

How Progressive is German Catholicism?

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That the question should protrude out of English Catholicism and start prodding about in German Catholicism seems like irreverence, biting the hand that fed, or just plain scandalmongery. The revival of theological interest amongst English Catholics owes, after all, much to the activity of German-speaking theologians like Rahner and Kung. Here, we have said, is a Catholicism that takes theology seriously. The German bishops brought this activity in their train to the Council in the form of theological advisers. They were very well advised theologically. The Council was for German Catholicism something like a Trade Fair; its stands were stocked with the latest models of German theology, and the bishops quite overreached themselves in attempting to express it.

Meanwhile back in Germany there was considerable surprise in many quarters that the German episcopate should be, as *Simplicissimus* put it in a front page cartoon, marching like a mitred army on Rome behind its two cardinals. The weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* rummaged through its considerable files and produced a number on Cardinal Frings¹ setting out dialectically his record as a conservative churchman in Cologne, and his activity as leader of the progressives at the Council. How were the two conflicting images to be reconciled? Certainly the German Church can never be the same again. Things have been said by its leaders in Rome which will have to be said in Germany. Wide reforms are already underway; but there is a profound sense of unrest amongst the laity, a fear that the reformation has not reached the roots of church life; that the authorities are incapable of seeing how deep the roots lie. German Catholicism will have little trouble in implementing the successes of the Council, but the failure of the Council to tackle the problem of *aggiornamento* with the world is all too reminiscent of the failure of German Catholicism to come to *aggiornamento* with the society it is living beside. A reformed scripture-conscious, self-critical Church is little comfort to the layman when the Church is still wedged in a structure that prevents it from understanding the society the layman is living in, when, as Herr Forster, the director of the Catholic Academy in Bavaria, recently put it, 'the real crisis of German Catholicism consists basically in its failure to break down the ghetto walls of the

¹*Der Spiegel*, 11th December 1963.

nineteenth century'.² Forster was talking about the political activity of the Church in Germany. This is the crisis area of *aggiornamento*, and it is in this area more than any other that the German bishops will have to prove that they meant it when they spoke so courageously of *aggiornamento* and renewal in Rome. The purpose of this report is to illuminate this area by an investigation of the behaviour of post-conciliar German Catholicism during the recent General Election (19th September).

Theology and Politics

It is easy, and I think justifiable, to be incensed at what one reads and hears about the political activity of German Catholicism. Most of it seems quite incomprehensible to the English Catholic. The root of the trouble does not, however, necessarily lie in underdeveloped democratic sensibility, although this is everywhere evident. The problem is theological. How does politics influence theological thinking? What is the relationship between the theologian and the politician? To fail to see this underlying theme running through the recent election campaign would be to misunderstand the plight of German Catholicism, and the kind of healing it requires. The Germans are, after all, incurably theological. Carl Amery, the well-known left wing writer, recently discussed this very problem. 'Nowadays we German Catholics are patting ourselves on the back because we have played such a progressive role in the Council. But, without taking away any credit from the German theological experts in Rome, our self-adulation is misplaced. We Germans have a fatal talent for being satisfied with theoretical achievements while at the same time standing helpless before the burning practical political and social questions. This helplessness is not something that we have willed upon ourselves, it is something we are prepared to admit and own up to – for example the problem that faces us of translating our theoretical knowledge into the whole sphere of activity in society. We must do something about this helplessness; we must build a bridge, or we will end up in a fatal theologising, in what Karl Krauss has called "decorating your own home", hanging up the appropriate progressive diploma on the wall.'³

But it is not quite as simple as that. The crisis of *aggiornamento* does not lie in the translation of theoretical theological knowledge into activity, but rather in the very thinking itself. Amery would be the first to agree that this political theory is untranslatable. It is the thinking itself which is dangerously lacking in *aggiornamento* content. Karl Rahner's discussion of the problem seems to me much more radical and helpful precisely because he sees it as a theological problem and challenges the basic principles of current German

²Cited in 'Schwarze Demagogie'; *Die Zeit*, 22nd October 1965.

³Carl Amery: *Freiheit eines Christen heute, oder wie weit zur nächsten Kapitulation?* A lecture given at Dusseldorf, 31st July 1965.

political-theology. 'The Christian' he wrote, 'shares as a brother this present world with all other men – the world as it actually is. He accepts the worldly world, he has certainly no intention of changing it into the world of the Middle Ages in which everything is influenced by religion. He doesn't labour under the illusion that he has ready-made or even better solutions than the non-Christian for its problems. The Christian accepts this historical world; he doesn't deify it into utopian ideologies, and he doesn't condemn it. It *IS* and the Christian who is, or should be the true realist accepts it as the unquestioned space of his existence, his responsibility, his preservation'.⁴ Did this kind of modern German theology, and the conciliar spirit of encounter, renewal and *aggiornamento* make any difference to the policy of German Catholicism in this crucial election campaign? The facts must be left to speak for themselves.

