

CATHOLICS AND MODERN POLITICS¹

It is said that the onlooker sees most of the game. When, however, what is to be surveyed is the dimly lit and sometimes treacherous field of inter-action between religion and politics, only the most confident of observers would lay claim to any privileged insight. And yet these musings at a monastery window, which is all they can pretend to be, may not wholly lack interest; they are an attempt to glean something of the significance of the contemporary scene in the light of ultimate principles. But the process will demand of us a certain corporate self-scrutiny, and of this a word must be said.

The divine constitution of the Catholic Church, indefectible in its essence and hierarchic in its structure, necessarily precludes any criticism by its members of the Church itself. It is not our business—nor, if we are wise, should it be our wish—to call in question what God has ordained. But the mental attitude engendered by this state of things, one of unquestioning acceptance, can sometimes extend beyond its due limits and so lead us to leave unexamined what in fact has every claim to searching attention. It is important to know, for example, to the extent that the thing can be ascertained, how far the Church in this or that particular country embodies all that is implied in Catholicism, or how far circumstances of time and place, not excluding the personal limitations of its members, seem to hamper the flowering of the full Christian life. It is as important that this should be known, at least by ourselves, as that we should know the measure in which we as individuals fail to live up to the light that is given us. Only so can we hope to escape from the moral blindness and self-complacency which were the distinguishing vices of the Pharisees, who reckoned that they were the children of Abraham and that therefore all was well.

We must, of course, take note of the fact that, whereas we can be aware of the poverty of our own motives, are able to pass moral judgment upon ourselves, we have no such right with regard to other people; there we must confine ourselves to the superficial level of outward appearances. Still, even on that basis—though I am well aware how tentative, not to say rash, the enterprise must be—we may be allowed to draw attention to certain features of our Catholic life here in England which bear upon the present discussion. Take, for instance, the fact that the Catholic child is provided in his earliest years with the answer to the riddle of man's existence; he is given ready made that final piece of wisdom for the lack of which the world

¹ Being a paper read to the Catholic Society of the University of Leeds, 3rd February, 1949.

around us is in danger of perishing: 'God made me to know him, love him, and serve him in this world, and to be happy with him for ever in the next'. So he is taught from the Catechism, and all he ever learns afterwards is meant to be an illustration and a further impressing upon his mind of that great truth of Faith.

Let us suppose that our child as he grows up wishes to become a priest, and in course of time enters one of the larger Seminaries or Religious Houses. There, after the needful preliminary training in the humanities, he will be grounded in scholastic philosophy and theology, he will have his attention drawn to St Thomas's way of thinking, make acquaintance with the Codex of Canon Law and, as touching the present matter, study Catholic social and political teaching from the encyclicals of Leo XIII, Pius XI and the reigning Pope. So equipped, he will have for his employ a set of basic principles to guide his judgment upon contemporary affairs; he may well feel confident, perhaps a little too confident, that he knows what is wrong with the world, that he has the solution to its problems. Unfortunately the world often discovers, does it not, that when put to the test, he can do little more than lay down abstract propositions and general statements of unexceptionable validity, but which are of small service in the complexities of the concrete situation to which they are meant to apply? 'There can be no true peace without equity', we proclaim from the housetops; while the tormenting question remains unanswered: What for this country and for that, for this man and that man, is equity in the year of our Lord 1949?

The clerical mind, let it be admitted, is all but incorrigibly *a priori*; we are trained for deduction rather than induction; we work from principles down to particulars rather than the other way about. This is well enough, say, in Dogmatic Theology or Canon Law, but it perhaps explains why a man may become a priest, he might even become a bishop, without understanding the way in which the normal educated Englishman thinks; and failing to grasp that, he will misunderstand the workings of our Parliamentary system of government. To take an obvious example: we of the clergy think of State help for our schools largely in terms of abstract justice; it is only *just* that we should be treated as others are, and we go on to denounce the bigotry and ill will of those who oppose us. But that is not the way a Minister of Education views the matter. We need not suppose him deaf to the claims of justice, but he has to work in the practical world where strongly conflicting claims can only be reconciled by compromise. For all his major decisions he must give an account to Parliament and, very likely, to his constituents at the next General Election. We may regret his incapacity to solve our difficulties according to the principles of absolute justice, we may deplore his

sensitiveness to public opinion, but it is to no purpose to disregard these facts. Perhaps, then, the moral of this little educational digression is that we shall attain our end in due course, not by approaches to Ministers at the highest level, or by heckling prospective M.P.s at election time (though it might well prove worth our while to do both these things), but by persuading the English people—that is, the men and women with whom we come in daily contact—that we Catholics are not odd cantankerous folk claiming exceptional privileges, but honest citizens like themselves who want no more than a square deal all round.

