

There is in the Cathedral Church of St Stephen, Vienna, a carved wooden hand-rail which curves up towards the magnificent pulpit. On it there is depicted in low relief a vivid conflict between lizards and toads, as if to remind any mounting preacher of the general context in which he is about to speak: the struggle between the creatures of the light and the creatures of the dark. The very quaint particularity of this work of the imagination paradoxically brings out the universality. Newman in one of his still very pertinent Plain and Parochial Sermons testified to this truth in his turn: 'viz.—that the warfare which Christ began between his little flock and the world should be in no long while transferred into the Church itself, and be carried on by members of that Church one with another' (Vol. III, Sermon 15, 'Contest between Truth and Falsehood in the Church'), Characteristically too—and with equal pertinence—he went on to add a note of historical perspective and discernment of spirits: 'And no one can read, ever so little, the history of the Church since He was on earth, without perceiving that, under all the forms of obedience and subordination, of kind offices and social intercourse, which Christ enjoins, a secret contest has been carried on, in the most sacred chambers of the temple, between Truth and Falsehood;—rightly, peaceably, lovingly by some, uncharitably by others, with a strange mixture at times of right principles and defective temper, or of sincerity and partial ignorance.'

The image in St Stephen's and the statement of Newman are concerned immediately with the Church. But both insights carry another universal, a universally *human*, meaning. Both the carved and the verbal statements implicitly carry the truth made explicit in the single most important declaration of Vatican II: 'By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity' (*Lumen Gentium*, §1). A truth again acknowledged, for instance, in the very title of the recent conference held at the Liverpool University Catholic Chaplaincy: 'Crisis of Authority in Church and University' (*The Tablet*, 22nd March, 1969). All these statements—in wood, in word and in activity—reiterate the Church's claim, that just as the university is—or should be—the bridgehead of society at large, so the Church articulates man's deepest needs and aspirations. And this is why the so-called crisis of authority in the Church is, in

principle at least, a paradigm of the same sort of crisis in society as a whole.

Our particular crisis may, then, be only an avatar of a perennial conflict between truth and falsehood, and the crisis within the Church its focal concentration once again. Nevertheless it does seem that we find ourselves willy-nilly at a crisis and turning-point of quite peculiar intensity and importance. We must, of course, continue to strive for that chastened self-awareness which was another mark of Newman's spirit. We need to beware of that self-identification with the archetypal powers of light and darkness which always tends to make any conflict into a holy war, especially in the context of religion. But when all these qualifications have been made, it does seem to remain true that we are passing through what Fr Cornelius Ernst in the first part of his article on the papacy called 'a profound shift of Catholic consciousness', a movement towards 'a newer mode of the Catholic mind' (April), a shift in which 'what is now frequently called a "crisis of authority" in the Church is only a symptom of something a good deal deeper' (in this issue).

What, then, is the issue? The article by Fr Ernst may have appeared somewhat hermetic and remote to some, just as his statement about a 'ruthless curial papalism of terror' may have appeared excessive. (Those who, like myself, were still inclined to this latter estimate may now be referred to, *inter alia*, the very disquieting questionnaire put to Ivan Illich, recently published in full in the March/April number of *La Revue Nouvelle*, Brussels, at p. 313 and, more recently, in the April issue of *Herder Correspondence*, at p. 111.) This article is in fact just one more effort in the line of the whole project of this journal: the attempt, however imperfect, to articulate contemporary experience in the light of God—to make explicit theologically what many are groping towards as the meaning of what they are actually experiencing. And this article, amongst others, is surely in continuity with so much of what is going on. In this connexion, the Isolotto 'affair' may be taken as symbolic: the fourteen-year experience of a Christian community growing almost literally out of nothing and finally coming into head-on collision with its hierarchic superiors, can be taken to stand for so many of those 'underground' or 'grass-roots' or 'charismatic' Christian communities proliferating all round the world.