The Parties and the Church

The three main parties were the CDU/CSU (the Christian Democrats in close alliance with their sister Bavarian party), the SPD (the Social Democrats), and the FDP (the Free Democrats). One could characterise the three in English terms: the CDU stands slightly to the right of the Conservative Party in England, with a vociferous right wing mainly amongst its Bavarian and Catholic adherents. The SPD likewise stands, if anything, to the right of our Labour Party. Like the Labour Party it has a left wing which has been muffled in the interest of elector-courting. The FDP is more difficult to place. It is Liberal rather in a continental sense – suspicious of clerical influence, but very much a capitalist party, certainly more liberal than the CDU, but very unlike our Liberals in its disturbing lack of a liberal conscience with regard, for example, to immigration and resurgent nationalism. The comparison is, of course, only approximate, but it is near enough, the distinctions are clear enough, to support the guess that the English Tory would vote CDU, the Labour voter SPD and the Liberal FDP.

The point I am making is that those three parties represent, in the business of government and opposition, the right/left tendencies one expects to find in any modern western democracy, and as such they offer the electorate a fair choice to think and express normal political divergencies. Of course one can start dividing the initials of the parties into themselves and, eliminating the common factors, arrive at 'christian', 'social' and 'liberal', and unscrupulous propagandists can work that up into the old struggle between Church, Socialism and Liberalism, but the raking up of the clerical past of the CDU, the Marxist past of the SPD and the Liberal anti-clerical past of the FDP presents a quite false picture of the aims and activities of the parties. Unfortunately this false picture bedevils the Church's view of what is actually happening, and what should be

⁴Quoted in *Pastoralblatt für die Diözesen Aachen, Berlin, Essen und Köln*, August 1965.

happening in German politics. She has been unable to accept the realistic view of the political situation and has instead played up the word 'Christian' in CDU. German Catholicism backs the CDU, and the CDU, I suppose understandably, is still prepared to manipulate the support into electoral gain. There are, after all, 26,000,000 Catholics in Germany.

The history of this Church-Party alliance goes back to the days after the war when Adenauer, an old traditional Rhineland Catholic, founded the CDU with the support of prominent churchmen like Cardinal Frings. The time was propitious. Everything had collapsed and it seemed that the only institution that had not compromised itself with the Third Reich was the Church. (Against this background one can understand how penetrating was Hochhuth's criticism in 'The Representative'.) Politics was out of favour, and the only ideology to hand was Christian social teaching. Although the claim was made, and still is being made, that the principles of the party are specifically Christian, no ordinary democrat would be able to distinguish between their christianity and a rather old-fashioned attitude to moral problems.⁵

This tendency of German Catholicism to emphasize the ideological in the current inter-party struggle may be out of date, but it still has a considerable nuisance value: it is the Church's main, and at the same time her most dangerous contribution. German democracy is still, after all, in an extremely fragile state. It is of vital importance that people should be encouraged to think democratically and politically. But the whole point of the Catholic involvement is to carry the struggle up to the ideological plain. It must transcend politics and be concerned with what it believes to be the ideological in its opponents. And so the SPD must be Socialist in the worst sense, Humanist and Godless plotting the downfall of Christian principles. The sane observer of the political scene in Germany would see this ideological struggle as irrelevant and tedious, a childish quarrel of days gone by, a grotesque misunderstanding of the reasons for the decisions that both parties make in everyday political life. But the Church's view of politics is, in fact, extremely popular; it has exactly that remoteness from everyday political life which appeals to that powerful element in German society which prefers the ideological to the political, that element which has manifested itself all too clearly in Germany's recent history.

The ideological involvement of the Church in politics has not only exacerbated ideological warfare, it has also the inevitable consequence that laymen are expected to follow the authorities into the conflict and take ideological and not political sides. No simple pious catholic from any walk of life would vote anything else than CDU with an easy conscience. One can see at once how this must affect

⁵I have seen it maintained by Catholic social theologians of the party that the English Health Service is somehow offensive to christian principles.

the political thinking of Catholics: The Catholic tends on the whole not to be interested in politics. Why should he be? If he can only vote CDU then there is no democratic alternative for him, no scope for political thinking, no political criticism he could possibly exercise on election day. Into an open society anxious for democratic growth the Catholic authorities in Germany have introduced a permanent ideological prejudice against politics – rather like class-prejudice voting in England. Politically they have created a closed-minded political caste; people who do not think or vote according to politics, but according to the customs of their caste. A whole area of democratic deciding has been anaesthetized.

