

Churchman

EDITORIAL

The long-expected announcement that the Archbishop of Canterbury is about to retire has provoked the usual flurry of media comment, ranging from tired old pieces deploring the anachronism of establishment to racy gossip columns, which purport to tell us just how and why some of the so-called 'leading candidates' are being subjected to anonymous smear campaigns designed to discredit them. Nobody seems to remember that there was a similar outburst of media interest last time round, which turned out to be totally wide of the mark. None of the 'front-runners' was chosen, and Dr Carey emerged as a complete outsider, whom none of the commentators had bothered to consider seriously.

There is really no reason to suppose that things will be any different this time, and one may suspect that undue media attention is likely to work against a candidate's chances. What the media have done though is to highlight the current divisions in the church, which at the moment focus on two not entirely unconnected issues. The first of these is the role of ordained women and the second is the recognition to be accorded to practising homosexuals, both in and out of holy orders.

The two are connected because in the current, politically correct mindset, both women and homosexuals are 'victims' of an aggressively patriarchal culture which has excluded them more or less since the beginning of the church. Conservatives who oppose the ordination of both women and homosexuals reject the accusation of 'patriarchy' and claim instead that theirs is traditional, biblical teaching, which cannot be altered by something like a vote in General Synod. The two sides start from different premisses and head off in opposite directions, so their minds do not meet. Indeed, so much is this the case that the pro-women and gay lobby is now stating quite openly that those who are opposed to their agenda ought to leave the church altogether, and if they will not go quietly, they must be driven out.

Evangelicals naturally incline to the conservative side in this debate, especially over the homosexual question, but their pietistic aversion to political controversy makes many of them uncertain allies at best. Indeed, when we consider that he who is not for us is against us, many card-carrying

Evangelicals must (sadly) be ranged among the opponents of orthodox belief in this, as in other matters. They will bury their heads in the sand, make excuses for their inaction ('we are praying about it') and then wring their hands when everything goes horribly wrong on the day of synodical judgment.

Where the media are probably wrong in their assessment though, is in the way in which they attribute great influence in such matters to the occupant of the see of St Augustine. To be sure, there was a time when an Archbishop of Canterbury could change the face of the church - one need only think back to Cranmer or Laud, both of whom paid for their temerity with their lives. But **the growth of church parties, synodical government and liturgical congregationalism** all make it extremely unlikely that any of their successors could have a similar impact today. Not only the average churchgoer, but also **the average ecclesiastical politician**, is quite unmoved by what the **archbishop(s)** think, say or do. It simply does not affect them in any serious way and they carry on regardless.

It may have been possible for an urbane unbeliever like the late Robert Runcie to get men who were made in his own image appointed to senior positions in the church, but if so, it was only because the church itself was happier with people who would look good, play their part, and embarrass as few constituencies as they could. Even then it did not always work, as the career of David Jenkins of Durham reminds us, and there is little likelihood of such tactics succeeding when church opinion is as polarised as it currently is. Realistically speaking, the next Archbishop of Canterbury is unlikely to be able to do much in the short term, and given that he must retire at seventy, a short term is probably all that he will get.

So what kind of man do we need as the next Primate of All England? A surprisingly wide body of opinion agrees that whatever else he is or does, the next archbishop should be a man of God. One would think that that was obvious, but the only recent holder of the post who came across in that way was the late Donald Coggan, whom everyone knew had a meaningful prayer life, even if they did not always see eye to eye with him on particular issues. It speaks volumes for the state of the Church of England when we are forced to admit that Archbishop Coggan was succeeded in the role of spiritual leader by the late Cardinal Hume, who exuded the same aura of spirituality, whatever we may think of his theology. Someone who can talk about walking with God

and carry conviction when saying it must surely be at the top of our list of desiderata.

The second qualification for the job must be theological orthodoxy. Of course, that is the natural corollary of the previous point, since those who walk with God are invariably going to be orthodox believers. How could it be otherwise? But an orthodox archbishop must not only hold the faith himself; he must also be able to articulate it to others. He need not be a particularly gifted evangelist, but he must be an encourager of those who are, and not an embarrassment to them. Too often the efforts of people on the ground are hindered by the foolishness of prelates who think that their fifteen minutes of media fame, acquired by denying some Gospel truth or by taking some eccentric moral or political position, are a contribution to the church's image with the general public rather than the exact opposite. We have suffered enough from this kind of thing in the past, and we simply do not need a figurehead who is going to let us down in the name of supposedly progressive and original thinking.

The third qualification ought surely to be a proven pastoral manner. A sensitive pastor can often get much further than a posturing politician, and archbishops have access to places where ordinary mortals do not go. For example, it is quite possible that the next Archbishop of Canterbury will have to tell Prince Charles that he must choose between Camilla and the crown, and it will require a man of enormous pastoral sensitivity to do this effectively. It is also very likely that he will face increasing calls from secularists for disestablishment, not because of anything the Church of England has or has not done, but because religion (for which read 'Islamic fundamentalism') is a social evil which we are all better off without. Those who have followed recent comments about faith-based schools, particularly after the events of 11 September 2001, will have no illusions about this. Ironic as it seems, the least fundamentalist religious body in the country is poised to suffer the most from the antics of the Taliban, and our archbishop will need all the pastoral skill he can muster to deal with that somewhat bizarre (but nevertheless very real) threat.

Lastly, an archbishop ought to have a sense of proportion and a clear awareness of his own limitations. Unfortunately it has to be said that the present incumbent has not always shown much sign of this gift, and the results have not been particularly edifying. Some will remember his almost *ex*

cathedra intervention in the Lincoln Cathedral scandal, an episode which ended in acute embarrassment for him when the subdean simply refused to resign and there was nothing anyone could do about it. If the next archbishop is going to have to tread warily in a sea of religious pluralism, the Church of England cannot afford gaffes of that kind. The next archbishop will have to choose his ground carefully, and fight in ways which will give him some chance of winning his point. This is not easy, even at the best of times, but a discerning spirit is essential if media catastrophe is to be avoided. One can sense that the banana skins are already being peeled; it only remains to be seen when and where they will be thrown.

As conservative Evangelicals, we must face the fact that we are most unlikely to get an archbishop of our own kind, seeing that we represent such a small minority in the counsels of the church at the present time. We have to be prepared to accept that there will be issues on which we shall disagree with whomever is appointed, and that to some extent, compromise goes with the office. What we ought to pray for is a man who will uphold the faith once delivered to the saints and who will communicate that faith effectively in the place to which he is called. A man of God could do wonders for the church's morale and leave a lasting impression on generations to come. This is what we must pray for, and in the mercy of God, ask that he will send a true and lasting revival of biblical truth to a parched and starving church.

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When Roger Beckwith's article 'The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity' was published in the Winter 2001 issue (115/4), it ought to have been stated that it had previously been published by the Harrison Trust, after being given as a lecture on 13 October 2001, and was reprinted in the *Churchman* by permission.