

Editorial

SINCE the appearance of our last issue the announcement has been made of Dr. Geoffrey Fisher's resignation from the Archbishopric of Canterbury and of the nomination of Dr. A. M. Ramsey to succeed him as Primate of All England. Dr. Ramsey's successor at York is to be Dr. F. D. Coggan, the present Bishop of Bradford. We take this opportunity of wishing Dr. Fisher God's blessing during the years of his retirement, and we warmly welcome Dr. Ramsey and Dr. Coggan to the historic thrones of Canterbury and York, praying that God will be with them, giving them grace and strength for the arduous offices which they have been called to fill, and granting them wisdom and courage to lead our Church in the way of scriptural religion. We are convinced that Dr. Ramsey has left behind him the frame of mind which, some years ago, led him to make the unhappy application of the name of heresy to certain distinctive Evangelical tenets, and that Evangelicals may look with assurance to him for understanding and co-operation.

To Evangelicals, the appointment of Dr. Coggan to the Archbishopric of York is, of course, particularly gratifying, for in him they have one who has always been closely identified with Evangelical religion and who can be expected to give condign prominence to the great Evangelical emphases which at times have suffered a lamentable neglect in the leadership of the Church of England. We may depend on him to call attention to the urgent need for biblical preaching and evangelism in the parishes of our land. It is cause for thanksgiving, too, that the two new Archbishops of Canterbury and York are men of theological scholarship and learning: may they be active in raising our Church out of the morass of relativism, non-propositionalism, and compromise with unregenerate modes of thought into which it has, in large measure, sunk! When our Church returns to the unhesitating acknowledgment of the absolute sovereignty of Almighty God, the all-sufficiency of divine grace, the sole mediatorship of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the complete authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God to fallen man, then it will become a powerful spiritual force in our nation and in our world once again. It is in this direction that we look to our leaders to guide us.

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In America, where this Editorial is being written, strong interest has been aroused by the proposal, made in December by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., in a sermon preached from the pulpit of Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco, that the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Church of Christ, plus any other churches that might fancy the idea, should formulate "a plan of church union both catholic and reformed". What he presumed to describe as "the chasm of the Reformation" would, he suggested,

begin to be bridged over when those who, like himself, were of the reformation tradition, recaptured "an appreciation of all that has been preserved by the catholic parts of the Church" and those who were of the catholic tradition were willing "to accept and take to themselves as of God all that nearly 500 years of reformation has contributed to the renewal of Christ's Church". He explained that by "catholic" he meant, not Roman Catholic, but Anglo-Catholic or high church. The union he proposed for the present would give promise of much wider union, "looking ultimately to the reunion of the whole of Christ's Church".

Dr. Blake defined three principles of reunion that were important to those who belong to the "catholic" tradition. (1) "Visible and historical continuity with the Church of all ages before and after the Reformation". This would be achieved under the symbol of the historic episcopate and would involve, it seems, a sort of general re-ordination of the whole ministry of the uniting churches. It is added that this proposal "implies no questioning of the reality of any previous consecration or ordination". Presumably, if this policy were to be consistently observed, a fresh general re-ordination would have to take place on every occasion that a new church joined those that had already been united! (2) The clear confession of "the historic trinitarian faith received from the Apostles and set forth in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds". (3) The administration of the two sacraments instituted by Christ.

He then defined four principles of reunion that were regarded as important by those who belong to the "reformation" tradition (1) "Continuing reformation under the Word of God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit"—but with the warning that "so long as the wording *sola scriptura* is required, no bridge can be made between catholic and evangelical": a place must be found for tradition alongside of Scripture, as "ecumenical conversations" were making clear. (2) The government of the reunited church in a truly democratic manner, free from clericalism and priestly authoritarianism, laity and ministry being accorded an equal share in it. (3) Simplicity of clerical vesture and titles. (4) A catholicity of such a kind as to include "a wide diversity of theological formulation of the faith" and "a variety of worship and liturgy including worship that is non-liturgical".

The sermon concluded, the Right Reverend James A. Pike, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California, in whose cathedral it was uttered, expressed "an enthusiastic Amen" to what "this great Christian leader" had said, and eulogized Dr. Blake's "prophetic proclamation" as "the most sound and inspiring proposal for the unity of the church in this country which has ever been made in its history".

The enthusiastic reaction of the Bishop of California is of unusual interest because in the same issue (December 21) of *The Christian Century* which reproduced the text of Dr. Blake's sermon, there is published an article from his pen in the series "How My Mind Has Changed". In this frank article he explains how over the past ten years he has become more liberal in theology. "When Norman Pittenger and I were writing *The Faith of the Church* . . . he did not

find reason to accept the historical virgin birth ; I thought I did," he informs us. But the passing years have seen a change : " Now I am with him " ; though at the same time he assures us that he would not deny " the possibility of the miracle ", and that he does not " deny in the least the *doctrine* of the virgin birth ". Thus this ex-Roman Catholic former lawyer tantalizes his readers with a concept anchored to an event which never occurred !