But we must return to our child with his Catechism. Let us imagine that, instead of going to St Edmund's or Ushaw, Oscott or Upholland, he is sent instead to one of our Catholic Public Schools, Downside or Stonyhurst, for instance, or even Ampleforth; though what I am now going to say holds good equally for the Secondary Day Schools, not to mention our Convent High Schools, as well. To give him every advantage let us present our child, now a young man, with three or four years at Oxford or Cambridge, rounding him off with an Honours degree in Classics or History. How effectively, we may ask, is he now equipped for understanding what is afoot in the modern world? We are assuming, of course, that he has remained staunch to the Faith and wishes, as happily numbers of our Catholic young men in this position do wish, to make a positive contribution of some sort to the cause, perhaps through serious writing, or by journalism, or merely by personal contacts.

Now we are not without evidence of the fruits of this kind of formation. Hilaire Belloc is an outstanding example of how rich, granted the native genius, those fruits can be. There are others, too, of lesser talent who have walked, though perhaps with more circumspection, in the same path. Such minds are familiar with the lessons of the past and, being in touch with current affairs, are able to give some guidance in interpreting the present; they know the glory of the Church's history and can point out how all that is of value in Western civilisation derives from Christianity. But the limitations of the historical approach are well known; its good qualities are frequently accompanied by defects which can roughly be summed up, at any rate with historians of one school, as the things-are-not-what-they-were point of view. No doubt they are not; but then, as *Punch* pointed out long ago, they never were. It is only to be expected that the student of the past should find it hard to seize the timeless element in things; hence historians, excepting as we must those of the first rank, are not at home in the world of ideas and first principles; with a training that has developed the memory rather than sharpened the intelligence, their standpoint is empirical and their

powers of luminous generalisation all but non-existent.

Of course the historian, like every thinking man, seeks a theoretical basis for his opinions. But if he is a Catholic and, through no fault of his, unversed in the Church's theology and philosophy, he perforce has to find it at a less abstract level than that provided by St Thomas Aquinas. This doubtless explains why such a political thinker as Edmund Burke proves so attractive to one kind of historical mind; though not, if I recollect aright, to Mr Belloc, who could discover only an occasional passage of sincerity in the 'hollow rhetoric' of Burke. Burke, who, incidentally, was an Irishman, had no patience with what he contemptuously described as 'the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction'. Even so, it should not be forgotten that he is in fact an inheritor and exponent of the great principle of man's subjection to the Natural Law which came through Hooker, from Aquinas, into the English political tradition. 'Those who give and those who receive arbitrary power', writes Burke in memorable words, 'are alike criminal and there is no man but is bound to resist it . . . whenever it shows its face in the world . . . it is wickedness in politics to say that one man can have arbitrary power. . . . Man is born to be governed by Law, and he that will substitute will in the place of it is an enemy of God'.

The modern world, as has been pointed out,² has much to learn from Burke; his sense of the organic and hierarchical nature of society, of the value of quality over quantity, of the complexity of political action, of the vast issues that hang upon the statesman's decision, of the high responsibilities of power—these are his abiding lessons; to which may be added a tradition of eloquence and fire, of dignity and brilliance, a sense of the sweep of great affairs, which have continued in English political life and in face of danger to the State have always been reaffirmed. Yet Burke, like many of his disciples, clung to a vision of the past, a vision neither deep nor broad, confined within the limits of nationality.

Burke belongs to the English eighteenth century. His outlook is neither scientific nor universal. It is profoundly national and to some minds stuffily conservative; it is an aristocratic culture he admires, limited to a privileged *élite*, static, for all its apparent flexibility. He belongs to a silver age, to a relatively provincial culture which was overripe; for all his obvious, if unconscious, debt to Thomism, he lacked the range of the medieval tradition. Moreover, the new world of the Industrial Revolution, of scientific discovery, of business enterprise, was alien to him. The fierce tempo of industrial life, the surge of middle-class and proletarian vitality, were as repulsive to his mind as to that of Dr Johnson.³

² John Bowle: *Western Political Thought* (Jonathan Cape, 1947), p. 438.

