Authority and Democracy—II
by David Hay

A democratic Church? Last month, in the first part of this article, I discussed certain studies on attitudes to authority and the psychological components of such responses. My point was that awareness of the psychological mechanisms which may underly some of the antagonisms in the Church can perhaps help to ameliorate them. There is however a further and more fundamental question to be raised concerning the structure of the institutional Church. On the one hand its hierarchical organization has the advantages of apparent historical continuity, the visible demonstration of unity and the fact that it is congenial to a considerable proportion of its membership, on the other hand its very attractiveness to people of authoritarian personality has its dangers. People so attracted may try to mould it in their own image, as indeed seems so have happened from time to time in history, so that their preoccupations almost reverse the emphasis of Christ's teaching on the spontaneous exchange of love.

At this point it is worth recalling the outcome of Lewin, Lippitt and White's experiment, where spontaneous and mature behaviour was a feature of the democratic group rather than the autocratic group. It may seem facile to draw comparisons between the behaviour of groups of small boys and behaviour within vast and complex organizations like the Church. Furthermore, evidence has been cited that the cultural predispositions of some nations and the personality characteristics of some people mean that they may actively prefer the autocratic situation.

However, a lot of evidence has been accumulating in a variety of disciplines to show that in large organizations as well as small, morale, satisfaction, originality, motivation and co-operation can all be greatly enhanced in a democratic climate, even amongst people who have hitherto been used to autocracy. This evidence has already had a marked effect on many sectors of Western community life, for example in the movement towards informal teaching in the schools, the widespread approval for democratic child-rearing practices, the development of group therapy in the treatment of mental illness and the increasing emphasis in criminology on the provision of a supportive rather than authoritarian environment in prison.

Some of the most convincing support comes from students of industrial organization, because they concern themselves with large-scale social structures and thus analogies may more validly be drawn with the institutional Church. Since the researches of Elton

Mayo in the late twenties, it has become clear that industrial efficiency is completely interlinked with the problem of human relationships within the organization. For this purpose, the provision of an environment in which people feel able to co-operate spontaneously and without reservation is, if anything, more important than time and motion studies.

In a development of this theme, Chris Argyris,[1] Professor of Industrial Administration at Yale University, has postulated an opposition between what he describes as the process of 'self-actualization' and the demands of formal organizations. In the process of self-actualization, he detects seven continua along which individuals in Western society are encouraged to develop. Examples of these are: development from the short-time perspective of the infant to the longer time perspective of the adult; development from a infant state of passivity to an adult state of increasing activity; a change from early dependence on others to a state of increasing independence; a development from lack of awareness of self to an awareness and control over self as an adult. These developments emphasize the fact that one of the most important needs of workers (and others) is to enlarge those areas of their lives in which their own decisions determine the outcome of their efforts. However, opposed to this process is the formal organization, the basic character of which is rationality. The means towards this end include task specialization and the creation of a chain of command to control, direct and co-ordinate.

Some obvious parallels may be drawn here with the Church, if one hierarchy is substituted for another and 'laity' for 'workers'. In fact, Argyris himself mentions the relevance of his view to the religious situation: 'It is my hypothesis that the present organizational strategies developed and used by administrators (be they industrial, educational, religious, governmental or trade union) lead to human and organizational decay. It is also my hypothesis that this need not be so.'[2]

Thus: Task specialization inhibits self-actualization of the worker/layman, because it provides only for the expression of a few shallow abilities; the presence of people with the specific function of leadership means that individuals are dependent on the leader and thus tend to become passive and subservient, and because they have little control over their environment, the perspectives of subordinates both in time and space tend to become shortened and parochial. Furthermore, the system tends to be reinforced by the fact that the leadership is liable to become more autocratic and directive as a result of subordinate apathy, thus increasing the problem yet again.

Individuals can adapt to this conflict in one of four ways, according

[1]Chris Argyris, *Personality and Organization*. N.Y., Harper and Row, 1957.
[2]Quoted in *Writers on Organizations* by D. S. Pugh, D. J. Hickson and C. R. Hinings. London, Hutchinson, 1964.

to Argyris: They can leave the organization, they can rise in the organization, they can use some form of psychological defence mechanism to hide the real conflict from themselves, or they can become apathetic and uninterested. Alternatively, there could be a reform of the organization, to reduce the dissonance, and here Argyris makes two suggestions. Firstly, the employee/layman should be given a chance to use more of his 'important' abilities, and with the setting up of councils of the laity, etc., the Church has made an attempt to move in this direction since the initiatives of Vatican II. In this country such developments have been as yet, very tentative, but even when fully operational, Argyris argues, changes of this sort will be only temporarily fulfilling. The real answer lies in full participation in and control over decision-making by the employee/ layman within his own sphere of activities. This means ultimately that the leadership must cease to be authoritarian and become much more democratic.

