

We are *not* part of an interdenominational Pentecostalism; we are part of that wholeness given in trust to the Catholic Church, and which the Lord is leading into ever fuller manifestation, in the reintegration of the fragments of our own Catholicism, and in the growing together of all Christians, Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal. Let us not short-circuit, seduced by a more immediate synthesis, a reunion based only on partial experience instead of a deep fidelity to the whole of our own tradition. Let us not preach a 'movement', so emphasizing our own peculiar insights (whether inspired by Pentecostalism or Marxism or whatever) as to endanger the common heritage of all believers; let us rather proclaim Jesus Christ, straight and entire. And may the Lord hasten the day on which we shall all be truly one, one in the simplicity of our own lives, one in the unity of all believers.

What is the Point of Being a Roman Catholic?

Reflections on a visit to Holland

by Brian Wicker and Ian Gregor

'A clean, well-lighted place'—the phrase occurs readily enough to anyone visiting Holland today and it has its own modulation when thought of in connection with contemporary Dutch Catholicism. Here, if anywhere, we can see translated into coherent and consistent practice much of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and it is hardly necessary to say that the notion of a Church as a whole seriously attempting to embody that spirit and not just paying lip-service to it cannot be other than impressive. A visit to Holland provides an opportunity to see some of the 'progressive' theological thinking in the Church 'in action', as it were—thinking which made us conscious certainly of 'the well-lighted place', but also, and more unexpectedly, of the shadows which fell across it.

Two propositions central to modern theological thinking are the importance of establishing a view of faith as a personal commitment and recognition of the pluriform cultures in which we live. And so it is not surprising to find these assumptions shaping contemporary Dutch Catholicism.

With regard to the first, in almost every conversation we had, words like 'authenticity', 'maturity', and 'personal commitment' occurred with unflinching regularity. Celibacy, to take the most obvious and topical issue, was felt to be significant only if it was a

freely-chosen, maturely-pondered vocation. The individual had to accept it as the only mode of life in which his personal and social fulfilment could be envisaged. Celibacy as an obligatory pre-requisite for the priesthood or, at the least, intimately bound up with its meaning and function, was seen as a legalistic intrusion into the private conscience of the person concerned. The notion of sin was reformulated so that it expressed the evils which man has brought about in the modern world—which meant the social sins of private affluence amid public squalor; of poverty in a world of plenty; racial prejudice, sectarian provincialism, commercial exploitation and social indifference. In particular, the obsession with sins of sex belonged to a regressive outlook, or stemmed from a Puritanical or Manichaean spirit which must be purged away. Liturgy, too, must be freed of its merely traditional and habit-forming role, and brought in its idiom and in its rubrics to our conscious attention. People should not fulfil their Sunday obligation because the Church commands it but because their conscience commands it. And what they must go to and what they must experience when they get there must be relevant, challenging, exploratory, rather than familiar, routine and consoling.

It seems hard to find fault with these desires as they stand, or to demur at the mood which provoked them. They provide a terse anthology of much of the argument that has come in the wake of the Second Vatican Council—indeed, they have contributed to spell out the meaning of '*aggiornamento*', as we have come to understand it. But when we see these attitudes in action, we begin to be more sharply aware of limitations, and difficulties.

If maturity, adult self-consciousness and authentic personal commitment are to be the norms of the new Catholicism, what becomes of the gospel of child-likeness and simplicity (Matt. 18) which has traditionally been an integral part of the Christian ethical ideal? Does not the very notion of faith itself have an in-built tentativeness, a feeling of personal inadequacy which consorts awkwardly with the mood of 'commitment'? If everything is to become a matter of personal choice, what of the element of routine and habit which is necessary, as straw to the making of brick, for the building of the Christian life? Is that world of habit and routine to be denied the sanctification which a long tradition, such as that of monasticism, has traced over the pages of history? What about the question to which T. S. Eliot drew attention when he remarked that 'even for the most highly developed and conscious individual, living in the world, a consciously Christian direction of thought and feeling can only occur at particular moments during the day and during the week, and these moments recur in consequence of formed habits; to be conscious, without remission, of a Christian and a non-Christian alternative at moments of choice, imposes a very great strain. . . . The compulsion to live in such a way that Christian behaviour is only

possible in a restricted number of situations, is a very powerful force against Christianity; for behaviour is as potent to affect belief, as belief to affect behaviour.¹ Or, to put the matter more briefly by quoting another remark of Eliot's, are we to live only by 'the moment in and out of time' and to forget the 'prayer, observance, discipline thought and action' that make up the routine of a Christian life?