³ *Loc. cit.*

We find, then, in the line of thought which flows from Burke a narrowness and rigidity of outlook as ill-adapted to expressing the political implications of Catholicism as it is to comprehending the vast social and economic forces at work in the world around us. Thus pronouncements upon the contemporary situation from this standpoint are likely to be no less wide of the mark than those abstract propositions which we have seen to be characteristic of the clerical mind. And when the Catholic layman with this mental formation turns theologian, as sometimes he does, the sandy bases of his own position are at once laid bare. Having unconsciously assumed that the social structure which accords with his prejudices represents the eternal order of things, he can be led, by an appeal to the New Testament doctrine of vocation, into denying the right of the poor and dispossessed classes to improve their lot; as if the 'vocation' to God's kingdom, which is what is referred to in the Gospels and St Paul, had anything to do with the stratification of society in terms of material wealth, whether in the first century of our era or in this.

If these observations are so far approximately correct, we are left with the disconcerting conclusion that the educated Catholic body in this country is none too well equipped for understanding, let alone solving, the urgent questions which affect the lives of all of us. The clergy have the principles, but they are mentally, if not physically, out of touch with the facts; the laity may be in closer touch with the facts but, speaking generally, they lack the key to their interpretation. That they suffer this lack is due to a singular gap in our educational system, to which it is hard to think that enough attention has been given.

Not only do we not possess a Catholic University, but there are no adequate means for the hundreds of our Catholic young people at the existing Universities to gain a mature knowledge, on parallel lines with their other studies, of the implications of the Faith. Apart from what may be acquired by individual reading and study, and the help given by the normally much over-worked University Chaplain, occasional lecturers, and Societies such as this, even the best educated Catholic boy or girl terminates his or her religious education with the last year at school. This seems to be a very serious state of affairs which it is surely somebody's business to think about. If a measure of the thought and energy hitherto expended upon Primary education, so much of which is brought to nothing by the after-school leakage, were now to be directed to Christian education at the post-Secondary school level, the results might well be more rewarding. As it is, our Catholic young people can and do study and take degrees in modern philosophy, but there is nothing of a corresponding sort for them in

the philosophy and theology of St Thomas. Catholic action is largely a waste of time when it is not the fruit of Catholic thought; this is a truism perhaps still worth reflecting on by those who have at heart the welfare of God's Church here in England.

Education, humanly speaking, is the key to the Church's influence on the minds of our contemporaries; education, that is to say, in its broadest sense, physical and intellectual, spiritual and moral, in the home as well as at school and university. More especially does much depend upon the intellectual and moral formation of those whom we may describe as 'representative' Catholics; for it is by them, rather than by the masses, that the Church is judged in the eyes of the world. We like to dwell on how much progress Catholicism in England has made during the past century; we count up the numbers of converts, quote statistics of newly-built churches and schools; we take pride in the civic recognition given to our ecclesiastical dignitaries. How we have developed, we congratulate ourselves, within this hundred years! Certainly we are on the map; by material and quantitative standards the spectacle is impressive enough. But when we try to weigh up our advance along the most significant way of all, that of convincing England as a whole, 'our separated brethren', that we and we alone embody Christ's authentic message, we may have to pause and think; there seem to be grounds for self-questioning.

As members of 'the Roman Catholic community'—which is the quasi-official English designation for the one Church of God!—we rightly support one another, praising each other's books, making much of our prominent figures, viewing our societies and institutions at rather more than life-size, as is the natural instinct of minority groups. But by and large, the great world around, the world of the average non-Catholic Englishman, still eyes us with suspicion or ignores us altogether. In the sphere of humane letters Catholics have made and are making a recognised contribution to the national life; but this is not so conspicuously the case in those branches of culture where it is most important that we should do so. Much as one may admire the novels of Messrs Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, need the rest of us feel satisfied that theirs is almost the only work of ours to be given serious attention by the more reputable Sunday Newspapers and weekly Reviews? Nor need we suspect any conspiracy of silence, that our capacities are being deliberately ignored; when we have anything of ultimate importance to say, and know how to say it, a hearing is readily given us. The truth is that, in the past hundred years, we have produced no first-rank philosopher or theologian; from the large company of devoted and able administrators there has stood out, I think, no one marked by that rare combination of mental and spiritual gifts which makes for Christian

leadership of the highest order. Cardinal Newman remains alone, the herald of that 'second spring' to which as yet there has followed no summer.