Again, Dr. Pike confesses that he no longer regards " grace, or the work of the Holy Spirit, as limited explicitly to the Christian revelation ". If this were an allusion to what is known as *common* grace, there would be few to find it startling. But the context makes it clear that he is speaking in terms of *special* or saving grace. Accordingly, in his evolutionary relativistic heaven, he finds room for Buddha, Socrates, and Freud ; and to those who object that Sigmund Freud was an avowed atheist he retorts, " he is not one now," and declares that " God can manifest Himself through those who (due to their particular mentality—after all, Freud was a nineteenth century intellectual) deny His very existence ". Today for Bishop Pike salvation is something " broader than any particular historical revelation, even the full revelation in Jesus Christ ".

Finding himself embarrassed by specific articles of the Christian creed, Dr. Pike confides that he now prefers the creed to be *sung* rather than said, on the strength of the quite extraordinary presupposition that when a statement is sung it ceases to be literal prose and *ipso facto* becomes non-factual poetry. " There are certain phrases in the creed that I cannot affirm as literal prose sentences," he says, " but I can certainly sing them—as a kind of war song picturing major convictions in poetic terms ".

The Trinity, to take another example, is a doctrine which the Bishop of California " did not question ten years ago ". But now he thinks otherwise. He mentions a conversation which he had several months ago with the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, who " cannot understand why we had to develop the Trinity concept ". " I am with him," he confesses, " in thinking that all the verbiage associated with the Trinity is quite unnecessary. . . . I can't see its permanent value. . . . I see nothing in the Bible, as critically viewed, which supports this particularly weak and unintelligible philosophical organization of the nature of God."

Now all this, it is true, took place on American soil, and different people will regard it as sad, shocking, or stale, according to their outlook ; but none the less, it is relevant to the situation elsewhere in the world, for Bishop Pike and Dr. Blake are prominent figures in the contemporary ecumenical movement which now looms so large on the ecclesiastical horizon of our world. Later in this year the World Council of Churches is to hold an important assembly at New Delhi at which it is expected that approval will be given to the proposal to include in the basis of membership specific mention both of the authority of Holy Scripture and of the Trinitarian Godhead. But we now feel forced to ask whether there is any guarantee that this filling out of the basis of membership will in fact *mean* anything. Dr. Blake demands the abandonment of the *sola scriptura* as an ecumenical *sine qua non*,

and at the same time calls for the clear confession of "the historic trinitarian faith received from the Apostles and set forth in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds", oblivious of the fundamental fact that the *sola scriptura* was for the ancient Church and still is the essential authenticating source of the very creeds he names. Dr. Pike gives vent to "an enthusiastic Amen" in response to Dr. Blake's exhortation, but deplores the historic trinitarian faith as a "particularly weak and unintelligible philosophical organization of the nature of God"; he is unwilling to recite the creed as literal prose; and he denies the uniqueness of the Christian revelation. But he will *sing* the articles of the creed as mythological poetry, and perhaps after the lapse of another ten years he will find it expedient to sing not only the creed but also the prayers and the liturgy and his sermons. In the spirit of the poet Shelley who wrote the line, "Naught may endure but Mutability," Bishop Pike would seem, to our regret, to have departed from the primitive concept of the bishop as the guardian of apostolic doctrine and to have joined the company of those who proclaim that naught may be absolute but Relativity. Henceforth, presumably, life will be further complicated by the necessity of having to make a distinction between what bishops sing and what they say, and to draw the appropriate conclusions.

We have no reason to doubt that the majority of those who are involved in the ecumenical movement today are able truthfully to *say* the creed *ex animo* from beginning to end, but it is now, if anything, more than ever necessary that those who can do so should exert the utmost influence to hold the movement within the mainstream of historic Christianity. Schemes for general re-ordinations, accompanied by hollow assurances that they imply no questioning of previously held orders, may lead to a bureaucratic unity of Adullamites governed by a board of career-bishops which is remote from genuine *Church* unity (in the innermost sense of that term) and which would be destructive rather than constructive of the apostolic character of the Church of Christ. The moment is one for engagement, not disengagement. If, however, the World Council of Churches should become dominated by a leadership that is less than distinctively Christian, if its positive affirmations are ever to be interpreted as belonging to the "sung" category, then the inclusion of trinitarian and creedal formulas will guarantee precisely nothing, it had better be reconstituted as the World Council of Religious Relativity, and it will be no place for those who hold fast to the scriptural and evangelical heritage of the Apostolic Church.

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