

Editorial Notes.

THE British Council of Churches held its eighth meeting at the beginning of May. Among the many significant matters which came before it, two were of over-riding importance. There was presented to the Council a report on "The Era of Atomic Power" drawn up by a specially appointed Commission, and the resignation of the General Secretary, Dr. A. C. Craig, was announced. All the churches associated with the Council are under a deep debt to Dr. Craig for what the Archbishop of Canterbury called his "unrestrained and devoted service" during the past seven years. The Council has been in its infancy. There has been much uncertainty and suspicion to overcome. One after another of its most widely trusted leaders—Paton, Temple, Elmslie, Garvie—have been removed by death. Dr. Craig has carried a growingly heavy burden with conspicuous courage and self-sacrifice. He returns now to Scotland to be associated with Dr. Macleod in the work of the Iona Community. It will not be easy to replace him and, indeed, the Council cannot yet be said to have grown into a very sturdy child, but he should not be allowed to go without some expression of the gratitude of British Christians—and not least Free Churchmen—for what he has done.

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The Report on "The Era of Atomic Power" (S.C.M. Press, 2/-) is a notable document. The weighty Commission responsible for it (which included Mr. Aubrey) was under the chairmanship of Dr. J. H. Oldham and the impress of his mind is clearly evident in its pages. It sets the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 in the wide setting of the new possibilities for evil and good created by recent scientific discoveries and relates them also to the economic and political issues of modern society. It is more successful in its analysis of the situation than in the definition of what should be the Christian attitude. The document is, we venture to think, either too long or too short, and it seems a pity that so much space is given to what is described as "the irresolvable dilemma" whether Christians can in any circumstances approve the use of atomic weapons. We understand, however, that the members of the Commission are

willing to regard this Report as no more than an interim statement and the British Council has referred it to the constituent bodies that they may make clear their reactions to it. We hope that when it comes before the Baptist Union Council adequate preparation and time will be given to its discussion and that the members will have before them not only this Report but also that of the parallel Commission set up by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.

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The Archbishop of Canterbury was invited to the Jubilee Congress of the Free Church Federal Council held in March last, and delivered a friendly speech which contained some very interesting and important passages. Dr. Fisher invited the leaders of the Free Churches to consider whether they wished to revive the question of reunion as a vital issue so that any proposals they might desire to make could be discussed at the next Lambeth Conference which has been summoned for 1948. According to the *Times*, Dr. Fisher went on to say:—

“Reunion, when it comes, if by God’s grace it does, will be reunion of the Church of England. It will not be reunion with the Church of England by you. I want you to weigh that phrase. It will not be reunion with the Church of England; it will be reunion of the Church of England, for you and I were in origin the Church of England in this country, and in a real sense we still remain the Church of England in this country. When we come together, we become again the Church of England. But now you would come into it with the traditions which you have grown in the period of dislocation, with your own customs, your own methods, and your own style of pulpit oratory. You have also your own hymn tunes and other things that matter in your daily life. Will all these things have to disappear in a reunited Church? I should say heaven forbid. Should the Free Churches lose all power of self-direction and identity with the past? Heaven forbid. I look forward to a time when the Church of England, having been reunited, the Methodists, Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians will, within that reunited Church, still function with an identity of their own much as the different orders function within the Roman Catholic with an identity of their own. The time might come, if reunion came about, when church notices might specify Church of England (Methodist), Church of England (Congregationalist), and even Church of England (C. of E.)”

Free Churchmen have sometimes criticised the Lambeth Conference of 1930, because more attention seemed to be given to

Anglican relations with the Eastern Churches than with the Free Churches. Dr. Fisher's remarks would appear to place on the Free Churches the onus of asking that the question of a reunited English Church appear on the Lambeth agenda in 1948. The Free Church Federal Council will presumably at its next meeting consider what response is to be made to the invitation of the Archbishop. We read with some surprise, therefore, the remarks of the editor in the April issue of *The Free Church Chronicle*, the official monthly bulletin now appearing from the offices of the Free Church Federal Council, since they might appear to be a prejudging of a most delicate issue.

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Surprise grows to astonishment and verges on dismay at more recent developments. A member of the Baptist Historical Society, anxious to equip himself for the discussion on Dr. Fisher's speech which he anticipates will take place, wrote to the offices of the Free Church Federal Council and asked if he could have a copy of exactly what was said. He was informed that the Council authorities had no full text of the speech. He addressed himself therefore to Dr. Fisher. We have the permission of our correspondent and of Dr. Fisher to print the reply :

Lambeth Palace, S.E.

3rd June, 1946.

Dear Mr. X,

I am afraid I cannot let you have a text of what I said to the Free Church Federal Council. I was speaking from notes and, as far as I know, there was no verbatim reporter. But I can give you the substance of it in the following four points :

1. I recalled the history of discussions with representatives of the Free Churches on Reunion from 1920 onwards, saying that I must see where we now stood with a view to the Lambeth Conference of 1948.
2. As an aside, I said, as was reported by the Press, that in a reunited Church there should be the possibility of each uniting body keeping something of its former customs and traditions, some measure of identity with its past and some degree of autonomy.
3. But, I said, before there can be a Reunited Church there must be agreement on certain fundamental principles.
4. I ended by asking whether Free Churchmen really regarded the search for agreement as a live issue worth pursuing or not.

Yours sincerely,
(signed) GEOFFREY CANTUAR.

We notice that at the Convocation of Canterbury held on May 22nd, the Archbishop (according to the *Times*) "took the opportunity to correct a report of a speech to the Free Church Federal Council, which, he said, had caused some misgiving. In that speech he said that 'within the reunited Church there was, as he saw it, no need for rigid uniformity of customs; each reunited Church could bring with it some of its long-established traditions and customs and retain something of its own identity and some measure of self-government. All that seemed reasonable, defensible, and even proper.' At that point the newspaper report ended, and some people had the idea that he had put forward that as a self-sufficient basis for reunion. But his next sentence was: 'Before there can be a reunited Church there must be agreement on certain fundamental principles.' The Archbishop added that he thought this could easily have been inferred from the report."

On July 20th, the Archbishop visited the Methodist Conference and, according to the *Times* report, "recalled that when he recently addressed the Free Church Federal Council he asked them whether Free Churchmen really regarded the search for agreement as a live issue worth pursuing. To that he had received no answer so far, except from one man who had described it as 'a phantom, or a mirage.' It made a considerable difference to him to know what was the answer."

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On these quotations we would make, at the moment, only the briefest comment. Surely the time has passed when pronouncements of this kind should be made from notes; when meetings of the Free Church Federal Council should be held without a verbatim report of the proceedings; when officials should comment on proposals before they have been discussed. Such things can lead only to misunderstanding, frustration and suspicion. We venture also to ask one question. What, on the lips of the present Archbishop, is meant by the phrase "agreement on certain fundamental principles?"