Of course there is a brighter side to the picture, which it would be pleasant to dwell upon, to point out, too, how much has been achieved, when allowance is made for the treatment meted out to us since the Reformation and our consequent limited resources. But in times of crisis, when we are being put to the decisive test, it is folly to count on our inherent strength without taking note of our limitations. To have the one true Faith, along with membership of an infallible Church, must not blind us to the fact that, when confronting the problems of the hour, we can make mistakes. Political and economic contingencies, with which the Church at its own level has the right to concern itself, fall far below the eternal truths of faith and morals about which we have an absolute assurance. We are largely dependent, then, upon the insight and specialised knowledge, the vision, sound judgment and moral energy (for which the state of grace is an assistance but not a substitute) of those whose task it is to enlighten and direct us. To take a familiar instance: consider the often made charge that we Catholics habitually fail to understand any point of view but our own⁴; if this is true it is more than a pity, it might well prove calamitous. Certainly we must make clear who are our enemies and state our differences; but if we are to do this we have first to *understand*. How much more weighty is the case against Marxian Communism, as stated by one who has taken the trouble to study the writings of Marx and Engels and tried to enter sympathetically into the Communist viewpoint, than those vehement denunciations wherein the language of the pulpit is hardly distin-

⁴ A hint of this accusation has been aimed at the highest level. Cf. Michael Oakeshott: *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge University Press 1941). Some thirty pages of this book are devoted to 'Catholicism'; they consist of a balanced and objective presentation of the Church's attitude to politics, being made up of extracts from the Encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI. In the author's introductory note (p. 45) he recalls the fact that 'The social and political doctrine of Catholicism is a doctrine in terms of Natural Law; it belongs, that is, to the most ancient of the Western European traditions of social and political thought. So far as Catholicism is concerned, this tradition received a definitive statement in the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas. But in modern times an admirable restatement of it was made in Leo XIII's remarkable series of Encyclical Letters, the most important of which are: *Arcanum* (1880), *Diuturnum* (1881), *Immortale Dei* (1885), *Libertas* (1888), and *Rerum Novarum* (1891). More recently, . . . Pius XI has contributed to the exposition of this doctrine a number of letters to different national branches of the Church, and two Encyclicals, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and *Divini Redemptoris* (1937)'. The author then goes on. 'I have gone to the pronouncements of Leo XIII and Pius XI for the statement of this doctrine, and I have quoted from all these Encyclicals with the exception of *Divini Redemptoris*, directed against Communism, which seemed to provide nothing that was not available elsewhere and to display no very profound appreciation of the doctrine of Communism'.

guishable from that of the political platform and whence, when all is said, there emerges so very much more heat than light!

Unfortunately we live in a world hag-ridden with propaganda. News uncontaminated by views is becoming more and more of a luxury. Where, nowadays, can we find a presentation of anything at all simply for its own sake, unmixed with comment and criticism? Even the B.B.C. announcer seems able to insinuate a whole background of suggestion by his tone of voice! We Catholics have nothing to be complacent about; we are no better than anybody else, except that we have a better cause. The result is that the man who is concerned to know the facts suspends judgment on almost everything he reads and waits for the other side of the story. As one ranges through the political Reviews, from the slick Social Democracy of the *New Statesman and Nation* at one extreme to the unimpeachable High Toryism of the *Tablet* at the other, one looks for the root of the matter somewhere midway between; and the *aurea mediocritas*, here as elsewhere, proves to be a pretty safe guide. From which point we are led directly to a discussion, though it must be brief, of those entertaining and seemingly never to be avoided categories, the 'Right' and the 'Left'.

These two extreme ways of thinking have perhaps never been better described than by Macaulay. He argues that this difference of standpoint has always existed and always must exist:

For it has its origin in diversities of temper, of understanding, and of interest, which are found in all societies. . . . Everywhere there is a class of men who cling to whatever is ancient, and who, even when convinced by overpowering reasons that innovation would be beneficial, consent to it with many misgivings and forebodings. We find also everywhere another class of men, sanguine in hope, bold in speculation, always pressing forward, quick to discern the imperfections of whatever exists, disposed to think lightly of the risks and inconveniences which attend improvements, and disposed to give every change credit for being an improvement. In the sentiments of both classes there is something to approve. But of both the best specimens will be found not far from the common frontier. The extreme section of one class consists of bigoted dotards: the extreme section of the other consists of shallow and reckless empirics.⁵

It would be affectation for anyone, whatever his claim to impartiality, to conceive himself as outside this debate, viewing with Olympian detachment the scene of turmoil below; for one reason or another each of us tends to be either 'right' or 'left', 'reactionary' or 'progressive'. On which side of the fence we happen to be standing, or even if we deliberately choose to sit upon it, matters little provided

⁵ *History of England*, Vol. I, p. 99.

we have no illusions about where we are. What is of importance, however, is that we should not involve—or, as far as we can help it, allow others to involve—the Church in this very human dispute. The Catholic Church, in the political sense, is neither 'right' nor 'left'; it is not even 'centre'; if the spatial metaphor is applicable at all, it is 'above' these differences of outlook. Correspondingly, the Church is irreconcilably opposed to Marxian Communism, not because the latter is politically 'left', but because it is metaphysically and morally 'below' the level of these legitimately contending points of view. This fact is not acknowledged by the Marxists who, seeing everything in economic and political terms, identify the Church with the 'Right', but it is of capital importance that it should be acknowledged and understood by us; not that thereby we may placate the Marxist, but in order to safeguard our own position.

