

Every now and then we are just compelled to try to make sense of our confusions. The ambition of those apparently very esoteric specialists, the so-called 'structuralists'—to discern and uncode the secret order within apparent unrelatedness—surely springs from a deep commonly human need of our nature. That there is confusion is a matter of experience. Fr Adrian Edwards's characterization of our present state of revolt and disarray as 'counter-customary' rings immediately true. But his use of the companion anthropological term *rite de passage* not merely confirms this sense of confusion but illuminates it with the hint of a meaning.

Where we are going, and the stage of our passage we seem to be at now, is suggested by a reflexion on the publication of the *missa normativa*. This may seem far-fetched, but only if we forget the critical principle formulated with deceptive brevity in the original Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: 'the liturgy is the *summit towards which* the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the *fountain from which* all her power flows' (§10, italics supplied). In other words, life and liturgy compenetrates—and the whole Culture and Liturgy debate for a few years back was nothing if not another, particularly vivid, expression and confirmation of this principle. But if this is so, then any important development of the liturgy must in principle have feed-back implications for social life as a whole. It therefore becomes imperative to decide more exactly what '*normativa*' means in its immediate liturgical context, and, secondly, to search out its correspondences in our whole life.

We are told that 'it is the intention of the Holy See that this reform should bring a period of calm and stability after the period of rapid change in the last few years' (Peter Coughlan, *The Tablet*, May 10th). Now '*normativa*' and 'stability' could be interpreted in broadly three ways: they could be the pretext of a reversion to type, a more or less covert opportunity and justification to return to the discredited authoritarianism of the past; or it could be the straw on the camel's back for those whose membership of the 'underground Church' is in fact a systematic intolerance of any authority beyond that of their own sect; or it could mean a subtle but profound change of our notion of balance. On this view, we should be changing from the unstable equilibrium of what is in fact immobility to the mobile equilibrium of the normal process of human growth, as this is well caught by Dr Dominian in his article: 'As in the case of physical

growth, what is needed is a suitably matching response on the part of the parents to each new phase of development.'

That '*normativa*' and 'stability' should be interpreted in this more elastic and organic sense seems to be confirmed not merely by the Pope's reiteration of the Council's provision for 'legitimate variations and adaptations', but by his own words in a previous address: 'Understood in its genuine sense, we can adopt the programme of a continual reform of the Church: *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (cfr. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église*, 2 ed., p. 409 ss)' (*Osservatore Romano*, May 15th).

If we are, however, to understand the stabilization of the liturgy in this organic way, then we must similarly understand the preparations and prolongations of liturgy in everyday life implied in the principle of compenetration. And here there would seem to be two major areas of application.

The first area—it is becoming tedious, but still necessary to return to it—is that of authority. Fortunately, we now have here the statement of Cardinal Suenens. Not that what he says is very radical; on the contrary. The importance of the statement lies mostly in the eminence of the speaker: it is a piece of *haute vulgarisation* in the best sense. And the basic principle of compenetration is implicit throughout: without yielding on the unique, indeed the proto-typical, nature of authority in the Church, he—like Dr Dominian in his turn—suggests how the children of light can learn from the children of this generation about the mode of *exercise* of this authority.

The second major area of application of this principle is what Professor Cameron refers to in a characteristically honest way when he speaks of our 'perplexities about politics and about the political role of Christians'. We are surely perplexed because of a massive shift of emphasis to our responsibilities in our earthly life, arising out of the vastly increased mastery we have gained over our lives and our environment. 'Secularization', 'coming of age', the New Left, the Church of the Poor, the almost universal decline in priestly vocations and the heart-searching among those who remain, the diffusion of 'religious' news in the secular press, the ill-defined and shifting alliances of all manner of 'secular' and 'Christian' forces—these are so many manifestations of the re-adjustment of the relationship between this world and the world to come.

We do, then, seem to be passing through a phase which can be illuminatingly called a *rite de passage* by our anthropologist, or a process of removing a 'false self' by our psychiatrist. At the same time, the *principle* of the *missa normativa* in the sense suggested marks a new stage in this phase. If we are now being encouraged to relearn the gentle art of growing naturally again, neither fixated nor forcing the pace, we are also moving out of a period of 'counter-customary' disarray into a more constructive period of sorting out more authentic expressions of the 'true self' of the Church. P.L.