

Dr Leach has been accused of saying many silly things in his Reith lectures; but he certainly said some very perceptive and pertinent things.

Put summarily, he seemed to be making three main points: that modern man can consciously manage his world as never before—we have ‘become like gods’; that the context of this management is a world of such quick and continuous change that past experience is largely irrelevant; and that we shall gain purpose and direction through finding ways of co-operation with our fellow-men and with nature which will be opposed to the fratricidal and dominative modes of the past. Each of these major themes demands our most serious reflexion as Christians.

When Dr Leach says that ‘men have become like gods’ and that ‘we ourselves have become responsible’, he is repeating what has often been suggested as the defining characteristic of modern man: his mode of self-consciousness, his awareness of himself not just as product but also as maker of history. But with this vastly increased power goes a deep fear. ‘Science offers us total mastery over our environment and over our destiny, yet instead of rejoicing we feel deeply afraid.’ There is nothing here to dismay a Christian. Man has undoubtedly taken over much of the power and knowledge that we used to think were only God’s. This has two effects—negatively, to displace but not to abolish man’s impotence (witness our fear in face of the sheer massiveness of our power); and positively, to reaffirm his co-operation with God. In traditional terms, this power can itself be the occasion of a greater awareness of the gifts of the Spirit through which our potential is put at the harmonizing disposal of God. In this sense, which is also St John’s, we *are* indeed like gods.

This renewed awareness of positive co-operation with God is particularly relevant when we consider the new dimension of continuing change. This change is now so fast, and yet so open to conscious control, that we can call it revolution rather than evolution. But to couple the undeniable fact of change with the highly questionable corollary of contempt for the past, as Dr Leach does, is only to obscure the real issue. Because change, in our world, demands a creative rather than a repetitive response, it does not follow that we must repudiate the past but only that we must find a different relationship to it.

For the Church, which depends both on its heritage and on its

eschatological mission, this is an important distinction to make. Not that the Church is unique in this respect. The fact that it lives off the past for the future brings out typically what it is to be human at all: learning responses from others so as to be able to use them as one's own, bringing past experience to bear on a present project. Hopkins's remark is more than auto-biographical: 'The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise.' And it is especially important to say this now, since it is becoming ever clearer that the crisis in the Church is really a cultural, not a religious one. We are disengaging from the ecclesiastical life-styles appropriate to one culture so as to find others more of a piece with our own. The shake-up this involves comes home to every Christian in varying degrees, but it is important to see that this is not a specifically Christian experience but a version—we should want to say the archetypal version—of what it is to be human: sometimes we must break with the past, and yet the way in which that break is made and other responses selected is itself conditioned by that past. What *is* specifically Christian is the particular history to which we are committed. And what is novel about our condition is the Church's openness to alternative life-styles in which to re-model and carry forward the pattern of her own past.

The Church must therefore be committed to change in the way that Dr Leach urges us all to be, and yet it must carry on its exchange with the past. The two commitments are not contradictory, though it is the simultaneous attempt to honour them both that has forced us into the famous 'dialogue'. The Church has responded to the same demand that is at the root of the present social re-organization, which is Dr Leach's third great theme. He has laid bare a world of profound social as well as technological mobility, innovation and evolution; and he expresses the impetus of the whole change when he speaks of the 'revolt against the whole principle of a pre-determined social order'. A society in which most of its members are denied the chance of experiencing their own responsibility is wide open to repudiation because it rests upon a relationship of domination rather than of dialogue.

The speed of change, the difficulties of negotiating it, the variety of talents and traditions necessary and available to do so—all these converge on the need for new forms of social relationship. Our machines have made us all so socially inter-dependent that it is vital to find forms of co-operation rather than competition. In this light, the new need and sense of community that are emerging in the Church are then adaptive responses to our new social environment. If this response has so far been largely instinctive, we should now consciously recognize our condition and take the risk under God's providence of taking a

look into the seeds of time

And say which grain will grow and which will not.

P.L.