The Church's quarrel with Marxism—and this cannot be too often stressed—has nothing to do with the antagonism of Capitalism to Communism; neither is it a variant of the Anglo-American 'cold war' with Russia; it is a conflict between a way of life based upon the existence and providence of God and the spiritual nature of man and a way of life based on a denial of these truths. Capitalism's dispute with Communism concerns the distribution of property and material wealth; the Anglo-American disagreement with Russia no doubt overlaps with this, while embodying also both the rightful protest of free men against the enslavement of smaller peoples and possibly the more dubious factors of political power and prestige; but Christianity's opposition to Marxism essentially turns upon the intangible things of the spirit: the value of each individual soul, man's personal freedom (for which a measure of private property is a safeguard) and his relation to God.

Now it is idle to ignore the fact that it is in a great many people's interest, on both sides of the dividing line, to treat these three quarrels as one. It is part of the Russian propaganda to regard England, America and 'the Vatican' (as Moscow radio likes to describe the Church) united in common hostility against the U.S.S.R., with the Pope as enemy number one. Obviously anything that lends colour to this presentation of the case redounds to the Church's discredit. Such a grouping of forces would not only be intolerable theologically; it would be spiritually, and quite possibly politically, disastrous. Were England and America at war with Russia, account would have to be taken of the millions of Communists in Italy and France, not to mention the hundred thousand or so in this country. These, and the further millions in China, India and elsewhere, are not to be disposed of by dropping atomic bombs on the Russians; and of course the Church's battle fundamentally cannot be fought with material

weapons at all. It is conceivable that the point may be reached when it would be right to resist Russia by force, and it is arguable—though to my mind very dubiously—that such action would be of assistance to the Church, as removing from the scene numbers of its implacable enemies, curtailing Marxist corruption, and preserving ecclesiastical property intact. But error can only be conquered by truth, evil will yield only to good; by these means, and on this level, we Catholics have to settle our differences with the Communists.

Here, then, it is suggested, is the distinctive contribution we can make in the field of politics: to insist on the primacy of truth and the way of good will. By truth in this context is meant integrity of mind, willingness to examine all sides of the question, the desire to see things steadily and see them whole; by good will, not vague sentiments of benevolence, but a creative attitude founded upon justice, ready to admit what is right in an opponent's case and not merely eager to defend its own. With any who would dismiss such counsels as utopian and impracticable one may be allowed to raise this question: Is it not largely on account of the absence of these healing energies that the meetings of the 'practical' politicians are so unproductive of results?

To strive, for our own part, to act in this way may demand of us, not only clear-sightedness, but greater mental flexibility and a less negative outlook than hitherto, thereby to discern how unchanging doctrinal principles may be realised under new and unlooked for conditions. There is needed, too, not necessarily more activity (which has no value in itself), but a more evident concern for the miseries of this poor distracted modern world. When we denounce its errors and condemn its follies (a form of declamation demanding the minimum of intellectual effort), as we so often do, is there not sometimes an underlying suggestion that we are not as the rest of men? In speaking of that popular bogey, '*the State*', do we always display—I will not say justice and charity—but the elements of political sagacity? Not to keep well in mind the distinction between the politically mature British Constitutional system, which is the product of a long struggle to vindicate freedom against arbitrary power, and the '*State*' as it functions in Russia or late Nazi Germany may lead us seriously astray. When one listens to the familiar warnings about how we are being robbed of our liberties, how parents will presently not be able to call their children their own, how we are the victims of regimentation and bureaucracy—ammunition eagerly seized upon by the Party Press and the political pamphleteers!—one is left undecided to what extent such outpourings are based on an actual examination of the relevant facts, or how far they are a repetition of the well-worn stock-phrases which have done

service in these matters for generations past.

