

# Comment

## *Quelle tradition?*

In the May-June number of *La Vie Spirituelle* Yves Congar reviews the autobiography of his delightful fellow-Dominican, Ambroise-Marie Carré, who is eighty this year. Former chaplain to Paris's actors, preacher, broadcaster and writer, he is (like Congar himself) a member of the Académie Française. Congar tells us that several colleagues in the Académie have said that they would like to be able to die 'dans les bras du Père Carré'.

That says something not only about Père Carré but also about the place of the Church and its clergy in French sensibility even today. How many English-speaking Catholics, however devout, would want to die in any priest's arms? At that most lonely of moments we want priests' prayers, yes, but now hardly ever their arms. In France the churches are deserted but it is still difficult for quite a lot of people to see Catholicism as something apart from the culture, apart from France herself and what is in the bones, and all the all-embracing things.

We anglophones are never really going to understand why the Lefebvre schism happened if we are not aware how intensely French Lefebvre's organisation and its ideology are, although the organisation has branches world-wide. In the eyes of Lefebvre Catholicism is integrally bound to culture, the culture of the *ancien régime*, one which most of us think has irrevocably vanished. He is an antiquarian, no historian; for him being 'traditional' basically means living in the embalmed world of a museum. For instance, one of his principal arguments in favour of the liturgical use of Latin is that, being a dead language, 'it is the best means of protecting the expressions of faith against linguistic change'.

Alas, in a changing world even our understanding of Latin changes! An embalmed religion is among the first victims of cultural change, not the last. Especially in a world altering as fast as this one, if we are to be genuinely 'traditional'—in other words, fired to preserve in its uncompromising fullness the deposit of truth handed down to us from the apostles—we have to go on and on re-articulating that truth. That is the only way of stopping it from being quietly taken over by this world's princes. Schism is always a tragedy, and even some of us who detest Lefebvre's integrist views believe we owe him something, for he has forced us to think harder. But it is difficult to see how the Church could now make a deal with him without being guilty of self-betrayal.

J.O.M.