely to be once we return to essentials?

If that is the result of the 1987 upsurge it will be the beginning of that new era in Church growth which so many have prayed for and prophesied. At the end of the day there is no technique, no system, no plan which can take the place of the straightforward preaching of the Gospel of Christ. This is our evangelistic calling, and it is this which will spread the Kingdom of God and bring new members into His Church. Anything less will be shallow and ephemeral, with little more than marginal media interest working in its favour.

Ministers of the Gospel, whether clerical or lay, need to ask themselves whether the cross of Christ has really been at the heart of their own proclamation of the Gospel. Have I told people that Christ died to pay the price of their sin and rebellion against Him? Have you? Or have we been content to offer the Church as an answer to loneliness, to personal problems of various kinds, or even to the moral dilemmas of our age? The temptation to offer people what they want instead of what they need is a constant one in the Christian ministry, and we must discipline ourselves to resist it.

Churchman

Let us thank God if a revival of interest in Christianity coincides with a revival of faithful and fearless proclamation of the Gospel which lies at its heart and determines its substance. We live in an age when the opportunities as well as the risks of failure are greater than ever before. Let us pray that we may prove to be worthy of our calling in Christ, and that God will reward our labours with the increase that only He can give.

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