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Editorial

THE 350th anniversary of the Authorized Version of the English Bible has not been allowed to pass unnoticed. Far from it, for the publicity accorded this milestone has already, during the first half of the year, been remarkable; and in particular the occasion has been made doubly significant by the appearance of the first instalment (the New Testament) of an entirely new translation of Holy Scripture—to be called *The New English Bible*. A vast amount has been, and continues to be, said and written both in praise and in criticism of this new version. It receives the attention of more than one of the contributors to this present issue. Until God raises up another William Tyndale it would seem to be vain to expect to see a rendering of the Bible which rivals the Authorized Version, and we are tempted to suggest that the committee which was responsible for the production of the Authorized Version showed, unlike the general run of committees, uncommon good sense (to put it no higher) in retaining for the most part the prose of this one man who, under God, wrote such matchless English. To give the Word of God to the people in the idiom of one's own day is indeed a commendable aim, and it is not our intention to add here to the volume of discussion concerning the merits or demerits of *The New English Bible*; but we do wish to express gratitude to the Archbishop-Designate of York, to Bishop Stephen Neill, to the Rev. J. B. Phillips, and to Professor G. W. H. Lampe for co-operating to make this an issue worthy of this year of commemoration. We acknowledge, too, our indebtedness to the Editor of *The Times* for kindly giving permission for the reprinting from the special *Times Supplement on the Bible in English* of March 27th of Dr. Coggan's essay which appeared under the heading "A Guiding Influence for over Three Centuries" (constituting the first part of his article in this issue). This stands in the place of an article which Canon A. W. Parsons had promised to contribute, but which, though commenced, had not been completed at the time of his lamented death in December. We pay tribute to this servant of Christ, who was so widely known and loved, and whose writing was always distinguished by clarity, fairness, and a charitable spirit.

Whatever our assessment of the new translation of the New Testament, we can be thankful to God that its publication has been a matter of such widespread interest that many thousands of copies have already been sold, with the result that multitudes are reading it and talking about it. Christians should pray that this renewal of interest in the Scriptures may lead to a revival of true religion, a genuine return to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and a new reformation in our day.

It is worthy of record that at a distinguished gathering, assembled in the Stationers' Hall in the City of London on February 16th for the purpose of celebrating the 350th anniversary of the publication of the Authorized Version of the Bible, tributes to the English Bible were paid by the three chief leaders of our nation. Her Majesty the Queen, in a message specially sent to the meeting, said that the translation of the

Bible into English "came like a broadening beam of light to our forefathers, giving them the right and the power to search out for themselves the saving truths of the Christian Religion". The Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Fisher), who presided, declared that "the life of the Church rests on the linked faith of individual Christians; and their faith is bound to get astray and twisted unless it is fed and nourished on the Bible". And the Prime Minister, Mr. Macmillan, in his address, said: "In this age, when our moral standards never seem quite to match our material progress, the Bible provides something especially precious—a unique heritage, beyond all price—at once a consolation and an inspiration."

* * * *

A clear symptom of the spiritual sickness into which we, as church and nation, have lapsed is the neglect and even contempt of the Catechism which is found on all sides. The drafting of a Revised Catechism has been watched with both hope and misgiving. Dr. Packer's article is a trenchant appraisal of the draft revision and a firm reminder that there are proper limits to the matter that should be included in any catechism. It will be an important day for the Church of England when its instructors realize once again the great value of the Catechism—and of the catechetical method of instructing the young. The following words from a letter written by John Calvin in October, 1548 to the Duke of Somerset, who was then Lord Protector of England, are well worth heeding afresh today: "Let me assure you, Sir, that the Church of God will never survive without a catechism, for it is like seed which ensures that the good grain does not perish but multiplies itself from age to age. Moreover, if you wish to build an edifice of long duration, and which will not fall quickly into a state of decay, see to it that the children are instructed in a good catechism which shows them briefly, and according to their tender age, wherein true Christianity lies".

Today, when family prayers and Christian instruction in the home are treated as outdated if not comic idiosyncrasies of the Victorian era, a double onus falls upon the Church, which by force of circumstances is challenged to act *in loco parentium* if the children in our parishes are to be made aware of the Christian message and its significance for life. Ideally, of course, a child should grow up within the two concentric covenant spheres of the Christian home and the Christian Church. It is within this framework alone that the baptism of infants is defensible and can be of genuine significance to the developing and maturing child, to the Christian community, and to the neutral neighbourhood. The prevailing practice of indiscriminate baptism is a scandal, not only to those outside the Church but also to those within—and to the recipients of the sacrament if they come from pagan homes. We have said before in these columns, and we repeat, that the Church should abandon this reprehensible custom, and should not delay to take steps to ensure that the present scandal is removed by insistence that the sacrament of baptism is administered only to children at least one of whose parents is a regular worshipper, and who thus have some reasonable expectation of growing up within the environment of God's

covenant of grace. For the rest, the Church must hopefully put the more normal process into reverse: that is to say, it must plan to reach the parents through the children. It must gather in the children from their pagan surroundings, and instruct and catechize them with diligence. It must develop a catechumenate of the unbaptized young, preparing them for baptism upon profession of faith when they are at an age to answer responsibly for themselves.

The catechism, then, should have a twofold aspect: retrospective for those who, as the children of practising Christians, look back to their baptism; and prospective for those who, as the children of non-worshippers, look forward to their baptism. Meanwhile the parents of the latter should be encouraged to take their place in the worshipping community, and themselves to come under instruction in a catechumenate for those of adult years.

P.E.H.