Eliot's remark might well of course be taken up and used by the Dutch in a different way—not to draw attention to the element of routine in the Christian life, but to indicate the impossibility of talking about 'a Christian society' at all at the present time. We are led inevitably, the argument would run, to talking about 'the moment in and out of time', to the uniqueness of personal decision for the Christian, precisely because there are no other 'moments' to which that description can be assigned. And it is this recognition, of course, which lies behind that other proposition to which earlier reference was made, that the Christian must recognize that society is no longer uniform and religious—if indeed it ever was—but pluriform and secular.

As in the matter of seeing faith as a question of personal decision and commitment, the recognition that the Christian must come to terms with living in a pluralist society would seem salutary and indeed beyond question. The idea of 'a Christian society', however valid it may have been in the past, is now dead, or at least is 'dying with a little patience'. If this is so, it would seem to follow that Catholicism would then take its colour from a whole variety of cultural patterns. And clearly the Dutch recognize this very sharply: they are anxious to insist that the particular impress Catholicism has received in Holland arises from their own history, political and ecclesiastical, and that they certainly do not regard themselves as trail-blazing for the Church as a whole. Their revolution is of domestic design. These are congenial sentiments and the whole emphasis that the Second Vatican Council placed on national hierarchies would seem to give the mood at least authoritative backing.

But while freely conceding the ways in which Catholicism will take its colouring from a pluralist society, are we not tempted to neglect or overlook a question that begins to shape itself in a very insistent way? It is the basic question as to just what the term 'Catholic' refers to. It is easy at this point to make a gesture to a common body of beliefs universally shared, but beliefs—as the metaphor suggests—cannot be thought of apart from their *embodiment*. We cannot drive a wedge between 'belief' on the one hand, and the human cultural order in which it finds expression on the other. If we have no recognizable Catholic sensibility, no specifically Catholic attitudes, customs, formulations, styles, where then is the Church itself? Is not some element of the concretely universal necessary, if we are to remain incarnational at all?

Just how intimately related 'belief' and 'cultural need' are is

¹*Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 30.

suggested by looking at the question of inter-communion. It is quite clear that for the majority of Dutch Catholics, or at least the majority of those who shape the new theology there, communion itself is a form of sustenance 'in media via'. As such it seems right that it should be available to all of those committed to the Christian pilgrimage and who are searching authentically for unity in Christ, since communion is part of the journey, not the end of the road. The style of liturgical practice reflects this emphasis. It is important to notice how much is conveyed by cultural forms which everyone admits are theologically variable and marginal but which are often emotionally and symbolically central. Mass in the 'new' style is just something 'on the way', nutrition for the battle of life. A mass celebrated with a bread-basket for ciborium and a glass jug for chalice, in which the ablutions really are simply 'doing the washing up' and the prayer 'Deus qui humana substantiae' becomes the unceremonious addition of water to a jugful of wine at the outset of the service, is a different kind of thing from mass in the old style, even in the vernacular. On such a basis, inter-communion as a device for the achievement of unity seems perfectly natural, indeed inevitable. Each person present has his wineglass, which is filled from the common chalice, and naturally he is expected to drink it as part of the action into which he has been drawn. Of course it can be properly insisted that there is more to the eucharist than this; and I don't think any Dutch Catholic would care to deny it. But the point is that as long as there is no *one* form of eucharistic celebration which can contain, in equal measure, *all* the legitimate aspects of the Christian mystery, there seems no reason why one aspect, if valid in itself (as obviously the 'nutritive' aspect is) should not be allowed to predominate, if that is what is felt to be the most pressing need in the particular situation. The Dutch insistence on the 'meal' aspect is no more a distortion than the unbalanced sacrificial emphasis implied, for example, in the practice of multiplying 'private' masses.