In this light, it does seem that so many of the attempts to define the crucial issue are over-facile, such as the antinomy between the Church as hierarchy and the Church as the people of God. The very cliché 'juridicalism' hits off only one aspect of a whole constellation of attitudes and reflexes, just as another cliché 'charismatic' hits off one aspect of another whole constellation. Similarly, even what is—in one sense happily—becoming another common-place is also over-simplifying. A Gallicly sharp statement of this growing common-place is expressed in terms of a 'clear distinction . . . between, on

the one hand, the *apostolic authority* given by Christ to his Church, in order to serve the communion of believers and the unity of faith . . . and, on the other, the *authority modelled (calquée)* on that of the ruling classes, progressively acquired over the centuries by the priestly body (*le corps sacerdotal*), becoming a privileged caste of clerics' (v. *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, 1st February, 1969, at p. 10, recording a motion of the group *Echanges et Dialogue*). Even this distinction seems over-simplifying in view of the intrinsic and interior connexion between Church and society proclaimed in *Lumen Gentium* (*supra*. Et cf. the quotation from Fr Robert Murray, S.J., made and justly criticized by Fr Ernst in this current issue).

No, the true dividing-line would seem to be simply between those who on the one hand explicitly or latently deny the place of any authority, however re-structured, and see a systematic conflict between anybody in authority and others, and those who on the other hand allow that *in principle* at any rate authority is as natural to any society as society itself is to man, however much actual relationships may need concretely to be revitalized. And if the Church's mission is to articulate man's deepest longings and values—and this because, in the last analysis, these can only be truly cherished in relationship to God—then the championship by the Church of the latter option is at the same time a championship of a deeply human need and value.

What this deeply human need and value is can be evoked in the words of one who is no doubt for most 'progressive' Christians at present an otherwise disreputable and suspect witness. In his *The Cruise of the Nona*, of all places, Hilaire Belloc had this to say *en passant*: 'Certainly the management of men is an art; and there are in it two factors which are nearly always set in conflict, although they ought to be harmonized. Indeed, one of them is nearly always thrust forward to the exclusion of the other: from which error in proportion civic disasters are born. These two factors in government are the direction of many and the interpretation of many. A number of men, a number too large to be appealed to individually . . . must be controlled and directed by him who governs, otherwise there is chaos. But it is only so controlled and directed by an interpretation of, and even a sort of subservience to, the common mind. Now control without understanding breaks a community, and sympathy without control dissolves it.' (These words, incidentally, echo the spirit, sometimes the very terms, of St Gregory the Great in his *Regula Pastoralis*, e.g. Part II, ch. 6, ch. 8.)

All this is a matter of principle, of ideal, of what another contributor this month calls an 'impossible impossibility': 'two factors which are nearly always set in conflict, although they ought to be harmonized.' It is certainly *not* to justify *any* claim by *any* authority. On the contrary. There seem to be at least two provisional lessons to be drawn from the Isolotto 'affair'. On the one hand, the most recent

tragic aftermath of the struggle shows that a failure to go on striving for this ideal results in what a commentator in *Esprit* has had the courage to call a degeneration into 'a new integrism of the left' (March, at p. 485)—mirror-image and over-reaction to the old integrism of the right, the Archbishop's rigid standing pat on the bare letter of the law. On the other hand, there is one simple and beautiful sentence in the transcript of the exchange between the representatives of Isolotto and Archbishop Benelli (substitute at the Secretariat of State at the Vatican) which sums up the potential of the new Church so painfully coming into being. *Herder Correspondence* has done us the service of publishing it: 'Urbano: The problem doesn't concern the juridical relationship between the bishop and the parish priest: the problem concerns the human and Christian relationship between the bishop, the parish priest and ten thousand souls' (March, at pp. 83-84).

And, in the end, can it be doubted that for all their only too easily understandable human conflicts, mistakes and temptations, failures even, it is these more or less underground communities who carry the future within them? From Isolotto to Medellin, from the Catholic Worker movement of New York to the Haslemere Group whose convention on poverty and violence at the Round House, London, will already have been held by the time this issue is published, these groups, eaten up with an ideal of the service of the poor and the oppressed, are surely prophetic. We have after all been warned:

He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.

P.L.

TAIZÉ : YOUNG PEOPLE FROM 43 COUNTRIES

A great international youth meeting, with 1600 taking part, will be held in Taizé from the 28th to 31st August.

From the end of June until November a whole series of other international youth meetings will be held, going on without interruption, thus making it possible for young people to be present in Taizé continuously, for the prayer as well as for the dialogue. These meetings are now in preparation, and already there have been young people from 43 countries.

The theme for the year: 'A challenge: Hope!'

By challenge, we mean that which has been thrown at us by the past year, with its anxiety and its bitterness. How then are we to go on, to live, to create?

For fuller information, please write to:

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