Just how successful this onslaught on the German Labour Party⁶ has been is shown by the recent attempts of the SPD to take upon itself the task of presenting the Catholic with a political alternative. SPD representatives went off to visit the Pope, and the SPD dominated state of Lower Saxony went so far as to arrange a Concordat with the Vatican. This was a humiliating experience for the SPD: the states hitherto in concordat with the Vatican were Italy, Spain, Portugal and Nazi Germany. But even this did not seem to clear the SPD in the eyes of the Catholic authorities. It is extremely hard to see how the SPD could ever acquire an image that could be officially acceptable to Catholics. The reason is clear: once the SPD can lay the ghost that it is ideological the church has lost her political language.

The Neue Bildpost Affair

How does German Catholicism exercise its political influence? In the first place there is, of course, the parish. Political sermons in favour of the CDU are a frequent occurrence, and the parish church after mass is a kiosk for the distribution of Catholic newspapers. What are they like? Let us take a look at one of the most popular – the *Neue Bildpost* with a circulation of around 420,000 weekly. This extremely aggressive sensational newspaper lies, as *Der Spiegel*⁷ wrote, between the porch and the holy water stoop in innumerable churches throughout Germany, and, in my experience, is sold by the altar boys after Sunday mass. Its right wing views (it supports Strauss wholeheartedly) make even some CDU politicians shudder – for this reason, I am told (the shuddering, that is, not the views), it has been banned in the Essen diocese. On the day of the election (a Sunday) this paper produced a huge reproduction of a caricature on its front page – a grim looking priest chewing a bite off a crucifix.

⁶The use of the parallel between our Labour Party and the SPD is suggested by the political propaganda the CDU made out of the difficulties of the Labour Government. cf. an article entitled 'Breach of Contract' in the CDU youth magazine *Die Entscheidung* (September 1965) attacking our Government's attitude to payments for the Rhine Army begins 'Britain's Social Democrat Prime Minister, Harold Wilson . . .'

⁷*Der Spiegel*, 4th October 1965.

The title the paper supplied was, 'This is what the SPD exhibits'. Inside the paper the Catholic, who was on his way to vote, was told that this picture and even worse had been exhibited in premises in West Berlin owned by the SPD. The exhibition, he was told, showed deep hatred against the Church, ridicule of the Pope, defamation of priests and nuns, etc. School children, it told him, were led through this exhibition. 'What,' it threatened, 'will happen when such attacks could be made against our faith without restriction?' The hint was clear. One could see in this exhibition exactly what the SPD thought of the Church, and what it would do to the Church once it was in power. A school teacher friend of mine used it to justify her voting against the SPD that morning.

This Catholic newspaper, *Der Spiegel* writes, received the blessing and good wishes of Cardinals Frings and Jaeger. The sinister undemocratic intentions of this propaganda become all the more obvious when we realise that this attack on the SPD had been held up for a whole year. The exhibition – a 'Gag Festival' – actually took place a year ago (15th September 1964). The story had been stored away for election day. Nothing was said in the *Bildpost* about the fact that the caricatures came from a French magazine and were meant as an example of French satire. *Der Spiegel* states that no school children were taken round – in fact only 4,000 people saw the exhibition. The SPD heard of this *Bildpost* edition on the Tuesday before the election and immediately protested that the party was neither directly nor indirectly involved in the exhibition, and got a court interdict on the circulation of the edition; but the paper got wind and had the edition out a day earlier. The SPD then sent telegrams to the bishops and letters to about 10,000 priests asking them to co-operate. But *Neue Bildpost* got out all the same, despite the interdict. A letter published in this newspaper for 3rd October gives one example of how the clergy reacted to this disreputable piece of propaganda and the interdict of the courts forbidding distribution. A priest tells how the local SPD representatives came to see him on election Sunday before mass to protest about the distribution of this edition. The priest tells how he told them that 'the SPD hadn't yet taken over the police force' and that it was impudence for the SPD to issue orders 'to me a priest'. The priest then got into the pulpit before mass and told the congregation 'with what Gestapo methods we will have to reckon if the SPD wins the election'. The anger of the congregation, he proudly tells us, 'found expression in the noticeable enthusiasm of the singing and praying'. No doubt also in the polling booths. I have not seen any public statement against this scandal from the bishops; on the contrary, the official Catholic newspaper for Cologne published on its front page a report supporting the action of the *Neue Bildpost*.⁸

⁸*Kirchen Zeitung für das Erzbistum Köln*, 3rd October 1965.