These warnings, needless to say, if unoriginal, are timely enough; there are grounds in plenty for them today; but they should not be left unbalanced by any appreciation of what, given certain conditions, *must* happen whether we like it or not. Though there may be differences of emphasis and even of method, it is common ground with all political parties that the interdependence of world trade, and the production of the necessities of life in a highly industrialised country like England, have implications too far-reaching to be left unsupervised in the hands of private enterprise; the State *must* take the responsibility, and with it claim the power, of ensuring that the work of the nation accrues to the benefit of the people as a whole and not to the enrichment of a privileged few. Those who refuse to accept this condition of affairs, and the consequences that flow from it, are like men standing on the sea shore vainly trying to hold back the advancing tide. They would be better employed in devising ways and means for keeping afloat.

If we insist on dealing with the State on the 'we'-and-'they' principle—'we' the God-fearing private citizens, 'they' the unscrupulous despots at Westminster and Whitehall—we may well be helping to produce the situation we most fear. As we treat people, so do they tend to be; if we regard the State as a group of responsible human beings not necessarily less well-intentioned than ourselves, with whom we can have a voice and exercise influence—and that is the English democratic theory, not always nullified in practice—then we shall be listened to and no doubt some of our wishes put into effect; but if we assume that the State approximates to a tyranny, and call it hard names, like *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*, we are creating within ourselves, though perhaps unconsciously, an expectation of being oppressed and swallowed up by it. If, then, the State carries out the rôle we have assigned to it, should we, what remains of us, have nothing to reproach ourselves with?

What is chiefly wrong here, I submit, is not that the State has too much power, but that there is an ever present danger of its abuse, owing to the godlessness and secularism which characterise political life. This, however, disturbing though it is, is our opportunity, the Church has the task, not of frustrating, but of *sanctifying* the lawful aspirations of modern man. The State is right in encouraging its citizens to regard themselves as members of a large community, with responsibilities to society as a whole. We for our part, in pointing out that the family existed before the State, spoil our case if we show no sympathy with those wider loyalties. What both sides need to recall is that the family is the best of all nurseries for good citizenship.

In the matter of our Catholic schools, there are, I know, spiritually minded people who make very light of large and airy classrooms, spacious playing fields, the morning cup of milk and a substantial mid-day meal. These, they tell us, are but a device of our rulers to rob parents of their responsibilities and children of their independence. Moreover, this pampering of the child's body is ruinous to his soul. Better, then, to keep to our cramped and unhealthy buildings in the slums than run such a risk. That there is something to be said for this point of view few will deny; though it would seem well not to be too ready to level accusations of vote-catching insincerity against educationists who wish to give the best they have to the children. At any rate, those who have personally to deal with young people at school know well how body and soul work together. Children brought up in a happy atmosphere and healthy surroundings are not only physically and mentally, but spiritually, better off than those not so privileged. If at all possible, provided there be no sacrifice of principle, which of us would not wish to see these benefits 'in widest commonality spread'?

Again, how negative, not to say shallow, is much of our talk on the great theme of human liberty! We speak of it as if it meant being left to do what we like, not interfered with by other people; which is essentially a selfish notion having its roots, not in the philosophy and theology of freedom, but in the politics and economics of *laissez-faire* individualism. 'When We say freedom', writes Pope Pius XII, as if to reproach the ineptitude of some of our discussions at lower levels, 'We mean freedom to pursue the true and the good, a freedom which is in harmony with the welfare of every nation and that of the great family of nations as a whole. This is the freedom that the Church has ever asserted, defended, and vindicated'.⁶

The philosophers have long since demonstrated that a man's liberty is not to be reckoned according to the variety of choices open to him; it consists in the non-determination of the will when confronted by any created *good*, so that he may choose or not choose, choose this or choose that. Basically human freedom is independent of outward circumstance, it arises from an inner condition of the spirit; we are free because the only object presented to the will from which it cannot withhold itself is the *summum bonum*, that is, the Beatific Vision. Before all else, even at the very moment of choice, we can be free; the margin between the supreme good, which is God, and the content of any created good is the measure of our freedom. Thus human liberty in its essence has nothing to do with the abundance of things we can choose from. St Francis in his nakedness and

⁶ *Catholics and World Reconstruction* (An Allocation of 1st June, 1946, translated from the Italian for the Catholic Truth Society by Canon G. D. Smith), p. 9.

poverty was freer than the multi-millionaire able to gratify his every whim. For the heart of liberty lies precisely in detachment from the things of this world, a detachment which is negative only in name, since it is but the obverse side of man's attachment to God.