When we reflect on the implications of a theme and variations in liturgical practice, particularly in relation to such basic celebrations as communion, we begin to see some of the pressures that gave the Tridentine Mass the status of a universal norm. To the progressive Catholic of today such a status smacks as much of Roman imperialism as it does of universal love. There is just no good reason, he thinks, why the mass should take only one cultural form. Yet perhaps we should reflect that it is precisely this 'one cultural form' which has been the inspiration of countless great minds in music, drama and the arts—an inspiration greater and more universal than even the prose of the Authorized Version of the Bible. It was one of the disturbing things about the Dutch revolution as it seemed to us (and we mean no derogatory comment on this—we merely observe it) that they seemed to have little or no sense of the cultural loss involved in the abandonment of the old forms.

At first sight, this may seem to be a trivial objection—a nostalgic addiction for unvarying rituals, an interest in the aesthetics of liturgy rather than their relevance—but it does in fact help to pinpoint the difficulty which underlies both the assumption that individual faith must be a personal commitment and that Christianity must take its bearings from existing within a pluralist society. And to pinpoint it in a way that we see a relationship between these assumptions.

It is symptomatic of the situation in which we now find ourselves that remarks made on behalf of the Tridentine Mass suggest a sympathy with such enterprises as the Latin Mass Society. And it is symptomatic because both liturgical change and resistance to liturgical change seem to have neglected that great area of impersonality which is so integral a part of time-honoured liturgical practice. By this we mean that liturgical dimension which is concerned with creating a sense of awe and mystery—the altar not as table but as sacred space. And here the emphasis is not on the immediate intelligibility of the rubrics, but rather their formality, their distancing effect, the reminder that if communion is a meal, it is a sacred meal. The older theological books used to describe the mass as a drama and the analogue it suggests with the stage is useful. As in so much contemporary secular drama the effect has been to break down the sense of distance between actor and audience, so the major emphasis of liturgical reform has been on participation, interchangeability of roles and so on. Now of course the reasons for this reform are clear and worthy of unqualified approval, but a visit to Holland suggests that in sacred drama we may well have reached a point where the essential mystery implicit in the eucharist may be in danger of becoming neglected. And that of course is an intimation that the mysteriousness of grace and the whole scheme of salvation may be in danger of becoming demythologized. Related to this is the way that the public and the communal aspects of current liturgical reform have often been understood in too facile a way—as if *any kind* of private prayer, any kind of withdrawal, was inimical to communal awareness and the ways in which that awareness is dependent on our sense of self-identity. What is being argued for here is that reflections on the Tridentine Mass bring home to us that we are in danger of over-stressing the self-consciousness of faith, the rationality of its commitment.

The Tridentine Mass also serves to remind us that in Catholic communities of extreme cultural diversity it provided a distinctive unity of form and an embodiment, cultural as well as sacred, of the idea of the Church. For a Christianity which seeks to take its bearings from a pluralist society, such a distinctive form, with its denominational exclusiveness, can only appear an obstruction. A sentiment congenial for the Christian in that society was expressed by someone remarking recently that he was an Anglican but was hoping one day to become a Christian.

Nothing could appear to be a more acceptable contemporary sentiment. Surely it is right that we should try to transcend the petty cultural differences (for this is what most of them are) between a merely denominational allegiance and an allegiance to Christianity as such? Yet sometimes the things that happen when people do, in fact, try to make that jump from a mere '-ism' to sheer 'Christianity' are disturbing. The gain is not only in open-mindedness: very often it is in woolly-mindedness as well. There is something artificial about this 'sheer' Christianity, something synthetic. Like many synthetic products, it is either too brittle or too flexible: if it does not break in the hand, then it bends to every form and fails to support the weight that we want to put upon it. When we consider this Christian common-marketeering, the pleas of the Christian little Englanders begin to appear initially plausible. Religious patriotism, like other kinds, may well be the last refuge of the knave, as Dr Johnson said: but it may also be the case, as Orwell remarked, that 'it is exactly the people whose hearts have never leapt at the sight of a union jack who will flinch from revolution when the moment comes',¹ and that, *mutatis mutandis*, the same applies in religion. In other words, a religion that is not rooted in some living and viable cultural milieu—and that means, of course, not living in some other quite different milieu—is not rooted in anything at all.

