

Until the actual texts of the final Conciliar decrees are available it is, of course, impossible to make any intelligent judgement on this aspect of the Council's work. Press reports suggest that the Schema on the Church in the modern world has been slightly improved but hardly that it is finally satisfactory. At least it no longer seeks to justify the policy of nuclear deterrence and it seems that pressure simply to re-state the teaching of *Casti Connubii* on birth control has been resisted. Fortunately the Council is not simply to be judged by its decrees. Amongst its effects for example must be reckoned the institution of the permanent Synod of Bishops.

The Motu Proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo* ordains that there is to be a Synod directly subject to the Pope. It is to be summoned by him whenever he thinks it necessary, he is to designate the place of meeting and to determine the agenda; he is to issue summons to the members at a definite time before the meeting telling them what is to be discussed.

'Et ad habendum commune consilium . . . summoneri faciemus archiepiscopos episcopos, abbates . . . ad certum diem, scilicet ad terminum quadraginta dierum ad minus, et ad certum locum; et in omnibus litteris illius summonitionis causam summonitionis exprimemus . . .'

These words are not, as a matter of fact, taken from *Apostolica Sollicitudo* but from clause 14 of Magna Carta. It would not, however, be fair to describe the Synod of Bishops as a great leap forward into the thirteenth century, for two reasons. In the first place the Synod is to have a permanent secretariat in Rome and moreover it is to be a legislative and not merely a consultative body. Of course its legislation will have to be approved by the Pope, nevertheless it will wield a real power. It is possible at this stage to exaggerate the importance of the representative character of the Synod. In the democratic sense of representation by actual choice the Synod will be no more representative of the People of God than are the Bishops who will elect its members. It will be neither the democratic voice of all Catholics nor will it be, like the Council itself, representative in the profound sense that its proceedings are specially guided by the same Holy Spirit that breathes in every one of the baptised. Nevertheless it is an extremely important and extremely welcome stage in the development of the Church as an organisation.

One striking effect of the Council has been that men who have

worked for twenty years or more for unpopular and 'cranky' causes such as ecumenism or the vernacular liturgy have suddenly found their ideas respectable. Such men may well be slightly disconcerted by the new faces that have now appeared beside them on the platform. There sits a prominent editor, well-known nowadays for his daring opinions on birth-control; but we treasure a letter from him in 1958 explaining that surely most people find the ordinary explanation in terms of natural law quite satisfactory and that they will merely be confused by any departure from it. Alongside him is one of our more progressive and dynamic bishops – the one who just a few years ago told his flock in a pastoral letter that he was sure they would be shocked and astonished to hear he had read a book advocating the omission of the 'Last Gospel' from the Mass. Of course it is not surprising that Bishops and even editors should learn a little and alter their views, and of course it is only human conveniently to forge one's past, but we can at least ask of these new progressives a little tolerance towards those who for one reason or another have not been able to scramble on the bandwagon so quickly. What harm is done to the Church of God if a few people, for old times sake, like occasionally to celebrate Mass in Latin? Provided that they do not seriously impede the ordinary parishioner who wants to take part in a normal Mass, can we not allow them what they wish, if only out of respect for their age?

Now, that practically every articulate Catholic professes the correct progressive views, the distinction between progressive and conservative is useful only for purposes of abuse; it no longer represents possible intellectual alternatives which men can be found to defend. This does not mean that we are all in agreement, it means that the important division is a different one.

The real division now seems to lie between 'progressives' who are reformers and those who are radicals – between those who seek to improve and humanise the present organisation of the Church, and those who have a vision of a quite new kind of church and who see reforms as merely masking the problems. We might say that while the practical immediate effects of the Council – from the Liturgy Constitution to the Synod – have been reformist, the doctrinal teaching has contained hints of a radical approach. There is a genuine debate here between intelligent Christians in which neither side is unaware of the problems. Reformists know quite well that they run the risk of repeating the mistakes of Trent, producing a Church that is merely swept and garnished; radicals do not need to be told that they may be going the way of the Protestant Reformation, producing a Church that is falling to pieces.

This, it seems to us is now the important debate, we hope to see it conducted in our pages with a vigour and charity that has not always characterised the exchanges between progressives and conservatives.

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