

■ The appearance of a Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament (Nelson, 12s. 6d.) is an event of more than bibliographical interest. For, in this country at least, the Bible itself has ironically been the symbol of Christian division. The appeal to it, and to it alone, has been the mark of classical Protestantism, while Catholics in the interests of an apologetic that stressed tradition seemed to minimize the Bible's unique authority. And they did not hesitate to accuse each other of manipulating translations to defend a doctrinal position. The last twenty years have seen so impressive an evolution in biblical scholarship – and so radical a change in ecumenical attitudes – that a common version (for the Catholic variants are few, and only such as seem desirable in the light of Catholic tradition: 'Hail, full of grace' rather than 'Hail, o favoured one' is an obvious example) is not only valuable in its own right: it is, as the Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain emphasizes in a foreword, a pointer to genuine ecumenical advance.

■ Eight years have passed since the publication of the Wolfenden Report on homosexual offences and prostitution, and during that time several debates in Parliament have reflected a continuing public interest in the reforms proposed. Representative bodies of most Christian churches have endorsed the main Wolfenden proposal, that the homosexual acts of consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence, and the recent debate in the House of Lords on Lord Arran's Bill witnessed the unequivocal support of the Archbishop of Canterbury in favour of a change in the law. It may be recalled that the Catholic committee appointed by the late Cardinal Griffin to give evidence before the Wolfenden committee itself supported the principal reform, while recommending the retention of full penal sanctions to restrain offences against minors, offences against public decency and the exploitation of vice for the purpose of gain.

It may be wondered why, in view of such widespread responsible support for a change in the law, the change is so slow in coming. Lord Devlin's thesis – that the State has the right to intervene in the sphere of private morality insofar as the common good requires it as a manifestation of the public conscience – undoubtedly reflects a general instinct (it can be little more) against change, though Lord Devlin has

in fact expressed himself in favour of the Wolfenden proposals. And any change that could seem to reflect indifference to the moral structures which should characterize a healthy society must obviously be carefully considered.

Yet it is manifest that the existing law – whatever might be true of some ideal law – fails to serve the common good. Only a minute fraction of offenders attract the attention of the law at all, and its intervention leads to grave inequities – not to speak of the positive encouragement it gives to the blackmailer. But the moral issue is much larger than a matter of the administration of the criminal law, though a law which operates so arbitrarily, and with so little hope of achieving its expressed purpose, can hardly be said to deserve the name of law at all. What is at issue, as Cardinal Griffin's committee insisted, is the right of the State to intervene in the purely private sphere of morality. 'Morally evil things so far as they do not affect the common good are not the concern of the human legislator'. If they were, adultery and lesbian offences should be crimes as well, and the defenders of the present law should, to be consistent, demand an extension of the State's right to intervene.

At a time of moral upheaval, the temptation for the Christian is to resist any legal change that might appear to diminish the community's disapprobation of wrong. But no valid moral order is sustained by invoking a law which illegitimately equates moral guilt with criminal culpability and which, in the process, brings the law itself into evident contempt. People are not made good even by the best acts of Parliament, and the statute books of many American States are full of such attempts – as unworkable as they are ludicrous and unjust. But to repeal a law is one thing: to promote the moral order is another. The need, and it is urgent, is to commend a true morality not by invoking the unreasonable sanctions of the law but by giving to the Christian sense of human responsibility a new sense of purpose. For there are laws in the moral order, too, and they above all must be seen to be the embodiment of the law of God, whose justice can never exist apart from his love.

And, whatever changes there may be in the law of the land, an immediate pastoral task awaits the Church. Freed from the fear of the law, homosexuals – and not they alone – must be made more, and not less, aware of their responsibility to society at large. They cannot use the excuse of their condition, if it be indeed irreversible, to suppose themselves exempt from the lot of all men and women, with burdens to bear and sacrifices to make.

Writing in these columns twelve years ago, and anticipating a debate that has since become so acute, the late Father Gerald Vann may be said to have summed up the matter. 'The Church cannot unsay the Ten Commandments; what is so desperately needed today is an understanding and sympathy on the part of those who represent the Church

towards the often intolerable burdens which unnatural circumstances, economic and otherwise, place on the shoulders of those who are trying their best to keep the Commandments and who therefore, if they fail, need encouragement rather than censure, and who, if they succeed, must often be regarded as having achieved heroic sanctity.'

■ Professor G. F. Woods' Inaugural Lecture (*Contemporary Theological Liberalism*: Adam and Charles Black, 5s.) as Professor of Divinity in the University of London reflects the self-examination going on in theological faculties in this country, the need felt to break with the historicism that has beset so much theology in the last half-century. He points to the limitations of the historical method, not indeed to reject it but to demand that it should not be expected to do that which it cannot. The historian of the Church and of doctrines can tell us what took place and what was said, reaching in these matters not a logical certainty but a probability than which more should not be asked; but, as historian, he cannot, or should not, pass judgment on the value or truth of what was done or said. Nevertheless, these are questions which the theologian must face, and to deal with them Professor Woods recommends the use of personal categories. 'Those who feel no gravity in these fundamental questions about our own personal being are unlikely to find much meaning or importance in questions about the being and activity of God.' The Professor argues that the language proper to such enquiry is 'personal language' and that we 'have a capacity perpetually to create linguistic apparatus and structures' for such discourse, and that it is within this language that we shall find a satisfactory basis for analogies of the divine. Whilst welcoming the theological seriousness implied in such an approach, one suspects that the status of this 'personal language' itself remains pretty obscure; for what personal categories are there which are not themselves achieved by analogy from physical object language, as is indicated by the persistently metaphorical character of the way we speak of our personal being? Renewed attention to the general character of analogical discourse seems to be called for.

■ The Editor apologizes for a serious misprint in Mr. Anthony Boyle's review of Lord Devlin's *The Enforcement of Morals* in the July issue. The last sentence (on p. 600) should read, 'The training of the English judiciary is unlikely to foster the gift of prophecy', and not as it is printed.