

# Commentary

POPE JOHN XXIII. The contrast between Pope John and his predecessor was as marked as any in history between two successive holders of the same office. Pope Pius XII when he died was certainly mourned but it was less as a man than as a great masked figure in some ancient drama. This aspect was not wanting in the death of Pope John—the television camera showed us images of kneeling and weeping chorus figures—but within this the world shared his long agony as he lay dying and was profoundly moved, moved by his suffering, his simplicity and by the sheer humanity which had been the climate of his reign and of his achievement. It was impossible not to pray for him and with him. But in the nature of things it is impossible also not to speculate on what was characteristic of his achievement and its durability. He reigned for only four and a half years, but his influence has almost certainly changed the Church's course for decades to come. And this was the effect peculiarly of his humanity. Not merely did he initiate the Council, but even before the power of the reforming liberal element among the bishops was shown so unmistakably, he gave it a direction of its own, insisting that its aim was pastoral not condemnatory, to break down what barriers it could and not to build up more. This humanity, this warm-hearted personal sympathy, was as evident in the images the cameras fixed, the less public activities—visits to prison, hospital, an old friend on a sickbed—as it was in his intentions for the Council and in his two great encyclicals.

Unless we take to heart the message of Pope John, not merely the directives but the direction of his thought, we are likely to find ourselves condemned by future generations. The time is terrifyingly short. To take only one sphere—as Professor Bernal pointed out in the lecture he gave to the S.C.M. conference earlier this year and which we have the privilege of printing in this issue, the less fortunate peoples of the world now know what they have been missing—not merely the material advances won by the Western nations, but the freedom to develop their own resources both material and spiritual. Pope John insisted in *Pacem in Terris* on the danger not only of political colonialism, but of the hidden power and selfishness of economic colonialism. Dependence breeds resentment, independence may, if we too work for it in sympathy, lead to friendship, peace and stability; but for the Pope and for

all men of good will this is in no spirit of fear, but in a compassionate concern for justice and the well-being of all men.

Where Africa is concerned, events are moving very fast. Not long ago the new African states were grouped in two blocks, Casablanca and Monrovia; since the conference of heads of state at Addis Ababa these have merged into one, with a new charter and a unified intention to wipe out white supremacy where it still exists. True enough, politicians indulge sometimes in rhetoric or even mere blether, and African politicians do so too. This was not rhetoric or blether, but part of the deep instinctive drive of the African towards a fulfilment determined by himself. For all the material benefits whose introduction began under colonial rule, the presence of the Europeans has also had a damaging effect, an effect which we who are Europeans can hardly realise and, in our pride, hardly understand. If, sometimes, we cannot understand, it is not for us to pass judgment, but to help in whatever way we can and continue to try to understand. In this, as in so much else, we shall find a guide in the words of Pope John in *Pacem in Terris*: 'It is vitally important that the wealthier states, in providing varied forms of assistance to the poorer, should respect the moral values and ethnic characteristics peculiar to each'. Respect—a deep respect for each human individual, for their freedom to live fully human lives in societies of their own making, respect for the conscience of each individual Christian whether Catholic or not, respect for all the good there is in men whether Christian or not—this is perhaps the characteristic accent of the life and message of Pope John.