

The article by Dr Coulson which we publish this month has already been called a 'turning-point' by a member of the editorial board of this journal when we first received it. And the reason for this immediate intuitive estimate would seem to be that once again Newman in his uncannily prophetic way has suggested a formula which precisely meets and mates a felt sense of greatly changed social conditions and of corresponding gropings for new forms of association or complementary 'co-partnership in Christ'. It is true that Dr Coulson himself admits to doubts: 'To hope for effective co-partnership within the Church may still be premature.' Yet there are surely many indications that the 'far-reaching change' which he rightly postulates as a condition for the viability of this sort of project is already occurring among us.

Three such indications come to mind immediately. On the continent of Europe, another 'affaire', the 'affaire Boquen', suddenly brought to the light of much wider public attention an experimental way of associating monks and lay-people in various forms of dedicated Christian life: 'At the heart of our communion will be the animating spirits of the community. To this work they will consecrate the greater part of their activity. They may belong juridically in the defined sense to the Cistercian community, or they may be members of a group vowed temporarily to celibacy, or they may be married. They will need several years' training and experience of shared life' (*The Tablet*, 15th November, 1969). In Holland, the proposed radical reform of the constitutions of the Order of Augustinians was again inspired by the idea that a common Christian dedication could be shared between a shifting and developing fellowship of association not confined to a neighbourhood and a group of more settled people, religious or lay, who would act as the stable hearth of such an association: 'The reform would transform the Order into a federation which could include priests and the laity, men and women, and married or single persons who want to live a religious life in response to developments in the Church of today' (*The Tablet*, 6th December, 1969; *et cf. ibid.*, 20th-27th December, 1969). And nearer home, we have also in recent months seen the publication of a most penetrating sociological analysis of the role and context of the priest in English society today ('Challenges to the Priesthood', *The Tablet*, 14th March, 1970). This analysis was published by way of a contribution to the debate on priestly celibacy, and as such was centred on the position and experience of the priest. It can, however, be viewed from rather a different vantage point, and its acute sociological insights used in another way.

It is worth recalling the author's central submission: 'I have no intention in this article of questioning the reasoning that underpins

the present law. I only wish to draw attention to the emotional difficulties which the observance of celibacy entails in the situation I have described. Even at the best of times, celibacy imposes its own emotional burdens. In the last analysis, in the life of the normal adult male, nothing can take the place of a wife and family. If the celibate is to achieve emotional maturity, it is essential that his ministerial activities supply sufficient emotional nourishment for him to overcome the emotional deprivation that celibacy entails. When these activities are experienced as emotionally inadequate, this emotional nourishment is not supplied and the burden of celibacy can become insupportable. This is surely one of the reasons why celibacy has shot to prominence in recent years as a topic of heated debate: not only are there good theological reasons why compulsory celibacy should be questioned, but there are many sociological factors which make the practice of celibacy today particularly painful. Celibacy should not be seen in isolation. It is but one part, albeit a very important part, of a vast complex of problems surrounding the priest and his role today. If the picture I have outlined is at all accurate, it follows that the present social expression of the priesthood is sadly out of date and should be replaced by something better if the priest is to operate effectively in modern society.'

Now both the force and the weakness of this argument is the way in which it brings out how larger sociological factors bear down upon and become personalized in the actual lives of individual priests. But precisely because the sociological becomes psychological in this way, the process can be reversed in the other direction. For implicit in the affirmation of an increasing want of emotionally satisfying relationships is the recognition of the fact that in principle a man needs adequate personal relationships if he is to mature within them to the point where he can transform—or, to use a Freudian term in a post-Freudian sense, sublimate—his emotional needs (albeit with the inevitable checks and difficulties involved in this very exacting form of social maturing). Which is to point the way forward to precisely the sort of changed 'social expression' of the lives of priests and religious which Newman glimpsed and which changed sociological conditions at last seem to make possible and necessary. And it is also to rejoin the specifically theological level. This needs to be elaborated, especially in view of the fact that the author of the article cited explicitly confined himself to talking 'along sociological, psychological and cultural lines'.

So far we have been talking interchangeably of religious and priests, and yet these two categories have long been quite distinct, historically, culturally and theologically, as indeed they ought to continue to be. Yet they have one thing in common. According to St Thomas Aquinas, what links the sacraments of orders and matrimony is that they both perfect a man in his relationship to the community at large, they are essentially other-directed (3a,

65, 1); whilst the monk, for all that he is a *monk*, *monachus*, and so a solitary and withdrawn from men, is withdrawn in this way in order to concentrate himself upon the vital principle and source of the basic unity between all men. So that in either case, monk and priest have in their different ways inherently social roles, functions in society as a whole.

We seem, therefore, to be in a situation where sociological, psychological and theological considerations converge to make Newman's glimpse and formula peculiarly appropriate to our times. Further, we have in the slow growth of parish councils, proposed experiments by the National Laity Commission, priests' senates and changes amongst religious orders, the beginnings of an infrastructure for such an adjustment; and in our new (or recovered) ecclesiology of the laity of all the faithful, people *and* pastors, with accompanying changes in our way of experiencing and thinking about the eucharist, we have a theology to match. The conditions for courageous re-thinking amongst the delegates to the first National Conference of Roman Catholic Clergy at Woodhall Pastoral Centre, Linton, Yorkshire, from 1st-5th June, therefore seem to be very propitious. For what will really be in question will be neither the central question of what the priesthood is, nor such peripheral questions as celibacy, but the more adequate and flexible 'social expression' of the ministry. And, as in the case of the Vatican Council at large, we can only hope that Newman's spirit will hover over this lesser council.

P.L.

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