

## A DIVIDED GENERATION

IT is one of the perils of certitude that one may seem to be too sure. The critic, exasperated at another's muddle-mindedness, can amuse himself (and his cheer-leaders) with the shabby evidence of a mind's confusion. And for the Christian, the gathering records of disillusionment, the sense increasingly revealed in the writing of our time that the secular gods have failed, can give an easy—and usually an unprofitable—opportunity for saying 'I told you so'. Bewildered and betrayed, the men who put their faith in utopias (of which communism was the most compelling) have little enough now in which to hope. The critic, as any other man, perhaps more than any other man, has the obligation of charity (which in this context must mean an attempt to understand another's need). An apologete's advantage may sometimes prove an apostle's disaster. Easy to reveal the vacuum left by a faith that could not embrace the calamities of our generation; harder far to try to show that the good the Christians seek and serve is every man's good at last. Never was St Paul so justified: 'in examining your monuments as I passed by them, I found among others an altar which bore the inscription, To the unknown God. And it is this unknown object of your devotion that I am revealing to you'.

Among contemporary documents Stephen Spender's Autobiography must be reckoned a faithful reflection of an age and its illusions. This is one man's story, it is true, and a highly personal one, but here is reflected the confident faith in political action and the 'cause of freedom', the mood of the Spanish War which spread far beyond the literary circles of Mr Spender's choice. Here, too, is the aftermath; personal once more, but remembering, as it must, that 'we were the Divided Generation of Hamlets who found the world out of joint and failed to set it right'. The picture is never a happy one: there is no perspective to give a lasting meaning to the hideous detail or the good. They stand out, unrelated and alone, for there is no firm purpose to order and integrate the whole. And Mr Spender's Oxford Festival Play, *To the Island*, is once more a similarly negative tract: the political lie, the unscrupulous violence in the service of a cause, these are detestable, and destroy a man in his dignity. But beyond the shudder there is no sign as yet that these things are damnable

precisely because man is made for more than these, because man is made for God, because God himself has assumed man's nature and his need.

It is not difficult to expose the confusion of a mind that has known such maladies of guilt and indecision. Evelyn Waugh, in a *Tablet* review of Mr Spender's book, found much at which to sneer, and no one sneers so entertainingly as he. But is this the whole story? Is this sorry catalogue of personal relationships gone wrong, of literary cliques and political naïvities, of careless writing and unresolved dilemmas, simply a matter for a column-and-a-half of satirical legerdemain? Mr Waugh wrote, one supposes, as a critic who is a Christian, and his was apparently the only Catholic judgment to appear about a book which, with all its manifest weaknesses, remains an accurate map of some of the territory the Church exists to redeem.

Who is to blame that for Mr Spender the Church is merely an interesting element in the poetry of Verlaine, or just horror for his first wife (because he says, of the convent-school sermons she heard on Hell) or inexplicably the adopted religion of his sister (the fact is mentioned and nothing more)? He cannot know, he can scarcely have suspected, that the unknown God he looks for, the peace and integrity of mind he seeks, the positive good which should match his own negative release from a materialist determinism, are in fact to be found within the Christian account of man and his destiny. And his ignorance, for such one must assume it to be, and that of thousands of others, is at least in part the responsibility of Christians. It can be comfortable, from the ramparts of confident belief, to expose the fallacies of the unbeliever, but, as St Thomas remarked, your adversary's arguments are themselves your opportunity to win him to wisdom. He is in need, and charity will urge you to meet his need; his very longing for goodness and God, however unconscious and unformed it may be, is a beginning, and it is one for which to be glad.

The apologete's defence of the Christian faith can appear to be, in an age so lost to the allegiance of the Church, a ceaseless rear-guard action, a holding to what we have; and a wider range, a remoter objective, may seem impossible to achieve. But it is not so. There is no land or allegiance beyond the kingship of Christ, and there is no man, however complex or tortured he be, who was not made for redemption.