

Comment

“It is irreconcilable with freedom of conscience, thought and expression that certain occupations (e.g. teaching) should be restricted to those who swear allegiance to the ideology of the ruling political power.” So, excellently and, in the circumstances, courageously, says *Document 9*, the latest appeal to the Czech government by the group of marxists and socialists responsible for Charter 77. The fact that a similar admonition needs to be addressed to the governments of West Germany and South Africa (amongst many others) does not detract from its importance and relevance to Czechoslovakia. It is fully in tune with the statement of Vatican II: “All the faithful possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence.” It is pleasant to contrast the human face of post-conciliar Catholicism with the grim visage of neo-stalinist Eastern Europe.

It is pleasant, that is, unless you happen to have exercised your lawful freedom of enquiry humbly and courageously in the pages of *The Furrow* and are nonetheless hoping to hang on to your job as Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in Maynooth College, Ireland. In December 1971, Fr. Patrick McGrath wrote a critical assessment of a document published by the Irish Bishops about Hans Kung’s book, *Infallible?*. Kung’s book is not, in my opinion, a particularly good one and McGrath does not say it is. Far more dangerously he criticises the setting up of the Irish Theological Commission which wrote the document (“the manner of its selection and the secrecy surrounding it”). He is not, however, particularly harsh: he regards the authors of the document as over-hasty and unwilling to take seriously an unfamiliar point of view. “No doubt one can deny the truth of Kung’s conclusions, but one cannot deny the existence of his arguments.” He also notes (prophetically) “it is one thing to extol courage and honesty; it is a very different matter to practice them.” Just how different, he is now discovering.

The seventeen Bishops who comprise the Trustees of Maynooth College have demanded his resignation on the grounds that this article (together with another in the *Maynooth Review* and some mildly critical remarks about *Humanae Vitae* in the *Irish Times*) is “prejudicial to the Catholic Church and the college” (*I.T.* Feb 28.). The article was in fact accompanied by a declaration from Bishop Patrick Lennon of Kildare that it was “free from doctrinal and moral error”. Bishop Lennon is not on the board of Trustees; clearly there is here some dissension (not for the first time) in the ranks of the Irish Hierarchy.

Lest there should be any doubt about their general attitude to

academic freedom, the Trustees took the same occasion to try to sack Mr. Malachy O'Rourke, a lecturer in French. What, in the eyes of these Bishops, unfits Mr O'Rourke to teach French to classes nine tenths of whom are lay people of any religion or none and most of whom are regularly taught by non-Catholics, is that having been a priest he has been legitimately and properly laicised. Not even the iniquitous Vatican regulation of 1970 forbidding Catholic institutions to employ laicised priests to teach theology can be adduced to justify this decision. (Fr. McGrath has not been laicised but it is alleged that the Trustees' real case against him is that he doesn't wear a roman collar and does no official pastoral work amongst the students. —*I.T.* May 9).

It should perhaps be explained, for the benefit of our more distant readers that Maynooth, though not founded exclusively as a seminary, was controlled entirely by the episcopal Trustees and for all practical purposes *was* a seminary until recently. The complications have arisen since Departments other than those concerned with theology were recognised as playing a part in the secular National University of Ireland and heavily subsidised by the government. These Departments, now by far the larger part of the institution, have 1070 students of whom 83 are clerical students.

In the power game they are playing, to retain their domination of Irish education, the Bishops' case depends on regarding Maynooth as still a seminary which happens to open its doors to a few laymen. On these grounds they claim to be entitled to enforce regulations about how Professors should dress and whether they should celebrate Mass or not.

Even the Irish Federation of University Teachers (hardly the most militant of unions —they recently announced that they would be “most reluctant to engage in strike action over salary claims” *I.T.* April 27) have balked at what they call a manifest case of injustice. When they found, after a ballot, that 77% of their members at Maynooth wanted industrial action, they called a one-day stoppage. Even this they were prepared to postpone or cancel if the Bishops would only talk to them. The government's Labour Court appealed to the Bishops to meet with the union but got no response at all.

There is a stubborn ‘No surrender’ attitude here reminiscent of Ian Paisley himself, and, of course, it provides exactly the evidence he needs to show that the pretensions of the Irish Republic to be a democratic secular society are not accepted, at least by these Bishops. On the evidence, they believe that their views must prevail regardless of public opinion or common justice. It is as important, and as relevant to the peace of Ireland and to the state of the Church, to overcome this intransigence as it is to overcome the intransigence of the most bigoted loyalists.

H.McC.