It will be protested at this point that surely the root of Christianity is the person of Christ himself? *He* transcends all cultures and all milieux. But the question is, can *we*? Of course, the dangers of a mere 'milieu' Christianity are notorious enough, and Carl Amery, in his study of Catholicism in Germany in the thirties, has made this point abundantly clear.² Yet equally notoriously, those who have in the past loudly claimed to be 'freed' from the clutches of merely human culture, and to have been totally given over to the person of Christ, have been forced, by the very logic of the human situation, to express this allegiance in just those cultural forms that they feel they have already transcended. The history of Protestantism, no less than the history of Catholicism, is the history of religious sensibilities enshrined in distinctive cultural forms, mediated by particular languages and distinctive ways of living and feeling. There is no escape from this dilemma as long as we remain on this side of the grave.

To bring this point closer home we may note that, whether a writer is Protestant or Catholic, whether he even continues to adhere to Christianity in any form or not, his writing will still be shaped by the culture in which he has been formed and even the shape of his rejection will be that of the culture he has rejected. James Joyce retained, in most essential ways, an Irish Catholic sensibility even

¹*My Country Right or Left*, in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. 1, p. 540.

²*Capitulation: an analysis of contemporary catholicism*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1967.

when he was most earnest in rejecting most of its claims upon him. Similarly, as the very late essay on *Hymns in a Man's Life* shows, D. H. Lawrence, even in his exotic wanderings in search of a new kind of religion, remained in many ways a stubbornly English working-class chapel-going non-conformist. We mention these two writers in particular for a special reason. It may fairly be said that, for the English Catholic, the cultural bags in which his religion is packed, and which he takes with him when he visits a country like Holland, are likely to be either of Irish or of Italianate manufacture. And to the extent that this is so, his religious sensibility will be largely formed by a blend of experiences that have been most eloquently described in this century by Joyce and Lawrence. For Joyce, it might be said, Catholicism constituted a milieu compounded of two elements: the cold and the wet; whereas for Lawrence it was compounded of the warm and the dry. One has only to think of the prevalent images in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* to understand the 'tonal' quality of the Catholicism he knew: the cold turf-coloured water in the washbasins of Clongowes Wood school, the cold damp ivory-white hand of Eileen, his first 'love', the pale passionless face of the priest who tempts him to try the priesthood, the sluggish filth of the sins that ooze from his lips in the confessional, the muddy streets of the red-light district, and above all the girl on the seashore with her white legs entangled by seaweed and her white drawers like the feathering of soft down. All of these images, or epiphanies, represent some aspect of the religion that he is trying to come to terms with; and, together with many others of a like nature, they haunt this picture of Irish Catholicism, making it perhaps the most powerful single expression of that religio/cultural world that has ever been put into words. In that world, Catholicism is repressive, anti-emotional, rationalistic, coolly tough-minded, censorious, bodiless, orderly, habitual, suspicious of individuality, hostile to originality, to spontaneity, to sex, to art.

For Lawrence, however, brought up in a Protestant tradition that seemed to him to share many of the features noted above as characteristic of Irish Catholicism, the religious sensibility of the Mediterranean world came as a relief and a refreshment. Admittedly within the English context, Catholicism for Lawrence is largely an aesthetic matter: the gothicism of Will Brangwen, the adolescent religiosity of Ursula expressed in her search for a meaning of the liturgical year. But in the Mediterranean milieu this aestheticism becomes a genuinely integral and full-blooded morality. The Pope knows more about the real value of sex than any 'grey puritan' like Bernard Shaw, for in 'the south' procreation is still central, still 'charged with all the sensual mystery and importance of the old past'—a past which has been 'stripped away by the northern Churches and the Shavian logical triviality'. The reason is clear: the 'old Church' knew that life meant fulfilment. The rhythm of life was kept by the

Church season by season, 'the sadness of Lent, the delight of Easter, the wonder of Pentecost . . .' and it thus represented the 'kindled rhythmic emotions in the souls of men and women'. This is why the Church kept the old pagan festivals, so that 'for centuries the mass of people lived in this rhythm, under the Church . . . (but) when the mass of a people loses the religious rhythm, that people is dead, without hope'. (Cf. *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, passim.) For Lawrence, religion even in this full-blooded sense is still only a way of life in the world: yet the point is that, for him, Catholicism represents almost the exact opposite of what it meant for Joyce.