The Youth Federation and the Workers Movement

Apart from the immense influence the priest still has in Catholic areas of Germany, the internal organisation of social work – Volk schools, Catholic workers organisations, and youth work – gives the Church a much larger influence on the life of the community than she has in England. This enormous organisation supported by the state, influencing Catholics in all forms of life, brings out its own newspapers. Before an election this organisation goes all out to win CDU votes. Let us look at some examples.

At the end of July the Federation of German Catholic Youth (BDKJ) organised a Federation Festival in Dusseldorf. Catholic youth from all over Germany were brought together seven weeks before the election to a rally which was described by H. Th. Risse in a radio commentary as ‘party political pressure in the year of the election’.⁹ A local newspaper reported: ‘In its choice of speakers especially for the discussion “Politics in Germany” the BDKJ has intentionally limited itself to CDU politicians including the Chancellor, and no representative of the SPD or FDP – that makes the political bias perfectly clear’.¹⁰ Fortunately there was an affiliated group – Quickborn Jungerenbund – which had the courage to protest that the impression was being given that Catholic youth are necessarily committed to the CDU. It had the audacity to invite Carl Amery to deliver an address at the time of the festival (the BDKJ authorities had refused to include him amongst the official speakers) and to arrange a press conference at which thirty journalists were able to hear the whole story. This incident is revealing. The attitude of the BDKJ authorities is typical of the cool manner in which CDU electioneering is given the platform of Catholic organisations. At the same time the energetic reactions of Quickborn and the wide support it received from the press and radio show how restless people are becoming at the Church’s one-sided political involvement.

The CDU draws its support mainly from the middle class in Germany, the SPD remains, however, the workers’ party. Whereas the middle class Catholic would probably vote CDU anyway, the Catholic worker is thrown into a crisis of allegiance between his Church and his social milieu. The ordinary German worker has no doubt on which side the Church stands, but the Catholic worker is placed in a hopeless dilemma: he must choose between solidarity with his own class, its party, its Trade Unions and ideals, and his Church which openly attacks these institutions and their ideals. It is, as I have learned in discussions with Catholic workers, a tragic situation. The Church is, however, relentless in its demands on her workers. Of course they are organised – for instance into the Catholic Workers Movement (KAB). We can get a fairly clear idea of its

⁹*Sendung Aktuelles aus der Christenheit*, 10th August 1965; II Programme WDR.

¹⁰*Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, 2nd August 1965.

demands on them from its official magazine for Cologne.¹¹ Its election number publishes under the heading 'Before the Elections' the following comments. 'Catholic workers cannot support parties like the SPD and FDP because these parties have still refused to state that their political activities are based on christian values.' Further down there is an extract from an open letter addressed to Peter Nellon (a Catholic SPD MP) from the Fulda branch of the KAB in which the astonishing accusation is made: 'For the SPD religion remains a private concern; politics for them is built only on penultimate values'. In contrast to this, the statement by the SPD MP, von Knoeringen, that 'the SPD refuses to use christian arguments as theses for election campaigns, not out of lack of respect for Christianity, but rather out of respect for the religious persuasion of its voters' seems more reasonable. It was, however, quoted as an example of the lack of Christianity in the SPD. Amongst local news we read of a KAB conference in an industrial town near Cologne. After mass during which the priest blessed the new banner and flag 'the priest was able to greet not only the members, but also the local parliamentary CDU candidates Dr Verbeek, and Fritz Justen'.

Finally there appears, almost inevitably, in this paper the famous declaration by Cardinal Döpfner made on May Day 1964. It crops up all over the place in papers of this sort. 'In the Godesberg Programme (the restatement by the SPD, in 1959, of its political thinking) the SPD has certainly started to build a bridge over the chasm which has always separated the Church and Socialism; but without going into details I think I must, after much serious thought, say that the bridge is not ready yet, the breach has not yet been closed.' The image is interesting; the Church and the Labour Party are estranged, but not, as so many Catholic thinkers the world over nowadays are anxious to stress, because of Catholic shortcomings and false political alignments. There is no hint of self-criticism, no hint even that both sides might do a bit of bridge building from their own sides and perhaps meet in the middle, and certainly no suggestion that Catholics might be across on the other side out of conviction. The Labour Party must span bridges across to the Church. Statements like these from the avant-garde of German Catholicism make one realise how very much more profoundly progressive our English hierarchy is in this critical matter.

