

## ON COMMENDING AUTHORITY

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**T**HE excitement with which the conferring of the Red Hat on Cardinal Gracias was greeted in Bombay had a special quality. It was not just that it came to the first Indian Cardinal; it was rather like the enthusiasm of Preston or Bolton on receiving the Cup. The Cup, clearly, is won. So in a real sense was the Hat, and that is the difference between East and West.

There had been no attempt to disguise the disappointment felt when about a month earlier all twenty-four hats had gone to the West. Indian Catholics had seen overwhelming reason to hope for at least one more Asian Cardinal in the seventy; in general what the Westerner says *about* the decision of a superior, the best Eastern Christian likes to say *to* a superior; in that he is already much nearer to apostolic Christianity. But if there was an Indian Archbishop in Bombay at all to receive the Hat, that was a situation which had been earned also. This is not the place to dilate on the subject. Immense as the joy in India has been in the first Indian Cardinal, I think that there may be more joy in Heaven on what the East can give back to the West.

For if Christianity is of Eastern origin, its form has been chiefly Western, and inevitably something has been lost of the father-and-son relationship, the very stuff of Eastern polity. This loss has been felt in two ways: first, and most fundamental, our ideas of God depend on an intense appreciation and love of human fatherhood; secondly, all Christian authority rests on the reverence of the subject for his superior as ambassador of God's fatherhood. Our Lord's coming was, in his own words, 'to declare the Father'; we understand his message in proportion to our ideal of fatherhood.

An example taken at random: some thirty-five Bishops after travelling from all parts of the sub-continent to greet their new Cardinal made their first corporate act—before all the official ceremonies—a meal at which the poor were fed, the Bishops themselves serving.

It would be dishonest and foolish to present such a picture as anything like the whole truth. In fact, at the very time when the Cardinal was in Rome for the Consistory, he was due to appear in Bombay before secular judges, brought there by some of his own Catholic people who objected to my action as his predecessor in demolishing the old cathedral (a demolition undertaken with the full approval of lay trustees and of the Holy See). As I know full well something of what the action has cost in time and money, I am not tempted to underestimate the disadvantages of stressing lay participation in Church government. But even a zeal misguided to the point of willingness to risk excommunication (and only two or three are so involved) may well be preferred to an assumption that the Church *is* the clergy, and not a combination of clergy and laity, each with a vital stake in a Church that is theirs.

In fact, the Church's unquestioned right to excommunicate is not likely to be invoked.

There remains the whole question of commending the Church's authority.

To *commend* authority: that, equally with asserting God's authority, is our Lord's purpose in founding his Church. Obviously, to commend is incomparably more difficult than to assert. The twin dangers used by the devil as a fifth column inside the Church have always been love of money and love of power. We cannot get on without authority or without money. Our needs are the Devil's opportunity. What we take up as a means we tend all too soon to make an end in itself. That is the story of every reformation in the Church, from within and from without.

The use of power is an issue vital to every generation. It has never been more urgent than today, in a world all but reduced to ruins by totalitarian abuse of authority. We tended in the last war to equate the Christian ideal of government with 'democracy'. The obvious objection to that is that Christianity may be saddled with the defects, so painfully apparent, of 'government by the people for the people'. Both in England and in America (as witness Paul Blanshard's *Freedom and Catholic Power*, and *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power*) there is a movement to

represent this democracy as threatened by Rome quite as much as by Moscow.

May not the answer be, in these countries especially, to stress more than we do the *motive* of Christian obedience—always, that is, to see the authority of God in anyone who holds his warrant: the father in the family; the Bishop in the Church; the King, President or Parliament in the State. The problem of choosing the most effective instrument of civil government is most complicated and difficult; the finest instrument in theory may prove a tyranny or a machine of bungling inefficiency if the proper attitude to authority is wanting, either in those who exercise it or in those who have chosen it.

The light which our Lord commanded Christians to show to the world to be seen by all men for the glorification of his Father, is such use of authority as the first Pope required of Bishops—a pattern, model and example to the whole world; the most vivid contrast must be presented between the Christian attitude of humility and the pagan use of authority ‘lording it over’ subjects.

Again, concrete examples: certainly and rightly Christian ‘democrats’ regard the right of criticising their government as an essential factor in their loyalty. In England’s very blackest hour, a harassed Prime Minister was being fiercely attacked in Parliament; Sir Winston Churchill proclaimed his pride that such a thing should be possible at such a time of crisis. He would have resented passionately the imputation that the sharpest criticism of his policy involved the least suspicion of disloyalty. There is room, I think, for a great deal more consideration of such a fact than we Catholics usually give to it.

