



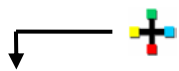
A Review of "Canterbury Pilgrim," By Michael Ramsey, (London: SPCK, 1974), and "Great Christian Centuries To Come: Essays In Honour Of A. M. Ramsey," Ed. Christopher Martin, (Oxford: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1974).

1975

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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The first of these two volumes consists of 36 short addresses and writings by Archbishop Ramsey, given during the last few years of his primacy. They include broadcast talks, speeches in the House of Lords, addresses on various occasions and an essay on "Church and state in England", written for this volume. The title expresses his feeling that "while my office has been that of a teacher of the Christian faith, I have found myself a learner amidst the changing and unpredictable scenes of the 1960s and after." The second volume contains nine essays, inevitably of varying quality, only some of which aim directly at assessing Dr Ramsey's part in the life of church and world during his period as the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury.

The first book, which includes addresses to audiences of widely differing types, brings out again his great gift for speaking simply and directly to ordinary people about God. He is first and foremost a priest, a man of God for whom God is the great reality, the great object of love and therefore of conversation. There is a delightful scene in a BBC studio where the producer asks Dr Ramsey: "What would you like to talk about?" and the answer, of course, is: "Well, I should like to talk about God" - and in a few minutes the camera men and the studio staff are listening, fascinated.

With this goes the call to holiness, the call to be saints, which is never far from the centre of his concern. It is all done very simply and in a homely way, and yet it has a rare authenticity. When Dr Ramsey speaks about the transfiguration of our Lord, as he often does, one feels that he is speaking from very near the centre of his own faith.

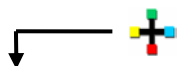
But these papers also provide many examples of the Archbishop's readiness to speak sharply and relevantly about ethical and political issues. It is of course not difficult to make stern pronouncements on these issues in religious gatherings which are sympathetic; it is more difficult to speak as Primate in the House of Lords when actual legislation is under discussion. His

warnings there about the British breach of faith with Kenya Asians are more nearly in line with the best tradition of Amos and Elijah than many statements that claim to be "prophetic". For some of his statements he has, of course, not been forgiven - on the one hand, his readiness to approve British military intervention against the Smith regime in Rhodesia, and on the other his criticisms of certain aspects of the Programme to Combat Racism. He may not always have been right, but he was always courageous and firm.

Among the short addresses here printed is one on the theme of Jacob's ladder. More than most Christian (leaders, Michael Ramsey has helped many people to see the Church as a place where there is real traffic between heaven and earth. As he talks, one knows that heaven is a reality, but one knows also that it is on earth that God's will is to be done.

It should be added that the photographs in this book do much to fill out the text. One learns a lot about the man by seeing him with the Dalai Lama in eager and questioning dialogue, with the young people at Taize full of freedom and joy, and with Mr Vorster in Pretoria looking like the Day of Judgment.

The most valuable essays in the second volume are those which illuminate directly Dr Ramsey's place in the Church history of these past 15 years. David Edwards is at his best in describing the part Michael Ramsey has played in the life of English Christianity. Kenneth Greet gives an affectionate account of the Archbishop's role in the movement for reunion in England and especially be-



tween the Anglican and Methodist Churches. Canon Allchin describes his part in the development of understanding between the Anglican communion and the Roman and Orthodox Churches. Christopher Martin of the BBC speaks of the Archbishop's role as a communicator on radio and television. Bishop John Howe shows how important has been the part played by Dr Ramsey in helping the Anglican Communion to develop towards a genuinely worldwide family in which the Church of England will be one of the smaller members. Professor John McQuarrie gives a sketch of the development of theology over the past 15 years and of Dr Ramsey's place in it.

The picture which emerges from these essays is one that justifies Dr Ramsey's choice of the word "pilgrim" to describe his own tenure of the see of Canterbury. William Temple is said to have divided bishops into two categories: those who have given up reading and feel ashamed about it, and those who have given up reading. Michael Ramsey, to an astonishing degree, continued through his years as Primate of all England not merely to read, but to read those books which were causing a shaking of the foundations for the Church everywhere. His period as Archbishop began with the vogue for radically secular theology and included the "Honest to God" debate and the much-advertised "Death of God". The later part of it has seen the rise of the counter-culture and the development of the various strands of "liberation theology". A bishop, as distinct from a theological professor, is entrusted with the responsibility to guard the faith of the Church, and when such violent winds of change are blowing it is easy and natural for one holding the office of chief pastor to react in a purely defensive manner. Michael Ramsey's response was open and constructive. As David Edwards writes: "It is admirable that Dr Ramsey's recent books should have been written at all. In the 13 centuries of the archbishopric of Canterbury there are very few parallels to their quality as the theological output of an archbishop in office. But it is even more admirable that Dr Ramsey was willing to wrestle with new truths instead of pontificating with old platitudes - and ended up by recovering all his old balance in a partly new position."

Michael Ramsey began his theological pilgrimage under the profound influence of Charles Gore. That gave him his initial direction. But the thought of F. D. Maurice, and that of Karl Barth mediated through his Cambridge teacher Hoskyns, brought into his thinking new elements which made his first book, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, a fruitful source of fresh thinking in the

debate between Catholics and Protestants. For the present reviewer, as probably for many others, that book was the first bridge of understanding which enabled a Protestant to begin to enter into the Catholic understanding of the Church. Its thesis was that the structure of the church is itself an expression of the Gospel and that, in accepting it, we learn to die to ourselves and to live to Christ. At the end of his Canterbury pilgrimage, the Archbishop is saying something that does not deny this but goes beyond it. He is looking towards a plenitude which does not yet exist, even in the structures which have been handed down to us, and for which not only we ourselves but also the churches as we know them have to learn to die. Age makes some men cling more tightly to what they have received; it has taught Michael Ramsey to look more eagerly for what God still has to give in the great Christian centuries to come.

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