

Comment

As it happens the first editorial comment I wrote in *New Blackfriars* was on Pope Paul VI's visit to the United Nations in 1964; now, fifteen years later, I celebrate the second papal visit by giving our readers a rest, for I shall be teaching abroad and leaving the editorship in the far more competent hands of Alban Weston O.P. who was our Reviews Editor.

This seems an occasion for a little self-indulgent reflection on a couple of the themes I have tried to explore in these editorials and in the journal as a whole. They are not very unusual or original themes: first there is the whole upheaval in the Church represented by Vatican II, and in particular the liturgical reforms. I used to be too optimistic about these. Excellent as the renewed liturgy is (and how easily we forget the sheer tawdriness of so much preconciliar liturgical practice) it does not seem to have released the energies that some of us expected. It has released a good deal of dreadfulness – earnest strumming of guitars and singing of children's songs – but that has to be endured as a passing phase; what it has not yet done on any great scale is to produce amongst Christians a deep sense of the Church as the whole people of God with a mission to the world, a real feeling that we are part of the "sacrament of the future unity of mankind". Maybe we have been expecting results too quickly; maybe we have been putting our expectations in the wrong place.

Much the same kind of thing has to be said of the ecumenical moves initiated, or at least sanctioned and made respectable, by the Council. We had to be rid of a shoddy liturgy that concealed the reality of the sacramental life; we had to be rid of an authoritarian clerical style; we had to be rid of divisions in the Church that had lost their relevance a century ago; these things were necessary but certainly not sufficient. The practical assumption of their sufficiency is a new impediment to the mission of the Church in the form of narcissism, a preoccupation with the structures of the Church itself. My impression is that Pope John Paul II takes this point very seriously and if he may be expected to be a little brusque with ecclesiastical liberals it is because he sees beyond the Church itself to the world with which we must engage and the political realities we face.

Which brings us to politics: *New Blackfriars* has constantly maintained that the gospel is neither indifferent nor reducible to politics. Because it challenges all human structures from our individual moral life to the life of the international community, the gospel must be critical of political institutions; Christian leaders,

lay and clerical, are bound to be unpopular and persecuted if they are doing their jobs, they are bound to appear to those they challenge as political figures.

But to be more specific, *New Blackfriars* for the last fifteen years and more has tried to take account of the fact that our industrial civilisation is the first one in history to have a little of that self-awareness that goes (according to Aquinas) with being to a certain degree self-moving. The self-consciousness of the industrial capitalist world is marxism – the scientific analysis of our society that has to be sharply distinguished from and opposed to the bourgeois ideology of that society. Marxism does not seem to us to be a creed, certainly not an alternative to or competitor with the Creed, but an insight into the forces that are shaping our world and simultaneously distorting our immediate view of the world. Because, therefore, the marxist can take a positive and rational part in the growth and transformation of capitalism into socialism, he, despite his often deep ignorance of, and deep hostility to Christianity, is not to be ignored or simply disliked. Being open to anti-Christian communists is a wholly different thing from the openness to anti-Christian fascists that characterised so much of the Church in the ‘thirties’. The Church must be ready to be itself transformed in the light of the awakening self-consciousness of our society. Just as her participation in the capitalist revolution split the Church into Catholics and Protestants, so we may expect the socialist revolution to involve new strains; it is our hope that if these strains are understood they need not lead to new divisions.

The first stirrings of the awareness of capitalism has produced changes not yet in the great centres of capitalism, but for the most part on its fringes in what was the more malleable, less industrialised, world. The consequence has been the strange phenomenon of the “communist bloc” of anti-capitalist but not yet socialist regimes. We have not seen it as our job in this journal to assess the comparative horrors of life in the Russian and American empires, but simply to try to see through the murk to what is really going on; and since clarity begins at home this has mainly meant trying to expose the hypocrisies of the western world, its contradictions and double standards. If this has sometimes seemed to make us soft on communists, well, the Catholic press includes enough Skibbereen Eagles to redress the balance.

So Goodbye, and thanks to everybody (especially all those who supported us during the curious episode of 1967). I’m sorry to be going when there is so much to talk about, but there will be an even more flourishing *New Blackfriars* to have a word in from time to time. Good luck to Alban and all his staff.

Herbert McCabe O. P.