Of course it is both true and relevant to remark that, if not liberty itself, the *exercise* of liberty may be curtailed by outward circumstances; there can be fewer things for the will to play upon. And this unquestionably need be no light matter; but in times like these, when men are being pressed down to the deep foundations of life, it is more profitable to consider the ultimate meaning of freedom than to cloud our minds with political rhetoric. What these thoughts suggest—and this is borne out by the witness of social observers—is that what the average man-in-the-street most consciously and painfully lacks is not personal freedom (which, fundamentally, no one can take from him) but something to live for; he wants to feel that he is not drifting aimlessly, that human existence has point and purpose, that he himself counts in that he is helping on a worthwhile cause, making for some goal. And this psychological phenomenon is in fact closely connected with man's liberty; for, as we have seen, it is only in virtue of the will's being concentrated, whether consciously or unconsciously, upon its final objective, God, that it may be said to be free.

What emerges from this, I suggest, is that if we thought and talked less about liberty, and more about the things which alone give purposefulness to life, we should at once be bearing a less equivocal witness to the saving mission of the Church and making some contribution to the needs of the hour. If, on the other hand, we are chiefly noted for our adverse criticism—albeit 'in the light of Catholic teaching'!—of social and political enterprises which many qualified judges regard as wholly compatible with Christianity, we need not be surprised to hear the counter-charge that we interfere in matters that don't concern us and neglect those that do. It is of course much easier to comment vigorously on current affairs than to bring home to men's minds the contemporary relevance of the Gospel, but there can be little doubt which of these two activities is the more valuable. The first will make better 'copy' for the Press, but the second is intrinsically the more interesting and what in fact the world wants to hear from us. Men are anxious to be convinced that Christianity is, after all, not an exploded myth; if only they *could* believe that they are beloved of God, redeemed by Christ, and destined for eternal blessedness! These are the truths which can infuse into the dullest of lives the glory of a dedicated purpose. And by whom are they to be unfalteringly proclaimed, if not by us?

It remains to offer some concluding remarks on the most burning

question of all: the fateful opposition between Marxian Communism and authentic Christianity, that is to say, Catholicism. This, we repeat, in no way coincides with the potential conflict between Russia and the West. These political differences could be carried to the point of war, one side or the other being brought to utter defeat, while the original antithesis might be left as far from being resolved as it is today. The Christian world, it has been pointed out, has a bad conscience with regard to Communism; for we know that the prophets of this new creed, Marx and Engels, drew their chief inspiration from the Capitalistic abuses of the so-called Christian West. These abuses, the Marxists declare, can be removed by no other means than by the violent overthrow of the whole social structure from which they spring. The attention of the Communist student is still directed to the famous passage from Mignet's *History of the French Revolution*, first published in 1824; it is of sufficient interest to be worth quoting:

When a reform has become necessary, and the moment for accomplishing it has arrived, nothing can prevent it, everything furthers it. Happy were it for men could they then come to an understanding; would the rich resign their superfluity, and the poor content themselves with achieving what they really needed, the historian would have no excesses, no calamities, to record; he would merely have to display the transition of humanity to a wiser, freer and happier condition. But the annals of nations have not as yet presented any instance of such prudent sacrifices; those who should have made them have refused to do so; those who have required them have forcibly compelled them; and good has been brought about, like evil, by the medium and all the violence of usurpation. As yet, there has been no sovereign but force.

The parties chiefly concerned, it may be, have gained a little wisdom since this was written; here in England, at any rate, there has been some redistribution of property without the use of force. We need not now discuss the desirability or otherwise of the new arrangements; those who disapprove of them, however, should not do so on Christian grounds. There have been, as is well known, assiduous churchgoers not unwilling to inculcate upon their less fortunate brethren the duty to tighten their belts, to remind us that we live on earth as in a valley of tears and that the time for alleviating the miseries of mankind is not here but hereafter. In a word, men who are well content that the rich should stay rich and the poor remain poor. Here it will be enough to remind ourselves of an 'inviolable requirement' laid down by the Holy Father and not sufficiently heeded by some of his children: 'that the good things which God has created for the benefit of all men should find their way to all alike, accord-

ing to the principles of justice and charity'.⁷

If, further, we seek guidance on this matter from the highest Authority of all, there is no possibility of mistake. Our Lord, though little concerned with building a paradise on earth or utopian schemes for social improvement, yet blessed the poor and made their cause his own. We recall, too, that he worked the greater number of his miracles, not simply for the benefit of men's souls, but to heal their bodies. So it is that perceptive Christians have always recognised that men's irremediable afflictions are already too many to justify their being left with those from which their fellow-creatures can bring them relief. The Church from its foundation, while cherishing no materialistic illusions about man's progress and perfectibility, has concerned itself with his this-worldly welfare as well as with his eternal salvation. Nor should it ever be forgotten that the inequalities among men and the hierarchy of values, which the Church recognises to exist, bear no essential relation to the gradation of the community into 'classes' based on such accidents as birth, wealth, or exceptional opportunity. They relate to the differences of function assigned to the members, whether actual or potential, of Christ's mystical Body, as determined by God's own design and his outpouring of grace.

