

Bishop of Durham says MacGregor should be replaced

By Clifford Longley, Religious Affairs Correspondent

The new Bishop of Durham, the Rt Rev David Jenkins, delivered a blistering attack on the Government during his enthronement service last night and called for the replacement of Mr Ian MacGregor - as chairman of the Coal Board.

The bishop's comments brought immediate criticism from several Conservative MPs, with one calling for his resignation.

In a sermon which instantly eclipsed the recent controversy over his views on the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection the bishop accused the Government of being indifferent to poverty by consistently favouring the better-off at the expense of the badly-off and wanting "whatever it says" to defeat the miners.

"Such a Government cannot promote community or give hope in the very difficult days we are faced with," he declared. "There must be no victory, because the miners must not be defeated."

This was the climax of his sermon in Durham Cathedral on the theme of compromise in religious, social and political disputes.

Those who insisted they were absolutely right, and God was on their side, were being "outrageously self-righteous, deeply inhuman, and damnably dangerous," he said. Anyone who rejected compromise as a matter of policy "is putting himself or herself in the place of God."

The bishop described himself as "an ambiguous, compromised, and questioning person entering upon an ambiguous

office in an uncertain church in the midst of a threatened and threatening world." But he said he rejoiced to do this as this was where God was to be found.

With an eye to his critics within the church, he put considerable emphasis on the Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Resurrection, which he has been accused of doubting.

Applying the theme of compromise to the miners' strike, the bishop asked how a negotiated settlement might be reached.

He went on: "Might it be by Mr MacGregor withdrawing from his chairmanship and Mr Scargill climbing down from his absolute demands? The withdrawal of an imported, elderly American to leave a reconciling opportunity for some local product is surely neither dishonourable nor improper." It would prove that his appointment had not been intended as a provocation to the miners "to fight in order that they might be defeated," he said.

Although the bias of his remarks was heavily against the Government, and he was strongly sympathetic the "desperation" of the miners, the bishop said there must be no victory for them in present terms which would mean "pits left open at all costs and the endorsement of civil violence for group ends."

Mr Scargill had yet to show he was not an absolutist but a compassionate and realistic negotiator who cared more for people than for an ideology.

"Without withdrawal and without climbing down, it looks

as if we are faced with several people determined to play God," the bishop remarked, "and this gives us all hell."

Several clergy from the diocese refused to attend the service because of the controversy over the bishop's doctrinal beliefs. But the bishop was greeted by loud applause when presented for enthronement by the Dean of Durham, Dr Peter Baelz.

● The Bishop's comments about the miners' strike were "disgraceful", said Mr John Carlisle, Conservative MP for Luton North. The Archbishop of Canterbury should deliver "the most severe reprimand in the book", he said. "The thunderbolt that struck York Minster might similarly strike Durham."

Mr Nicholas Fairbairn, Conservative MP for Perth and Kinross, said: "His duty is to save souls; and not to preach socialism. If he wishes to worship earthly gods like Arthur Scargill, let him forsake the post to which he has just been wrongly appointed."

"As a great and wise English king said: 'Rid us of this turbulent priest.'"

Mr Barry Porter, Conservative MP for Wirral South, said: "I would rather have an imported American who knows something about the industry, than a bishop of the Church of England, who seems to know very little about Christianity."

"It is beyond me how a bishop at his enthronement, can use that occasion to make a political statement on a topic about which he is totally ignorant."



The bishop before yesterday's enthronement

Deadly message

From Robert Fisk, Beirut

In the aftermath of yet another suicide bombing "The truck was right beside me

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By Clifford Longley, Religious Affairs Correspondent.

The Times (London, England), Saturday, Sep 22, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61943. (709 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS17141558