

God and revolution: it is this polarity that seems destined more and more to haunt and challenge those who are alive to the movement of the world today. Why is this so?

Two recent examples may serve to illustrate what is at stake. Last month the Rev. Russell Hill in his article on South Africa described how the staff of a hospital there could simultaneously show 'more than ordinary human kindness' and yet be quite unaware of the objective and mass discrimination they practised towards coloured people. More recently, in a most illuminating programme in the television series *Meeting Point*, devoted to race problems in this country, two men of transparent good will and humanity, a clergyman of the Church of England and Mr Stuart Hall, were just not communicating, simply because in respect of the same facts the Canon kept insisting on 'personal relationships' whilst Mr Hall kept pointing to the situation of 'objective disadvantage' suffered by so many in our society, especially coloured people.

What these illustrations have in common is the fact that two views of society are opposed to each other. In the one view society is not seen as an inter-related and mutually responsible whole, or else it is so seen but in terms of a hierarchy of relationships inherited from the past and assumed to be still viable. In the other, society is seen in principle to include all its members, with the consequence that it must be constantly possible for mutual responsibility, relationship and power to be redistributed, in proportion to the changes of condition and population. In one view, there is a refusal of what Mr Raymond Williams calls an 'effort at total qualitative assessment', if only because of a refusal to view society as a whole at all; in the other, this effort is in principle accepted.

And this 'effort at total qualitative assessment' of social relationships as a whole is imposed upon us by the major changes in the conditions of our life. We are having to remake a broken whole. We are being forced back to reconsider the idea and reshape the practice of a common weal or good, a 'general design' of society, as a consequence of the loosening of so many established ties and habits. We share this transitional process of resolution and re-crystallization with many other civilizations and with phases of our own; with the Greece of the sixth century B.C. when the notion of *philia* underwent its tell-tale change of meaning from a kin-relationship to friendship unconnected with blood; with the Arab world that was ripe for

Mohammed's new religious principle of unification precisely on account of the changeover from a nomadic and clan to a merchant culture; with the urbanization of thirteenth-century Europe that gave rise to the friars; with the detribalization of so much of modern Africa. What is unprecedented is the scale of the new general design; it cannot now be anything but a world scale.

We are therefore experiencing an unprecedented version of a familiar process, the social manifestation of what each individual must in his own due time undergo—the dying to restricted groups of relationships in order progressively to be related somehow to the whole world.

What revolution means, therefore, is the challenge, firstly, to an awareness of a world decisively on the move; secondly, to a choice for or against new shapes of social relationships, an ideology, an exploratory sense of a new general design to inform partial efforts (whether these take the form of fasting for famine or work on racial liaison committees, of suffering or radical politics); and only thirdly, to a decision on the problem of violence. For whilst the problem of violence must be faced by Christians, it is only one face of the revolution that assumes many particular forms in different circumstances.

In the light of these technological and social changes, then, so much of our theological reappraisal makes sense. Thus, what we are learning to call the 'sin of the world' corresponds to the social upheaval of our times; for it means the insinuation of the values of macro-society into the micro-society of our homes, it is the primitive twisting of our values that occurs in the very learning of our emotions, let alone in our acculturation in a larger sense. Contrariwise, this very dislocation of our social relationships and the effort of remaking them is the material and setting of the Church's rediscovery of itself as a 'kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind. She is also the instrument for the achievement of such union and unity' (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). Here is the context of the Church's instrumental work of at-one-ment and peace-making. And it is this renewed sense of the Church's essential redeeming relationship to society as a whole that informs Fr Fergus Kerr's article this month, which is itself a sequel to his own article in November and to that of Fr Cornelius Ernst in December.

Particular responses to God's call in our time may therefore go awry, but the goad is surely there. And it is hard to kick against the goad.

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