

As I was saying before I was so oddly interrupted, ecclesiastical authorities can behave in some fairly bizarre ways. 'Alongside the actual agony of growth in the Church', I remember saying, 'there seem to be these men playing a private game amongst themselves in which the moves are directives and prohibitions and the players score points for going through the motions of docility or of repeating the orders correctly.' During these domination games a player or a bystander may occasionally receive a minor injury, but for the most part the play has not much relevance, good or bad, to ordinary life. It is just this that is wrong with it. It is just this that makes men see organized Christianity as an amusement reserved for people of rather specialized tastes.

For example, take the Kerala nuns business, a story that arises out of and typifies the whole relationship of the West to the Third World—a situation in which there are always pickings for the exploiter and always sufferings for others. (If Fr Puthenpura did make money out of it, he made a lot less than the United Fruit Company or Anaconda Copper make out of Latin America and a lot less than some religious orders make out of the slavery of Mexican grape-pickers imported into California.) Now when these religious women were in distress, which institution came to their aid? Not, in fact, the clerical authorities but the press. It was the Catholic press of the United States and elsewhere, followed by the *Sunday Times*, that led to the outcry that is surely going to end the business. It is not that the Roman authorities did not try; they just didn't know how. Instead they went into one of their games. If we are to believe the spokesman for the Congregation of Religious as reported in *The Tablet*: 'As soon as the competent Church authorities have been informed about this, they had forbidden such financial assistance to be provided, had ordered that girls without the right educational qualifications should not be chosen and had begun a careful investigation.'

Now all this forbidding and ordering and private investigating is just a game and it seems to have had no effect at all on the traffic. What finally blew it up was publicity. The competent authorities would have been a lot less incompetent if instead of talking about 'ignoble lies' (which later became 'undue exaggerations'), and instead of issuing orders, they had been in real two-way communication first of all with the novices concerned and secondly with the world at large. The retreat into secrecy, the censoring of letters, the attempt to suppress 'documents compromising to the Church'—all this kind of thing simply plays into the hands of the exploiters and makes the domination game an essay in fantasy. In fact nearly all the bishops involved in this affair come out of it rather well—and a good deal better than some righteous journalists. The villain

of the piece (apart, maybe, from a few priests on the make) is surely a secretive and self-enclosed structure of authority in the Church that actually inhibits the exercise of real authority.

Sacred Congregations and all other authorities should take warning from Northern Ireland. It is extremely dangerous for a ruling group to believe that any opposition it encounters is really an attempt to subvert the whole society. This is a dangerous belief because it is self-authenticating. If you persistently treat your critics as though they were enemies of the Church they will often in very weariness begin to conform to your image of them. Some will publicly depart but many more will silently slip away without bothering to make an announcement.

The same dangerous delusion can affect matters of doctrine. If you say loudly and for long enough that criticism of the received teaching on, say, Christology or the Eucharist is the same as denial of this teaching, then your mistake will slowly become the truth. Transignification will acquire an heretical sense because we refuse it an orthodox one. The devil only has the best new tunes because we have discarded them.

We need to be quite clear that the Church is not a sect, that she is large enough and tough enough to survive conflict and disagreement without getting into a panic. Toleration, of course, is not enough. We need institutional channels by which people with new and dissenting views can play a responsible part in the direction of the Church. Dissent which is merely tolerated becomes a parlour pastime as surely as dissent which is merely repressed becomes destructive. Just how dissent can be brought into the decision-making structures of the Church without being emasculated is a problem we have yet to solve and it is not one that will be solved in the abstract. Such institutional developments come about through actual struggle between groups who do not seek to unchurch each other and yet are in determined disagreement. Perhaps the Catholic Renewal Movement will be the nucleus around which a 'loyal opposition' will develop—perhaps on the other hand it will be the Latin Mass Society or Fr Flanagan's strange group.

In the meantime, as we move from structures based on the idea of consensus to new and more flexible forms of authority, there is a particularly important job to be done by the Catholic press. A journal such as *New Blackfriars* does not have to pretend to provide *the* Catholic view of our world or *the* Catholic theology. What for fifty years we have tried to provide is a meeting place for people with different and sometimes conflicting insights into the 'theological articulation of contemporary experience'. Out of this we hope that a new and traditional style of Catholic thinking will emerge parallel to the new structures we hope to see arising in the Church. It will be evident that in these matters our editorial policy cannot be neutral—the very proposal to treat movements of dissent with as

much respect as more official movements betrays a definite view of the Church. It is a view, however, that I think is shared by a great number of Christians and one that belongs to the heritage of the English Dominicans.

*New Blackfriars* can do this job so long as we can go on printing it. This year has seen the sad loss of *Herder Correspondence*, *New Christian* and *Slant*, and although their work was different from ours, their disappearance makes it more urgent that the remaining journals should carry on. It is merely doctrinaire to suggest that in this secular age we have no need of specifically Christian periodicals—ask yourself which articles you have particularly enjoyed in *The Month* or *The Downside Review* or *New Blackfriars* during the last year and then ask in which secular journal you might have expected to find them. Obviously a great number of our articles could have appeared in a secular monthly, but there are others which but for our existence would never have been available.

Now if *New Blackfriars* is to continue in spite of higher printing costs and higher postage rates we quite simply need *one thousand new subscribers*. I would therefore personally appeal to anyone who has found this journal of interest and value to bring it to the attention of others. We will carry on (and incidentally return to fifty-six pages) if and only if our readers want us to enough to help us. If we are no longer wanted then we should without rancour disappear—as should so many institutions in the Church.

H.Mc.C.

**Next Month  
in  
New Blackfriars**

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