Now to the English sensibility, Catholicism is likely to be experienced as a blend of these two opposed, but in a sense complementary, 'structures of feeling'. With the tiny exception of the old 'recusant' Catholic minority, English Catholics tend to imbibe their religion from some combination of these two sources, the Irish and the Mediterranean. And the point of saying this is that, given this fact, the Catholicism of modern Holland comes as an almost unmanageable shock. How can we fit into our picture of Catholicism this stolid, bourgeois, pragmatic, suburban version of a faith that we had been brought up to think of in quite other categories—of peasantry and aristocracy, of the medieval and baroque, of intellectualism and sentimentalism, authoritarianism and eccentric sanctity all held in a balance of extremes? This balance is what we have come to think of as the potentially universal cultural form which is Catholic Christianity in the world. But what Holland represents is something quite different: not a balance of opposing forces held in check by an overarching authority, but a working democracy built on pluralism, tolerance, compromise, universal education and the spirit of experiment held together by cunning. Can we see this as a version of Roman Catholicism?

It seems hard to see how there can be any one satisfactory reply to that question, or to the larger question that lies behind it: namely, how to reconcile the equal and opposite demands of a transcendent ecumenical unity and of the need for roots in some particular living culture. Perhaps the only kind of an answer that can be suggested comes from George Orwell. One of the things that seems, to the outsider at any rate, to be missing from the Dutch Catholicism today is the feeling for the still living drama—the tragic drama—of death and resurrection, that is the central fact of Christianity itself. Of course we do not wish to suggest that this is something that has been forgotten or disbelieved or in any way consciously betrayed. We mean that, in terms of real life, this drama is hard to bring home to consciousness, in a society that seems so secure, so prosperous, so eminently reasonable in its social and political arrangements. Part of both the Irish and the Mediterranean milieux for Catholicism has been the lack of just these desirable, civilizing qualities. Their Catholicism has flourished on their relative poverty, their insecurity,

their lack of worldly resources. This has been the soil in which the Christian tragic drama has been kept alive in the collective consciousness because it has been kept going in life itself.

Of course one must not forget the experience of the occupation that underlies much of the new spirit in the Dutch Church. Yet little of that experience seems to surface in today's world. There is rather a sense that Catholicism in Holland is the product, not of a tragic or revolutionary 'metanoia', but of a steady progress towards a more adult grasp of life. But does such a notion of steady progress, lacking, as it perhaps does, the sense of the fundamental contingency of all historical developments, their radical dependence on an unpredictable providence, on a Christ who comes like a *tiger* 'in the juvenescence of the year' as Eliot put it—does such a notion fit into the Christian scheme of things? Or are we to think rather of some moment of revolution which, when it comes, will demand of us a momentous decision of faith? If so, do we not need more than the common marketeer's purified, transcendent Christianity?

The very description 'Roman Catholic' seems now, and increasingly, to bring with it a tension and yet we are beginning to see this tension not as something accidental or temporary, the difficulties of an ancient hierarchical structure adapting itself painfully and slowly to the changed conditions of the modern world, but as revealing the intrinsic tensions in the way things are.

In the recent canonization of the Forty Martyrs this tension became apparent in a specially clear way. Here, from one point of view, was a defiant act of Roman imperialism reviving conflicts and old controversies, proclaiming loyalty to the Papacy and indicating in unmistakable terms the gravity of a faith that our ancestors had died for. And yet it was precisely this occasion which the Pope took to make the most historic statement on ecumenism, referring to the Anglican Church as an 'ever-beloved sister' and to speak of her 'special traditions'. This was far indeed from the mood of 'our separated brethren'. And it is perhaps here, on the most central stage of all, that we are having acted out in the tormented, puzzling career of Paul VI the drama of what it is simply to be, existentially as it were, a Roman Catholic at the present time. And for some the ineradicable tension posited by that description still continues to offer the deepest insight into what it means to be a Christian—the 'via crucis' of Paul taking us further into the meaning of the 'aggorniamiento' initiated by his far-seeing predecessor.

Satan and the Failure of Nerve by Roy Yates

It is an interesting exercise to trace the development in the character of Satan that takes place in the Old Testament. In the earlier strands