That the government of the Church is divinely committed to the Pope and Bishops does not mean that this authority is not *for* the people. It is for the people to a degree beyond anything that the most fanatical democrat ever thought of. The Pope may or may not delegate to the laity—there has, in fact, been immensely greater variety of such delegation according to time and place than is realised. Whether he does or not, it is humanly impossible to exercise authority without consulting the governed. To deny

this is to make nonsense of democracy.

The Kings and Prophets who governed God's Chosen People were indeed appointed by him; nonetheless, there seems to have been the fullest approval for extremely frank comment; nothing could be clearer than the distinction between the dignity of the office and the merits of the person. Their Lord, when he came on earth was *himself* the pattern that St Peter was later to emulate. Martha addressed her complaint not to Mary but to her guest.

Of countless examples in the early Church the most striking is the stern rebuke of the first Pope by one who was certainly not St Paul at that moment, but a convert notorious for a campaign of savage persecution. Both in the Acts of the Apostles and in their letters, there is overwhelming evidence of difference of opinion discussed with perfect frankness.

Not to beat the air: has the principle that guides us in feeding our bodies any application in the nourishment of our souls? We chose the government which instituted in wartime a system of fair rationing which became the admiration of the world; we believed, and rightly, that the system required constant watchfulness from our servants in Parliament. Are we to believe that the human imperfections requiring such a check and stimulus are miraculously removed from the pastors appointed to feed our souls? In the course of visits paid to ports in twenty-six countries I came across anomalies which, had I not seen, I could hardly have believed. To take only one example, till recently there was, or perhaps even is now, a port where certain dispensations for the benefit of sailors were available in a few of the docks but not in the others! (Three dioceses were involved). Imagine (if you possibly can) anything comparable in the distribution of bodily food; and were it to be said that people get the kind of government they deserve, may that not apply to those who don't care sufficiently about their souls to represent their needs, and represent effectively? (In fact, the apostolic practice of daily Communion, in abeyance for so many years, was not restored just by a stroke of the papal pen. Effect was given to our Lord's wish because some people expressed decisively—yes, at the risk of being

hurt—the hunger they felt.) The same is true of recent facilities for evening Mass and non-fasting Communion, and indeed of every other reform that has ever been. Had Catholics done nothing about this, their passivity might have been called obedience, but hardly in Heaven.

There is another field where passivity and laziness—not without some loose thinking and arrogance on the part of the clergy—have created even greater hardships.

Today the sanctity of marriage is the real battleground between Christ and the world, marriage being God's foundation for the family and for the ideal of fatherhood on which our Lord stakes everything. Fidelity to our Lord's institution of marriage as indissoluble (so excluding divorce) and chaste (so excluding artificial birth prevention) demands on occasion really heroic holiness. With increasing frequency conflict is set up between Christian law and civil law. To resolve such conflicts is one reason why the Church has her own courts. They exist by divine right; equally by divine obligation they ought to be models to the world of what a court should be: to judge them by any other standard would be monstrous. But whereas English law can call upon exceedingly highly paid lawyers, a Bishop has usually nothing but spiritual benefits to offer to priests helping him in his judicial functions. These priests may be few and overworked; it may be extremely difficult to find clergy in sufficient numbers qualified by technical knowledge, sufficient leisure above all, judgment, to fulfil the requirements of justice and Christian love.

Having travelled so widely, I have heard much of such courts (and my remarks, therefore are applicable, God knows where . . .). What I found general was very strong criticism of incompetence and delays, both faults less disedifying and less frightening than the harm done to Christian obedience and charity by criticism of authority and not to authority.

In practice, the devout Catholic bearing cheerfully the cross imposed upon him by the law of Christ is frequently afflicted with additional torments, such as years of delay, which are certainly not of Christ's making. Far more numerous are the Catholics ill instructed or not rooted in

the Faith who take the law into their own hands, blaming the contradictions they encounter (the issues are sometimes highly complicated), the endless delays, the shelving or passing on of responsibility, the loss of documents—all the complaints so often discussed except in those very places where alone they could be discussed with profit.

There are, I believe, a few places—I know myself only of India—where the question has been mooted of combining the resources of many dioceses, so that two or three courts may serve a whole country with the highest efficiency and promptness. Intelligent criticism should be applied to affairs at home where we can do something before it is turned upon Rome.

There is no divine guarantee that the Church will be healthy if deprived of the bracing public opinion recognised as the lifeblood of any intelligent democracy (or for that matter, any religious order) where consultation and representation is, or should be, brought to the highest pitch. Holy Scripture, tradition and history all affirm the principle of collective responsibility of Catholics for the Church that is theirs. It should not have been necessary for the Holy Father to re-affirm a truth so demonstrable, but as he evidently did find it necessary, here are his words, addressing an international gathering of Catholic pressmen in February, 1950. He stated the functions of a free press as known to all of us, and then went on: 'The Church is a living body and something would be lacking to her life if expression could not be given to public opinion within it. For such a lack, both pastors and the faithful might be to blame.'