As in the case of the BDKJ so the KAB is having trouble with small affiliated groups who don't want to be organised out of their freedom to make their own political decisions. A chaplain of one such group recently complained that the KAB was a sort of fifth column of the CDU – the party, he indicated, which is regarded by the huge majority of the workers as bourgeois, conservative and capitalist. He complained that the incorporation of young workers into the KAB would weaken their apostolic presence in their own

¹¹*Unser Diözesanverband der KAB in der Erzdiözese Köln*, Heft, March 1965.

milieu. He appealed for freedom for the Catholic worker to make his own political decisions. 'The KAB should leave its self-chosen Ghetto and declare its solidarity with all those of good will in society to work for a better world. The CDU should conduct its election campaign as a political party with political means and reject the election support of the Church.' This statement by a priest with wide personal experience of the problems of working people was answered by a representative of the KAB, also a priest, in the following manner. The point of a church organisation is to form its members in the faith and in Christian moral teaching. The Christian worker strives for the realisation of a Christian society in an industrial age. Theologians, social teachers and economic experts have taken up a position that is opposed to Liberalism and Socialism. 'If the KAB is in the minority then its members have the courage to be a minority for the sake of the truth.' What truth?

The Smearing of Willi Brandt

Mann in der Zeit, a monthly newspaper with a circulation of 700,000 distributed throughout Germany, brings out rather interestingly, the general lines of Catholic propaganda in this election. It is officially published 'on behalf of the German bishops for the organisation of pastoral activity amongst men in German dioceses'. The special edition for the election month carried a lengthy article by the CDU candidate Heinrich Köppler. The paper is strewn with CDU propaganda in one form or another. An article dealing with the SPD states that it is not yet acceptable to Catholics. The SPD must give up its present policy of comprehensive schools. It must withdraw its support for state-controlled social work. The SPD must not attack German bishops behind closed doors, as somebody apparently did in January last year in Berlin, and it must not go on criticising Catholic institutions and organisations. 'If we are to believe that the SPD is really friendly to the Church then this friendship must be practised right down to the last official of the party.' There follows an attack on alleged SPD influence in radio and television, and finally the statistics are brought out. From the 205 SPD members in parliament only eleven are Catholics, and there isn't a single Catholic in the Shadow Cabinet. This last point is bewildering. In view of Catholic propaganda it is not surprising that the number of Catholics in the SPD is low. One might also have expected the far greater number of Protestants to count—the CDU itself, is after all, a Christian not a Catholic party. Then one can be a very nominal Catholic indeed in Germany. About 44% of the German population is Catholic. A recent survey on Catholics in the German Republic broke down this number as follows: 10% are practically atheist; 40% are marginal, having pretty well broken off all contact with the Church; 30% are regular Sunday Catholics without having any close connections with the Church – religion is not a serious enough

matter with them to provoke any conflict in their religious attitudes; 20% are closely connected with the Church.¹² This statistic seems to me more revealing, especially in view of the reputation of several Catholic politicians.

Turning to the correspondence columns of this number of *Mann in der Zeit* we come upon a letter that leads us into one of the most unpleasant aspects of recent political activity in Germany. A priest writes 'Couldn't you perhaps give us a sketch of Willy Brandt's (SPD leader) life in your September number? Certainly many would really like to know what Brandt got up to in Norway and why he wore Norwegian uniform'. Now what is this good priest probing for; what is this suspect past that he is trying to have brought to the notice of the faithful in the election edition? Nazi affiliations perhaps? On the contrary; it is well known that Brandt along with many other honourable Germans, emigrated when the Nazis came to power. Rumour has it that he helped the Norwegians defend themselves against the Nazi invaders. Brandt's character has been bitterly attacked from every direction. Adenauer accused him openly in the 1961 campaign of having been born out of wedlock and got away with it. 'He drinks' a priest told me when I asked him why he would vote against Brandt. Most ominous of all the rumours against him is his involvement in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side. German Catholics in particular are unwilling to think through the connection between German and Spanish Fascism, especially as German troops were involved in Spain in what many think was a crusade against Communism.

