

April 26th. Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.

April 27th. Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.

It is no good pretending that nothing has happened. I should not be writing here if it had not. And this fact alone will already be as disquieting for many as it may be hopeful to others. The almost automatic expressions rise of themselves: reaction or balance, capitulation or adjustment, compromise or peace-making, stool-pigeon or mediator, feeble or meek? The simple and anguishing truth we are having to learn to live with is that the divisions and exasperation of feelings are already there, even between those who yet share a root and remnant of deep connexion. The only question is whether any particular episode in this dark night battle is to be allowed to deepen those divisions or can be used creatively to renew that connexion. The courage and humility of heart necessary to keep restarting must therefore take the form of going forward in accordance with one's conscience whilst acknowledging these divisions and probing their causes so as to find a common point of growth again. And in this particular case, one hard fact remains after all the personal grief and the apparent waste of spirit: whilst many Catholics were hurt and bewildered by Fr Herbert's remarks in the February editorial (albeit apprised of them only by the accidents of press publicity), others found them opportune and just. In other words this incident has exposed the emergence of a new and important group of Catholics who from unprecedentedly diverse social origins have come to professional and intellectual maturity especially since the war. It is worth trying to assess the nature and implications of this fact.

It would need a proper sociological survey to establish exactly all the elements of the picture. It is, however, at least clear that the emergence of this group has coincided with deep changes at once at the collective or national and at the more intimately personal level. During this time when Britain's position in the world and her external outlets have been reduced, when the welfare state has been brought in, when the seismic shock of Suez and the Hungarian revolution

has occurred, more subtly pervasive factors have been at work in the home: compulsory secondary education for all 'according to age, ability and aptitude'; more experimental and individual methods of learning at primary school level, the slow freeing of sex, the changing relationships of men and women as mirrored in the 'partnership' marriage, the gradual permeation of psychological knowledge. A whole change of sensibility, mentality and expectations, even unconsciously new conceptions of inter-relationships, between men and women, parents and children, and so between man and man, authority and subject, have been quietly fermenting in our society.

Further, as this mutual penetration of society and the Catholic body within it has been taking place in extension and depth, the relationship between that Catholic body and society at large has also been insensibly changing. It is perhaps not so much that we have changed, at least in our official and received responses and structures, as that society has changed around us. And that is the whole trouble. As long ago as 1917 Lord Sumner could say: 'With all respect for the great names of the lawyers who have used it, the phrase "Christianity is part of the law of England", is really not law; it is rhetoric.' Nothing that has happened since has belied that statement. On the contrary; and the Lady Chatterley trial was perhaps the single most vivid moment of illumination of the growing autonomy of a secular, humanist culture in this country. But if the relationship of the Catholic body to society at large has thus been changing even despite itself, then sooner or later merely unconscious and intuitive re-adjustment had to give place to awareness and to sensitive decision of principle. And to my mind the mere existence of the Catholic New Left is at the very least one evidence of the awakening to a situation which is that of us all in this country.

Especially since the war, then, two notable changes would seem to have occurred. On the one hand, a whole modification of sensibility and mentality has been subterraneously at work. On the other hand, the very quality of the relationship of the Catholic body to the larger society has been changing. It was inevitable therefore that the supervening of a Council whose distinctive mark was to open the Church to the world so as to make it once more a Church incarnate amongst men should be explosive or liberating—however one chooses to take it. Once the Church in Council assembled had deliberately followed the inspiration of Pope John in allowing the long-suppressed release of the native energies of its peoples, then the significance of the double change I have tried to evoke had to come out into the open. For the Church acknowledged that it is in the world and of its time, using its language and assuming its joys and hope, griefs and anxieties, and that it is in its service; and it thereby declared its responsiveness to, and its responsibility for, the double change indicated. This responsiveness and responsibility is of course two-edged: it is a principle of separation as well as of incarnation, of

transcendence as well as of immanence. The fact remains that our received ways of regarding the Church and our structures of inter-relationship are put in grave question.

It is in this situation that the magnanimous statement of Archbishop Dwyer in the March number of *New Blackfriars* takes its full relief. It so truly marks a new epoch in the history of the Church in England that it is worth recalling here:

‘. . . There must be much more open discussion, much narrower grounds for authoritative statement than there had been in the past. . . . The English Bishops therefore consciously and of set purpose did not attempt to inhibit discussion. So far from intervening with authoritative and disciplinary directions they left a free field. Men who died twenty years ago would hardly believe their ears if they were alive today.’

Similarly, Fr Provincial in the April Comment remarked: ‘The relationship of the laity to the hierarchy has been raised in a new form, and one of the happiest results of the incident has been a greater awareness on both sides of the implications of the Vatican decrees and an increasing sensitivity to issues that are of great concern in contemporary English experience. One hopes that this will find expression in some institutional form.’ Such new forms are already quietly evolving, but one such institution is surely a journal such as this, being peculiarly well fitted by its ephemeral character to the experimental nature of the dialogue necessary at this juncture of our history.

The review, then, is for all those who are committed to the pains and venture of growing with the Church, or, rather, of *being* the new Church growing and discerning its direction, and who are yet neither so sure of their way that they will not listen to others nor so insecure that they will not expose themselves to the contradiction of argument.

Two points must be emphasized here. On the one hand, we wish to make visible the conviction that we cannot move forward as a body, but only as splinters and factions, unless the pathfinders and the home-camp of the people on the march maintain their lines of communication. On the other hand, we must face the fact that debate, argument, probing discussion—acrimonious even at times, until we learn mutual respect and manners—can no longer be limited to improvements of the present state of things; they are part of the dark and confused groping to a quite new state, negotiating and mediating the transition. The last lines of James Joyce’s novel, for all their romantic individualism, speak to our present condition. For though written with the riven history of the Irish race in view, they surely derive their force and appeal from the fact that they are but one more celebration of an arche-typal experience. St Paul put it in his own way when he spoke of the breaking down of the dividing

wall of hostility and of the creation of one new man in place of two, so making peace. And each individual and generation renews the experience when a crisis of foundations puts in question received structures of thought and relationship under the stress of the new, of the reality of experience. Then it is that, not the individual isolated, but the individual at the fine point of a tradition, the individual as mediator of a community, has to forge the necessarily uncreated conscience of his people and time.

We do not know, then, where we are going, only with whom. *There* must be the source of our energy and discernment. It is in this sense that we can say that the Church is to the world what prayer is to the individual: its discerning and contemplative heart.

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