

'APART FROM THE FAITH'

THE EDITOR

A PART from "the faith" the only choice is between "the inadequate" and "the absurd". It was under the cloud of war, with freedom gone, alone, that Theodor Haecker came to the simple conviction of the ultimate demands of faith. For him, as for countless Christians before him, catastrophe brought clarity. He had realised the true nature of the Nazi movement from the start. He was arrested, then released on condition that he ceased to lecture or to write. And so his *Journal in the Night*, covering the years of war (he died in April 1945), is the testimony of a believer, confronted now by a national apostasy. Written in darkness, with no human hope left to sustain him, it is a book of its time, and perhaps of all time.

'There can be no neutrality towards God', remarked Haecker. That neutrality is the recurring temptation suggested by human pride. And in a Holy Year dedicated to the 'great return' to God, in which the prayers of the faithful people of God have been directed to the reconciliation of the separated, the Church's authority to teach, to unfold the full content of the truth committed to her charge, takes on a quickened meaning. Amidst the tumults and disasters of a world racked with war or the threat of war, the Pope has chosen this moment of time for the solemn definition of the dogma of the Assumption of our Lady and for the publication of an Encyclical Letter, *Humani Generis*, which is a recall to what is fundamental, a warning against those fashions of thought which weaken the truth which it is the Church's mission to defend and declare. 'Apart from the faith' all is lost at last, and thus it is that the proclamation of a dogma and the reproving of intellectual errors are not simply affairs of ecclesiastical politics, the Roman equivalent of congress resolutions. It is in relation to the Church's authority and to her function in the world that her actions must be judged. And the protests of those outside her obedience are, however unconsciously, not so much a protest against what she says as against her right to say it.

The Church's authority is the authority of Christ, made available therefore throughout all ages; a living authority with

the mind and voice of Christ to declare the truth, not as alterable indeed but as made increasingly explicit within the divinely instituted and divinely sustained economy of her life. And the unity which is a mark of the Church's mission is not just the uniformity, imposed and arbitrary, of a form of government. It is expressed most certainly in a hierarchy of function, with the Pope as its infallible head and guarantor. But the unity is that of an organic life—a way, a truth, a life, all one, rooted in Christ. The loss of that unity is not merely a loss of discipline and law, though the history of broken Christendom is a sad proof of how inevitable that has proved to be. It is a loss of the sense of the Church as herself redemptive, teaching mankind the truth that alone can set men free. For the paradox at the heart of the Church, the 'scandal' that most affronts those who do not belong to her fold, whether through their own choice or through the apostasies of the past, is the seeming duality of freedom and subjection: man is free to a point, but the Church determines that point, and liberty is thought to be at an end. Inescapably, as the Pope insists, 'discord and error have always existed outside the fold of Christ', for the limits of freedom are no longer certainly known once the bond of unity is severed, once the Church is rejected in her office not only as the custodian of divinely revealed truth but as its interpreter as well.

In a world divided with hatred and fear the Church's voice is raised to declare the unique dignity of our Lady's Assumption. It might seem a needless gesture, since the virtually unanimous allegiance of Catholics has long ago been given to this dogmatic truth. But, seen against the background of the century that has passed since the definition of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady, the new definition reflects the confidence of the Church in the Mother of God, who at Lourdes and Fatima and in countless ways besides, has revealed the power of her intercession. The new honour that is hers is nothing new: it is fundamentally an expression of the redemptive joy of the Church in the office that is our Lady's in the work of redemption.

The Encyclical, though of its nature it has not the supreme authority of the definition, is equally concerned to make known the truth, which the Holy Father, by virtue of his office, is commissioned to declare. Here, once more, it is the unity of the Church as a living reality, or more truly a super-reality, that

gives their deepest meaning to the Pope's warnings. The attempt to mitigate the claims of faith, to accommodate the hard demands of truth to 'the inadequate' or 'the absurd', is in intention often a generous gesture: the wrong deed for the right reason, if that reason be the will to reconcile those who are cut off from the Church's unity. But truth is not optional, and its territory—the territory the Church defends and makes known—goes beyond the mere affirmation of defined dogmatic statements. And the Pope's insistence on the pre-eminence of a philosophy 'according to the method, doctrine and principles of the Angelic Doctor' is concerned to safeguard not merely a method but the strength of a metaphysic that relates to absolute truth, that provides the indispensable intellectual foundation for the Church's teaching. 'For truth and its philosophic expression cannot change from day to day, least of all where there is question of self-evident principles of the human mind, or of those propositions which are supported by the wisdom of the ages and by Divine Revelation.'

It does small service to the Pope's purpose simply to single out the explicit criticism of contemporary intellectual tendencies as though the Encyclical were but a catalogue of condemned propositions. The condemnation is there, and it is timely, but it is the exercise of a father's authority, concerned to preserve the unity of the family committed to his care. As ever, the Church's primary work is to reveal her mission to the world, and the truth she teaches, the truth she lives by, must be seen in all its fulness as the only hope of mankind. 'He that heareth you heareth me.' The Church's words, the Pope's words, are the words of life because they are the words of Christ.

For many outside the Church, the events of Holy Year, and especially the crowning event of a dogmatic definition, may seem to bear little relation to the calamities of our time. The Popes have indeed spoken insistently and often of the hatred and social injustice that poison the affairs of nations and make war the common experience of our time. But deeper than a disease lies the cause of it, and beyond the temporal order lies the order of grace and glory which the Church exists to proclaim and to convey to men.

Theodor Haecker's *Journal in the Night, 1939-45*, translated by Alexander Dru, is published by the Harvill Press at 12s. 6d.