The smearing of Brandt's reputation has amounted to a public scandal. Not only has the campaign stooped to a level of personal denigration that should not be tolerated in any decent democracy, but it has been based on a political standpoint that must awaken serious doubts about Germany's attitude to her past. It is depressing to notice how enthusiastically Catholics have joined in the campaign. Recently the intellectuals have been trying to draw the attention of the German people to the implications. *Die Zeit*, the excellent liberal weekly, published an article by Egon Bahr entitled, 'Emigration – a stain?'¹³, in which he pointed out that the campaign had callously distorted the facts. 'That a young man only nineteen years old left home in 1933 on the advice of his friends that he was in personal danger because of his politics, and was deprived of his citizenship by the Nazis had no influence at all on the whispering campaign. The fact that Willi Brandt used Norwegian uniform to avoid arrest is not believed, that he never fought against German soldiers is used by the NPD (the Neo-Nazi party) and Richard Jaeger (CSU, now Minister of Justice – a Catholic) to show that Brandt is no

¹²Norbert Greinacher, from an article in *Wort und Wahrheit*, October 1965: 'Die Katholiken in der Bundesrepublik'.

¹³Emigration-ein Makel? by Egon Bahr. *Die Zeit*, 29th October 1965.

fighter. Hardly an election meeting took place in Bavaria, Lower Saxony or Bremen without this issue being raised. . . . The defamation blossomed into all sorts of absurdities.' 'The CDU/CSU along with the NPD issued a picture of Brandt as a Norwegian soldier on their political handbills under the title "By their fruits you shall know them".' Egon Bahr concludes: 'The sense of the campaign depended on the belief that a large number of people took exception to Germans who had emigrated, thought of the Spanish Civil War as an event in which the Condor Legion fought on the right side, and Hitler's war as the German people's war. Assuming it to be a fact that a large number of Germans share these views, then the decisive question for the future is: Do we want to encourage these views? Do we want to cultivate them so that we can enjoy their fruit? Shouldn't the parties be united in the determination not to encourage feelings in which the boundaries between national, nationalistic, and nazi are hardly discernable? The problem is: Can the CDU which for sixteen years has determined the guiding principles of political morality, draw, in the interest of its further political success, on Nazi sentiments without damaging itself and our people?' Günter Grass the well known young writer, made his protest in a speech at Darmstadt. 'For ten years the German people, including the post-war generation, was expected to tolerate Hans Globke (Secretary of State in Adenauer's government), the commentator of the Nazi's racial law. The supposed political genius Adenauer was given a free hand by the parties that call themselves christian to instate this man in office. In view of this, one can understand how the growing family of those who were fellow travellers, accomplices, and guilty in Hitler's day boil up in hate as an emigrant declares himself ready to stand as a candidate for the office of Chancellor in this land.'¹⁴ Carl Amery won the disapproval of at least one Catholic newspaper¹⁵ for suggesting to a meeting of Catholic Youth (BDKJ) that they sign a letter to be sent to Brandt which ran: 'We respect your decision to leave Hitler's Germany and to wear the uniform of a country that was invaded by Hitler. We feel that each attack on such a decision is an attack on those Catholics and Socialists who were hunted by Nazi tyranny into exile, prison and death. We recognise these attacks as conscious support for National Socialism and a serious danger for German democracy. We will always oppose such attacks irrespective of whether they come from old Nazis or from Christian politicians.' Only twenty-nine out of the three hundred signed the letter which was subsequently sent to Brandt. Amery earlier had written in *Die Zeit*: 'Brandt's character offended two of the most important German prejudices

¹⁴*Der Monat*, November 1965. An excerpt from 'Rede über das Selbstverständliche' – on the occasion of receiving the Büchner-Preis, October 1965.

¹⁵*Echo der Zeit*, 7th November 1965.

– prejudices that Strauss and Adenauer (both leading Catholic politicians) exploited without scruple in their struggle against him: first he was a bastard, and second that he wore enemy uniform. The fact that these men used such arguments against Willi Brandt would have disqualified them in any decent democracy, but here in Germany it was just right, and every possible use was made of it. As far as I know no bishop or Catholic Central Committee spoke out publicly against this kind of political persecution.¹⁶

Sex and Communism

There are many signs that public opinion is at last waking up to the dangers of what a recent article in *Die Zeit* called 'black demagogy'. Heinz Kornetzki in this article¹⁷ cited Catholic newspapers up and down the Federal Republic which are in the hands of 'a clan of Catholic conservative publishers'. While CDU politicians got their pictures in these papers and were offered every occasion to attack their opponents, the SPD remained without a chance.' This article indicates the moral weapons these newspapers used to fight the political enemy. The content of this political morality seems to consist in a condemnation of communism and sex. So any analysis of a political situation is finally reduced either to communist tendencies or sexual license. It is hard to find any other kind of political argument. Kornetzki cites a Catholic information service that circulated the information that Brandt has a 'personal friend' who possesses a Cuban passport, a paper from Bödefeld that pathetically warns that 'if Germany and Europe is not going to sink under the red flood then we need a Christian Democratic movement', and a Catholic paper in Oberfalz which made play of the fact that Brandt's sixteen year old son had signed a petition against America's policy in Vietnam.

