

The appearance of the encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* on the real presence of Christ in the eucharist is an occasion for considering that other and more fundamental real presence of Christ: his presence in human suffering. According to Our Lord himself, the first test of our faith, our capacity to recognise the Word of God for what he is, is meeting him in the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned. Unless we recognise him in the tortured prisoners of Vietnam it is idle to pretend that we recognise him in the sacraments of the Church.

There are countless individual agonies in which the Christian may either encounter his saviour or pass him by, but this is not simply a matter for individuals. There are some things which are literally crucial for mankind as a whole and these are a test for the Church as a whole. Will the Church see and enter into the suffering of the world to find her saviour, or will she pass by on the other side? (The priest and the levite were doubtless preoccupied with the reform of the liturgy and the constitution of the Church.)

It would be ignorance to think of the documents already issued by the Council as irrelevant to this central concern. Their whole purpose is to make the Church open to mankind. The Constitution on the Liturgy tries to make worship less 'liturgical' in the sense of less ritualistic; the Constitution *De Ecclesia* teaches us to see the Church not as an ecclesiastical affair but as the 'sacrament of the unity of mankind'. Nevertheless it is useless and empty to envisage a Church open to the world if the actual Church that exists dodges the encounter with the world that suffers now. There is grave danger of this. As historical events, the promulgation of the earlier decrees of the Council must be interpreted in the light of what happens at the fourth Session. Then we shall know whether the liturgical decree really is, as Fr Clifford Howell claims, 'One of the most important documents ever promulgated'. Or whether it was merely a matter of tidying up a few rubrics and cutting out some archaisms. Psychologists speak of a phenomenon they call 'displacement': when a man is faced with a problem he dare not deal with, he suddenly becomes very busy about some quite irrelevant matter. It could be that this 'mechanism for avoiding conflict' that is found in many animals is also operating in the Church. Perhaps our sudden preoccupation with collegiality and the vernacular is merely a way of averting our eyes from the frightful problems and conflicts that face us. This suspicion grows in proportion as disputes about such things as the vernacular or eucharistic theology grow more bad-tempered. Perhaps these Christians are working off amongst themselves in the safety of correspondence columns, the aggression they dare not turn against more powerful enemies.

Displacement does not remove the problems. They remain towering before us and sooner or later we must admit that they cannot be

met by the kind of *aggiornamento* that simply involves reformulating catholicism in language acceptable to the best moderate liberal opinion. If we are going to recognise the real problems of mankind, and that means the problems of over-population and nuclear war, we are in for conflict.

Catholics believe that the Church as a whole is represented in one way by the episcopal college gathered in Council and in another way by the leader of that college, the Pope. Let us consider each of them. The Pope has just returned from his visit to the United Nations. This was what they call an historic event. This means first that it hadn't happened before and secondly that it made a difference to the course of history. In fact it was a disappointment, an opportunity almost wasted.

It was not Pope Paul's fault that Western journalists seemed to think he had dropped in at the U.N. during his American tour (indeed his own decision to travel through New York in a closed car instead of a triumphal chariot may have been significant) but could he not have made better use of 'the epilogue of a wearying pilgrimage in search of a conversation with the entire world'? It was good that he definitely ranged himself against those who despise the United Nations 'this last hope of peace . . . a stage in the development of mankind from which retreat must never be admitted'. It was good that he explicitly condemned colonialism and implicitly advocated the admission of China and that he spoke so intensely of the evil of war. All this was good but it could come straight from the editorials of the *Guardian* or the *Observer*; it is a view taken for granted by any civilised humanist. It did not take a Pope to tell the United Nations *that*. The Church is not confronting the world until it speaks to the world in the voice of Christ, until it says, for example, not that war is horrible but that murder is sinful. Pope Paul could have said but did not say simply and explicitly that the teaching of Christ means that no man may ever use nuclear weapons (or any others) to obliterate a city. He would not have been speaking merely for some minority viewpoint, he would have been proclaiming the faith of the Church as interpreted by the consensus of Catholic theologians: even Schema 13, of which more later, gets this far. He would have been saying something at once obvious to the Christian mind and shocking to the world. Pope Paul well knows that the Christian's objection to 'the terrible arms that modern science has given us' is not simply that 'they demand enormous expenditures, obstruct projects of union and useful collaboration and falsify the psychology of peoples'. The objection to them is that they are methods of committing murder and they function as what he called 'defensive' weapons only by making credible the threat to commit murder. 'If you wish to be brothers, let the arms fall from your hands. One cannot love while holding offensive weapons'. True, but this could have been said in the thirteenth century: the picture of two warriors throwing

away their swords and embracing has almost no relevance to the actual situation. A nuclear bomb is not a very big sword, it is a device for killing thousands of people who have nothing to do with the quarrel between warriors except to suffer from it.

No closer to the actual facts of human suffering was the simple image of bread on the table. 'You must strive to multiply bread so that it suffices for the tables of mankind, and not rather favour an artificial control of birth, which would be irrational, in order to diminish the number of guests at the banquet of life.' Whatever we are to say about methods of birth control (and in this matter, unlike that of murder, there is evidently not a general consensus amongst theologians) the fact is that such control is advocated not simply to diminish the number of guests but precisely to multiply the bread.

It does not seem that this visit showed the Church as a community really coming to grips with the agony of man, but it was, after all, a minor occasion compared to the convocation of the Council of the Church. Although the Pope in his public activity always in some sense represents the Catholic Church, the Council speaks for the Church in a much deeper sense than does the Pope in such a speech. What then of the Council?

Will the Fathers really take the measure of the problems of the world? Will they, for example, faced with the problems of hunger, illiteracy and ignorance, restrict themselves to exhortations to the 'developed nations' to come to the aid of their less fortunate brothers, or will they even hint that the question is a political one, that these conditions have strong and living roots in the system of exploitation known as the maintenance of Western Civilisation?

If the text of Scheme 13 on war is passed as it now stands we may count the Council as having failed. This topic provides a simple test of whether *aggiornamento* means really confronting the world or merely being worldly. It is true that the Schema does condemn absolutely the use of nuclear weapons but as it stands it justifies the threat to use them. Moreover it asks Christians to give their governments the benefit of the doubt as to the justice of going to war: as though waging war were something normally virtuous which might on occasion become wicked. Finally in a sentence of unbelievable condescension it suggests that it might be appropriate if governments, as a matter of 'positive law' grant to their citizens the right to follow their consciences in this matter.

The outlook is not good and yet it may be that England is about to follow her tradition of turning at the last moment, after long prevarication and compromise, to speak and act for sanity. As I write this the news comes through of the speeches of Abbot Butler and of Bishop Grant and Bishop Wheeler criticising this section of the Schema. If they can carry the assembly with them they will have saved not merely this Session but the Council as a whole.

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