From a somewhat different angle, the research work of Tom Burns, professor of Sociology at Edinburgh University, seems to point in the same direction. Along with a psychologist, G. M. Stalker,[1] he has made a study of different types of industrial organization and their abilities to cope with various social situations. At one extreme lies the 'mechanistic' type which is adapted to relatively stable conditions. Here there is a clear hierarchy of control, and responsibility for overall knowledge and co-ordination rests exclusively at the top of the hierarchy. There is an emphasis on vertical communication and interaction, that is, between superiors and subordinates, and an insistence on loyalty and obedience to superiors. In their studies, Burns and Stalker found this pattern of organization ill-adapted to unstable conditions, when new and unfamiliar problems are continually arising, which are not within the competence of the existing specialist hierarchy. Perhaps the Church in a phase of 'aggiornamento' is representative of such a situation, and here an 'organic' type of organization seems to fare better. Because continual adjustment is necessary, there is a constant redefinition of individual tasks and the 'contributive' rather than 'restrictive' nature of specialist knowledge is emphasized. Interaction and communication may occur at any level, as required by the particular problem, and it follows that whilst the structure retains a form of stratification, its mode of functioning is much more democratic. The lead in joint decisions is taken by whoever shows himself most informed and capable, or in other words, the 'best authority'.

The flexibility of this type of organization produces some of its own tensions, but in the experience of the researchers it also generates a much higher degree of commitment. Whilst the hierarchic com-

[1]Tom Burns and G. M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation*. London, Tavistock, 1961. For a most interesting development of this and other themes related to ecclesiastical administration, see: *Ministry and Management*, by Peter F. Rudge. London, Tavistock, 1968.

mand system loses significance as an instrument for ensuring co-operation, it becomes replaced by a greater development of shared and internalized beliefs about the values and goals of the concern. Finally, because the relation between mechanistic and organic systems is elastic there can be an oscillation between the two according to the requirements of the social situation, or in fact both can operate side by side in the same organization, each being adapted to particular environmental conditions. Thus, it is conceivable that in different parts of the world and at different periods of history a more or less organic or mechanistic organization of the Church might be better adapted to the efficient performance of its functions.

Conclusion

In medieval times, secular and religious social structures mirrored each other closely and thus were mutually reinforcing, but today the two are in conflict, with a slow but continuous transfer of attitudes across the secular/religious boundary. On the one hand there are some Catholics who are concerned to perpetuate autocratic forms of government in secular society, whilst on the other hand there is much hostility directed against the Church because it is interpreted as being one of the stronger outposts of a medieval view of society which is no longer plausible.

Meanwhile, much of the current disturbance in society, such as the civil rights movement in America, the ill-fated reform attempts in Czechoslovakia, the struggle for workers' control in industry, the increasing incidence of student revolt and so on, can be interpreted as a demonstration that participation is a sought-after ideal in many parts of the world. If the analysis in this article is correct, such developments are in many cases a sign of maturity rather than irresponsibility and the question must be asked as to whether a move in the democratic direction is also a possibility in the Church. Could it perhaps come about by a rapid development of the doctrine of the 'consensus of the faithful'? In this context it is disturbing to note that Burns in his own research came to doubt whether a rigidly mechanistic social structure can consciously change to an organic one, because the necessary new functions tend to be the subject of power struggles between established sectors of the old hierarchy, thus eventually re-establishing the mechanistic order. Adrian Cunningham has expressed a view similar to this in a recent issue of *Slant*,[1] and suggests a search for other, more radical means to bring about democracy. These might well fall into the category labelled by Karl Rahner, 'revolutionary obnoxiousness'.

Whatever the means, there must be a considerable number of Catholics who are beginning to reflect on the barrier separating modern secular man from his God, and wondering whether, for the love of Jesus Christ, a change may not be possible.

[1]*Slant*, 22, August-September, 1968.