Sex rears its head somewhat awkwardly into the political arena. The CDU may be in control, but somehow an absolute majority for the CDU, according to the CDU politician Susterheim writing in a Catholic paper, would clamp down on the rising interest in sex in public life. It is hard to wield sexual indignation against a society that has been ruled by the CDU for sixteen years. One can, of course, as a Catholic paper did, denounce the shamelessness of German magazines – their immoral pictures and suggestive articles and then add idignantly that the Liberals and Socialists look on silently. But attacks on neighbouring socialist countries carry more conviction – Sweden, for instance, where unspeakable orgies take place, where bands of youth make love on the roofs of cars, where schoolgirls practice abortion and young Socialists write in favour of brothels. 'A moral chaos the like of which our civilisation has never known' writes the diocesan paper for Trier. 'Democracy

¹⁶*Die Zeit*, 22nd October 1965.

¹⁷'Schwarze Demagogie', *Die Zeit*, 22nd October 1965.

without God' is a favourite heading. *Sonntag im Bild* likens it to the days of Nero. The appearance of Günter Grass in politics on the side of the SPD widened the scope of this form of political argument. A writer in the Würzburg Catholic paper designates this world-famous writer: 'Günter Grass, literary image for the SPD mayor Willi Brandt, author of pornographic masterpieces, literary expert for masturbation'. The fact that intellectuals like Günter Grass have taken over what might have been the Church's role of making a profound moral criticism of German society, has tended only to widen the gap between the intellectuals and the Church in Germany.

The Election Pastoral

No analysis of the recent German election would be complete without a discussion of the bishops' pastoral letter. In order to see this carefully composed document in context, it is worth taking a look at a speech given by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of German Catholics, Heinrich Köppler, to Catholic journalists before the election. As a CDU candidate he brings Church propaganda into line with CDU election policy. Fritz Allemann writing in *Der Monat*¹⁸ about the CDU election campaign says that it was the policy of the party to narrow down the election into a Chancellor plebiscite. Erhard against Brandt, a battle of personalities. Political dogma was to be played down as far as possible. This finds its way into official Catholic policy. After emphasizing the special responsibilities of Catholic journalists in 'forming the political opinion of Catholics', Köppler goes on, 'Unfortunately it is a fact that the new consciousness of Church members has led to a decline in internal Church discipline. The result is that official resolutions, etc., particularly the usual bishops' pastoral before the election, have lost some of their effect. It is especially important for the Catholic press to exercise, of necessity, a certain restraint in handling political themes'. Köppler goes on to complain of the loss of a sense of solidarity among the laity. 'It is important that this sense of belonging together should be strengthened and especially with those Catholic personalities who are responsible in the political field'.¹⁹ This speech is particularly interesting for the light it throws on the tactical shift we have noticed in this election. He notes with regret the loss of discipline due to the independence of the laity, and suggests methods of coping with it for political ends. Political themes are to be played down, mass solidarity and Catholic personalities to be played up.

And so we come to the pastoral letter issued by the German bishops to be read in all churches on the Sunday before the election. I think one can detect in it the sort of tactics Herr Köppler laid down for the press. It begins by reminding the faithful that May of last year was the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war. 'When we

¹⁸*Der Monat*, November 1965.

¹⁹*Mann in der Zeit*, April 1965.

look back on those years we have every reason to thank God that he has sent us men at home and abroad who have led us out of the chaos and successfully worked for the building up once again of our nation, our economy, our culture'. Things like bread, new houses farming, industry and trade are referred to. They then go on: 'These men deserve our thanks for the sacrifices they have made'. (One could imagine the reaction in England if the hierarchy had issued a pastoral letter before our last election reminding Catholics of the achievements of the Tory government in the past thirteen years.) The pastoral goes on to remind Catholics of their duty to take an active part in public life. 'Some people maintain that only adherents of secular Weltanschauungen have the right to be active in politics and that when Catholic citizens want to be politically active they must leave their faith at home and must only act according to liberal, socialist or other human ideals; everything else, they say, is clericalism or political Catholicism. Against such claims we reply: We Christians claim our right as citizens to work according to our faith and conscience in the formation of the community, of the nation, economics, culture – yes of the total life of society. We German bishops ask all voting Catholics to fulfil their duty on election day and to vote for these men and women who take upon themselves the heavy responsibility out of a sense of faith and trust in God. The well-being of our folk depends on the fact that voters come to a decision which they can answer for before God and their conscience'.

