

Almost two years ago an old Amplefordian wrote a critical appreciation of the *Slant Manifesto* in the *Ampleforth Journal* (Summer, 1967). What was most significant about this was that it was written at all: unless at least a few people at the mutual extremes have the generosity to listen and to talk to each other, there can be no genuinely common pursuit in the Church. And now a similar occasion for such a conversation occurs in the shape of an even more important book from the Catholic New Left: *From Culture to Revolution* (Sheed and Ward), the papers read at the *Slant* conference in 1967.

We hope in due course to publish a more professional appraisal of the papers from the pen of Professor J. M. Cameron. We content ourselves here with registering certain questions which a reading of the book would seem to pose immediately to both parties in the debate.

On the one hand, there would seem to be a critical question for the Catholic New Left itself. The very title of the book indicates the principle and strategy of coherence: it is the felt frustration of an ideal defined as 'culture in common' that necessitates a programme of action to attain this thwarted system of values—and hence revolution. The necessity and the means of the programme of revolution therefore depend on two things: the accuracy of the diagnosis and the acceptance of the ideal. Now despite certain wavering attempts to pass off the *ideal* as an unquestionable transcription of objective *fact* (see e.g. p. 28) it seems quite clear that on the whole the ideal proposed, that of a 'culture in common' (which is, of course, a very sophisticated conception rich in ramifications), is indeed an ideal and a value-judgment. The underlying and often explicit opposition throughout is between culture as a complex of ideally lived values and culture as the socio-political setting of these values—we might say between institution taken in a more sociological sense and institution taken in a more juridical sense (v. particularly p. 55, and cf. pp. 5, 11-12, 16-17, 18, 29, 40-43, 46, 48, 54). And it is here that the alert Christian will surely want to ask questions: are we pressing the diagnosis deep enough if we read the only too evident holes in human affairs as the deficiency of a common culture? Could not the deficiency of a common culture itself be only an expression and consequence of a yet deeper lack, of the ontological order, the remedying of which should therefore logically precede that of its derivative manifestations? Put in specifically Christian terms, is it not our faith that the flaws and failures of our inter-

personal and structural relationships are themselves so many signs and showings of a more radical flaw which we traditionally term the failure of our relationship to God, the ground of all other relationships? Therefore, despite all the talk of radicalism, is the diagnosis truly root and branch, or only, as it were, branch? And if the diagnosis is indeed insufficiently radical in this way, then surely the ideal that is the implicit correlative of any stated impoverishment and privation must undergo a corresponding shift, and the programme and means that follow from it and above all, the expectations that attend it, must also be revised accordingly, under pain of inevitable disillusionment and a new idolatry of community. In particular, does not the ideal stand revealed as eschatological in the strict sense, that is to say, attainable in its fullness in the next life, and only derivatively, inchoately, and symbolically in this?

On the other hand, all this does not mean that the privileged and the liberals among us can therefore relapse contentedly back into our old positions; we too must face a disturbing question, and it is the New Left who put it. For even if the ideal of universal community glimpsed by the New Left belongs properly to the future, precisely for that reason it must in the Christian version of eschatology (at once promise and inauguration) be allowed to invade the present as far as historic conditions and human generosity permit.

And here the two outstanding papers of the symposium are crucial. The essential insight of the New Left is that the development of each man is reciprocally related to the development of all others in his society, at its different levels—or, to adapt some of Mr Eagleton's words, that 'a crisis of personal value' is connected to 'a general crisis of society'. Now what Mr Charles Taylor has so brilliantly done is to use a single—ultimately eschatological—criterion not merely to take the New Left criticism of the traditional Marxist interpretation of this principle one stage further but by the same token to expose what he calls the 'privatization' of our still predominantly liberal society. By this he means the widely received or resigned indifference to public and commonly sought meanings, the abandonment in practice of the attempt to relate such empirically given (and inevitably deficient) communities as we have to 'ultimate realities' and, in this sense, an interior emigration into the suburbs of our cities and psyches, to the detriment of an attempt to work out a purpose genuinely in common. And it is the particular merit of Fr Fergus Kerr's paper (previously published in *New Blackfriars*, November, 1967) to have unmasked the apparent neutrality of the established version of society which endorses such privatization by analysing precisely how and where there *are* in fact two alternative views of society in deep and active conflict amongst us. Further, more explicitly than any of the other contributors

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There is, in fact, a widespread feeling that the use of such weapons is exceptionally wicked and barbarous. While it lasts the danger that such weapons will be used is diminished; so, if we do not wish to see them used in every quarrel between neighbours, it is wise to foster and reinforce that feeling and not to do anything which might undermine it. I do not think that the banning of chemical and biological weapons will make wars any less nasty, nor do I think that such a ban would prevent a nation which was determined to use them from doing so, but I do think it diminishes the risk of our drifting unintentionally into microbial war, the results of which would be unpredictable. Public awareness of the nature and effects of nuclear weapons has made their immediate use less likely than it would otherwise be and the same can be done in the case of chemical and biological weapons. This staving off will, however, be of little value if the time gained is not used to create the conditions for a just peace instead of the uneasy state, half peace, half war, in which we are now living.

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(except perhaps for Mr Taylor, at p. 175, and Mr Raymond Williams himself, at p. 305), he shows that the issue is *not* the individual *versus* society, taken in some gross, collectivist sense, but the *sort* of relationship that should obtain between individual and society: listening or stopped, connected or isolate, collaborative or exploitative. No, the issue is far more between individualism and a true personalism.

Evidently, once the issue is posed in such terms, a great deal of work and thinking remains to be done—and, incidentally, much more agreement may be found than polemics might suggest. But, as lawyers know, to have brought grave and complex questions ‘to issue’ is already no mean achievement. For this alone we should be grateful to the authors and publishers.

P.L.