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Editorial

The Primacy

THE NEWS (released as we go to press) of the elevation of the Archbishop of York, Dr. Donald Coggan, to Canterbury has received a general welcome in the Church of England and beyond its borders. It is no disrespect to Dr. Coggan to say that this welcome is tinged with some disappointment that there is to be only a five year primacy, but it is evident that none of the other 'candidates' (or should they be called 'runners' after Ladbrokes had started laying odds on them?) was yet in a position to command enough general support in the church. Dr. Coggan has contributed to the pages of *The Churchman* on a number of occasions and many of our readers will be pleased that an Evangelical is to occupy the seat of St. Augustine for the first time in over a century. Dr. Coggan's work in Biblical translation, exposition and preaching has indicated the emphases of his ministry, but he has not been a 'party man'.

In 1961, when Dr. Michael Ramsey was elevated from York to Canterbury, both archiepiscopal appointments were announced together in the same week that Dr. Fisher announced his resignation. The point was fairly made that the church was not even given a Sunday on which to pray about the matter. If there is still criticism of the fact of crown appointments, there can be no doubt that full consultations have been held on this occasion. Another feature of the 1961 appointments is supposed to have been Mr. Harold Macmillan's desire to keep a Trollopian balance between a 'high' Archbishop of Canterbury and a 'low' Archbishop of York. Whatever justification there may have been for that, it is to be hoped that no such factors will weigh heavily in the next appointment to York. The major differences in the church today are no longer those connected with ritual. They are much more to do with traditional and radical approaches to theology and to practice. The shortness of Dr. Coggan's time at Canterbury should open the way for the best possible man to fill the vacancy of York,

regardless of background and outlook. The appointments in 1979 may need to be 'balanced' but no one can tell in a fast changing situation what will be the particular balance needed at that time.

It would be ungracious not to pay tribute to the retiring Archbishop whose temperament and gifts are so different from those of Dr. Coggan. He has shown a genuine love for people of all kinds and his ability to read the signs of the times and keep in touch with younger people, together with a deeply rooted faith and devotion, has enabled him to be both something of a prophetic voice and a steadying influence in a time of theological confusion. We wish him well in his retirement.

Some Recent Books

A Theology of Liberation, which is reviewed in an article in this issue, has now been produced in its first British edition (SCM Press, 1974, 323 pp., £2.10). We welcome another volume of John Gunstone's Commentary on the New Lectionary (SPCK, 1974, 232 pp., £1.95). This covers the period from Easter 4 to the Sunday next before Advent, Greater Holy Days and a selection of other festivals. *The New Topical Concordance* (Lutterworth Press, 1974, 280 pp., £2.50) will be a help to Bible students if used with discretion. *Church and School Handbook* (2nd edition, Trade and Technical Press, 1974, 425 pp.) is full of useful information of all kinds ranging from bank loans to public address and communication systems, from burglary prevention to educational cruises.

Modern Theologians

MR. THISELTON'S article is one of a series on modern theologians and what they have to say to Anglicans. In our last issue G. W. Bromiley wrote on Barth and in our next Colin Brown writes on Bultmann. R.E.N.

Talks about Talks

THE inter-church commission, which brought together in the course of its discussion representatives from fifteen different church bodies, managed to complete its work in six months, with three main meetings. The result in terms of the resolutions to be placed before the various authoritative bodies, including our own General Synod, represents a somewhat different approach from previous ecumenical procedures, and is to be welcomed. First of all, it envisages no limited approach to involve only those who might agree fairly quickly on some scheme:

'We call upon the Churches in this land to commit themselves. . . .'
Secondly, it anticipates various kinds of union in the outcome: 'It is expected that from these discussions there will emerge a plan for union between those Churches able so to commit themselves, but these discussions should also explore the possibility of other forms of visible unity. Churches negotiating for union on the basis of such a plan should retain the continuing partnership of those Churches which cannot at that time do so.' Thirdly, it outlines a process by which churches may seek ways of union: by beginning from local areas throughout the country; by 'forwarding commitment to union locally'; by 'assessing the implications of present experience of ecumenical co-operation' (particularly in designated 'areas of ecumenical experiment'); and by 'studying the problems of areas in this country where such co-operation is difficult or does not exist'. To forward this programme, it calls upon the churches who accept the Report and the Resolutions, to agree to share in a commission, by means of representatives, and financial commitment for three years towards secretariat of one or two officers, with supporting staff, who would also work in close contact with appropriate denominational and ecumenical bodies.

The terms of these resolutions will be flexible enough to keep working together within this process almost all the participating churches, although clearly some will proceed more quickly to establish a scheme, or terms, of union than others. 'Other forms of visible union' suggests different options where traditional-type schemes are less serviceable. We may well hear more of 'federal' forms of union, where a commonly recognised conciliar authority brings into close relation churches which continue to operate in terms of their own distinct structures, order and life. The 'Uniat' churches of the Roman Catholic communion indicate the model.

Granted that this report is accepted and the commission set up by the majority of churches involved in these talks, we can have no illusions as to the task it has, if it is to do more than be a fact-finding body, and take to heart its remit of 'forwarding commitment to union locally'. It will need to harness energies and enthusiasms that are already finding Christian united fellowship in simple, informal ways. It will need to stimulate many in the local churches who maintain an ostrich-like indifference to anything outside their own congregational activities. It will need to revive much that has gone stale, or lost interest in the midst of local concerns in other directions. Yet there is still a network to be used, starting with the regional ecumenical groups of church leaders, and from them both to existing, and fresh groups and bodies, to work out the programme. Quite what will happen in some parts of the country where ecumenical encounter is hard to come by remains unsolved, and may well need special care. But that this is the most promising approach so far to the 'Nottingham date' of 1980 is surely to be agreed.

G.J.C.M.