These principles are of the highest importance when disputing with the Communists; for the real point at issue is often obscured. We rightly condemn the ruthlessness of their methods, but if we deny any justice to their claim for a fairer distribution of this world's goods, we cannot invoke the support of the Church. Let us try to lay bare the heart of the quarrel: *What the Communists aim at doing, quite consistently with the dominating role they attach to the economic motive, is to MATERIALISE (i.e. bring down to a sub-natural level) the whole of human life, and on this basis eventually build up a classless society whose only object will be the temporal well-being of its members. What the Church aims at doing, no less consistently with its claim that the motive dominating the human will when true to itself is the love of the Good, is to SPIRITUALISE (i.e. raise to a supernatural level) the whole of human life, and on this foundation give glory to God by making real his Kingdom, thereby ensuring the eternal happiness of each of its members.* Herein, I submit, are the true points of opposition, the basic antithesis on which there can be no reconciliation or compromise. Let no one here cry 'Peace', 'Peace', where there is no peace. We must know our enemies, stand by our friends, and with God's grace, die rather than yield. This, and not the Anglo-American dispute with Russia, is the great conflict of our

⁷ Pope Pius XII: *Wealth, Work, and Freedom* (Whitsun Broadcast, 1941; C.T.S. translation), p. 8.

time. The eyes of the world are upon us to see how we of the Catholic Church, the only Christian organisation that counts, comport ourselves in the struggle.

The Marxists, acknowledging only a realm of matter, in which one man's gain is another man's loss, must necessarily proceed by force and fraud, violence and bloodshed. We, on our side, are pledged to the use of spiritual weapons, which, paradoxically, are the strongest of all, even though their enduring triumphs have often been achieved through seeming failure. *'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'*. Somewhere, somehow, through the darkness that hangs so heavily over Asia and eastern Europe, God's unerring purpose is at work; perhaps in some analogous fashion to the way it was achieved for ancient Israel through the dread empires of Assyria and Babylon. Have we any indication of what that purpose may be? Men cannot live together in fellowship on a sub-human level of material well-being, as the Communists are even now finding out; world unity will be brought into effect at the level of the spirit, or not at all. Is it not possible that the Church, persecuted in its members, is to be rendered more manifestly spiritual, that is, less able to be identified with any set of political or economic conditions, and so is to reap the harvest which the Communists, despite themselves, are sowing? Certain words of the Holy Father seem to lend substance to these thoughts: 'In those parts of the world where the Church, whether through deliberate and systematic persecution or through the brutal depredations of war, has found herself deprived of all visible support or stripped of her lawful property, she has seen the unity of the faithful become closer and closer and their zeal burn with an ever brighter flame'.⁸

The Church, being indestructible, cannot be overwhelmed by Communism; in the final reckoning Communism will have served the purposes of the Church. As God's Kingdom on earth, the Church must always remain recognisable for what it is, 'a city set on a hill', but the appearance it presents to men's eyes a hundred years hence may well prove very different from what it is today. One lesson of history seems to be that the Church does not necessarily succeed best in its essential task when the machinery of the State is at its disposal. There is not seldom too high a price to be paid for such conveniences. St Teresa and St John of the Cross regarded, not sixteenth-century Spain, but the age of the martyrs as the time of the Church's greatest spiritual vigour. To some modern equivalent of the era before Constantine we may well have to adapt ourselves, or even to the spirit of an earlier time. St Paul doubtless knew little

⁸ Pope Pius XII: *Catholics and World Reconstruction*, p. 8.

of the politics of freedom; but he could proclaim the glorious liberty of God's sons to the slaves of the pagan Roman Empire, and this without any assistance from its officials.

Let us end by recalling the memory of a great Englishman, the martyr Bishop of Rochester, St John Fisher. He sealed with his blood his protest against State tyranny, but he, 'the holy man of his time', knew well that the conflict between ecclesiastical and political government is not always as simple as it is made out to be. He has a word which can still prick the consciences of some of us today: 'In the days of the Apostles there were no chalices of gold, but many golden priests; but now there be many chalices of gold, but almost no golden priests'. Could it be that we have yet something to learn from that remote Apostolic age?

ALFRED GRAHAM.