

EDITORIAL

This year's General Assembly has remitted to the Panel on Worship (the new designation of the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion) the consideration of the theological and liturgical principles involved in the question of 'Special Sundays' .

There was, a few years ago, an irritating proliferation of 'Special Sundays' devoted to this or that worthy cause. The initiative in their appointment came sometimes from within the Church, which was fair enough, but sometimes also from outside pressure-groups. In the latter case, some were endorsed by the General Assembly, while others were magisterially imposed upon the Church without any prior consultation. Ministers were insultingly inundated with detailed orders of service, even the sermon complete to virtually the last dot and comma, and the media were informed in advance that, for example, such-and-such a day was designated 'BE KIND TO CANARIES SUNDAY' . The better informed among the churchgoing public sat in the pews with an air of eager expectancy, only to experience a bitter disappointment occasioned by the consignment, by their churlish minister, of his precious 'yellow pages' to the wastepaper basket.

In the most recent past sanity has begun to prevail. The General Assembly has endeavoured to retard the rolling bandwagon, and has this year, for example, limited the scope of 'Special Sundays' to five of the major concerns within the Church itself, with the addition of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and 'Christian Lifestyle Sunday' at the start of Christian Aid Week.

But even this limited prescription begs a number of questions which the Panel on Worship should examine. To what extent should the controlling factor which determines the form and content of public worship be our response to God's mighty acts, rather than these acts themselves? To what extent do 'Special Sundays' disrupt the careful balance of the Christian Year, during which, following the discipline of a lectionary, the sensitive preacher will, in any case, and wherever appropriate, direct his people's attention to the ongoing life and mission of the Church? To what extent do 'Special Sundays' arrest the flow of systematic expository ministry, where this method of acknowledging comprehensively the history of salvation, and its implications for the Church's task, is preferred to the weekly following of a lectionary?

Underlying everything is the constant danger that our worship will become 'man-centred' or 'world-controlled', and that the visible and responsive activity of the Church, despite the peppering of our talking about it with liturgical and theological jargon, will become a mere humanitarianism (even humanism), detached completely from its true centre in Christ. Every Sunday should be viewed as a 'Special Sunday', for every Sunday is the LORD'S DAY. When Christ is truly present, as witnessed in the Gospel record, there can be no stopping the kind of serving and caring which is urged upon us by 'Special Sundays'. If it is felt (probably with real justification) that the ongoing work of the Church is often being neglected by preachers and congregations, then the root of the problem must surely be an underlying neglect of Christ Himself - the whole Christ, in response to whom, and in whose strength, the Church engages in all its special tasks.

Let us, therefore, ensure that all our worship, week by week, is Christ-centred, and let us ensure also that we are sufficiently acquainted with the wider work of the Church, so that, whenever appropriate throughout the year, and not simply on artificially manufactured special occasions, we can direct our people to, and lead them intelligently in intercession for, the work that Christ is seeking to do in and through us in His world. But we must never forget the true Object of worship, without whom all our life and activity can have no Christian significance.

The Editor is once again deeply indebted to Sir Ronald Johnson (newly elected to the Society Council) for his meticulous proof-reading of the typescript of THE RECORD.

The third issue this year, of which much of the material is already assembled, will contain inter alia a paper by the Rev S D Rogerson on 'THE USE OF SILENCE' a FAMILY SERVICE FOR PLOUGH SUNDAY from the Rev K D F Walker, and a review by David A Stewart of a booklet on 'FAMILY SERVICES'. It is also hoped to include an article on funerals, and another from a leading architect with wide experience of ecclesiastical work. Last, but not least, Sir Ronald Johnson is reviewing Dr Donald Webster's major work: 'OUR HYMN TUNES: THEIR CHOICE AND PERFORMANCE' .

The Editor will be happy to receive material for publication in 1984. Short snippets of news, orders of service, occasional prayers, longer articles, music and hymns - all such will be most welcome.

The 'URGENT CALL TO THE KIRK' is not reflected in this issue, but the Editor, like many in the Society, is one of its warm supporters, and will welcome reactions to it, especially with respect to its liturgical implications.