Does this pastoral mark a growth in Catholic political neutrality? I am afraid such a reading would be too optimistic. No German listening to the pastoral would be in any doubt about which way he was being urged to vote. The achievements of the CDU are praised, and no mention is made of the very serious moral, political problems the Germans have had to face in these CDU years; politicians can get away with 'you've never had it so good' propaganda, but one expects the Church to be looking deeper than the economic miracle, the affluent society. The ideological section is necessarily defensive. The Church has a specific political role to play—in this way the words 'socialist' and 'liberal' can be brought to so as to establish with 'christian' the party trinity and the two persons in it which are unacceptable. But, as Herr Köppler has reminded them, direct ideological themes are unpopular with an undisciplined laity; one should stress the Christian affiliations of the MP's. So personality is to be preferred to politics. It is not to be a question of Catholics getting involved in purely human political reasoning, but rather of Catholic loyalty and solidarity with Catholic politicians.

The Election in Retrospect

The result of the election was without any doubt a personal success for Erhard. Although the CDU didn't quite achieve the overall majority it had hoped for, it increased by 2% its share of the votes.

For the SPD, although it increased its vote by 3%, the result was very disappointing; it still lags 8% behind the CDU, and Brandt has been forced to resign as a candidate for future elections. The FDP dropped by 3%, the neo-nazi NPD entering the field for the first time reached 2%, and the very Christian looking Freedom Party (DFU) lost some 200,000 votes to end with 1.3% of the electorate. It would seem at first sight as though Catholic propaganda had once again played its part in securing a CDU victory. Certainly it is hard to believe that Erhard would now be the Chancellor without the Catholic vote. Women still constitute a sizeable majority of the voters, and they vote overwhelmingly in favour of CDU. A closer look at the results suggests, however, that the Catholic campaign has suffered a severe set-back. The Catholic News Agency called the result 'vinegar in the wine'. Allemann²⁰ notes a trend 'towards the lessening, albeit only gradual, of the importance of the Church'. The SPD did much better in many, although not all, Catholic areas. A look at the election map shows that the SPD won votes in the predominantly Catholic states of North Rhine-Westphalia (6%), Rhineland-Palatinate (3%), Bavaria (3%), and in the Saar (4%). In Saarlouis-Merzig where Catholics are 93.5% of the population, the SPD gained 7% and the CDU lost 5.3% of the votes. The SPD on the other hand suffered its losses in the predominantly Protestant areas. Allemann sums up the result: 'It indicates a healthy maturing away from those confessional motives which were no longer appropriate for the functioning of democracy in a developed society like Germany's; it indicates that these confessional motives have been surpassed by other more general considerations and endeavours'.

Several questions must remain unanswered. How far, for instance, did the signing of the concordat with the Vatican lose traditional SPD votes? Was the swing to SPD in Catholic areas a sign of Catholic maturity or just growing indifference to the Church? It is difficult to believe that the German Church will not be forced to re-examine her current position in politics. She is, as Kornetzki points out²¹, in a critical situation. 'A few days before the recent election a group of Catholic publishers who controlled an agency providing articles for Catholic papers stated that Catholics who voted SPD did so as a result of an erroneous conscience. If this is true then the results of the election show that the pastoral situation in the Church is in a precarious state'. Her present neo-scholastic social theory is out of tune not only with the thinking of her progressive theologians and the spirit of renewal and *aggiornamento* her bishops defended at the Council, but also, and this is much more serious, with the reality of the society she is living in. A letter in *Die Zeit* following Kornetzki's article is the last word:

²⁰*Der Monat*, November 1965.

²¹'Schwarze Demagogie', *Die Zeit*, 22nd October 1965.

'On the 19th of September I went to the polls. I voted SPD. On the 2nd of October as a Catholic I fulfilled my Christian duty and went to confession. I asked the priest if I had burdened my soul with a sin as the result of having voted SPD. "Yes", he said. "As a Christian you ought to give your vote only to a party which is genuinely based on Christian ideals". Of course I could have refuted the reverend father's point of view; the SPD is also (perhaps even more than the CDU/CSU) a party that is based on Christian ideals, that guarantees religious freedom, protects each religion, etc. But I kept quiet. I got my penance and absolution. I left the confessional contrite and disturbed, contrite and disturbed over my sinful life. But all the same I'll vote SPD again even if I must make the best of the fact that after my death the boxes and the front rows in the future life will be reserved for the CSU. If they let me in at all it will be "standing room only" in the gallery. The comfort of not being alone there and of being in good company, will help me to bear the disgrace. Till then I will just have to try to live with it.'

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