

Editorial

The important thing about Hans Küng, as Fr Kerr points out below, is that he writes for a general public as well as for an academic one, not by writing down, in the old manner of 'popular' theology, but by treating serious problems, problems of which the answer is still to seek, in a way that anyone can follow granted only their serious attention. Of course he is not unique in this; we are seeing more and more important theological writing coming out in paperback, and having the kind of sale which publishers a few years back would hardly have dared to dream of. This year, for instance, there have been several important works by Schillebeeckx and K. Rahner coming into English paperback series; just as, outside Catholic publishing, there has been the extraordinary success of the Bishop of Woolwich's book.

What does this mean? Undoubtedly there are those to whom it has meant the disturbance of long-settled attitudes, with all the doubt and worry this involves. Catholic and Anglican voices have been raised to suggest that people aren't yet ready, that caution is necessary, that some kind of censorship would be prudent. Whether the authors are right or wrong (and obviously a Catholic would have more reserves about Dr Robinson than about Dr Küng) doesn't, in this context, seem to matter: their crime, it is suggested, is to have emerged from the safety of academic life in order to plague ordinary folk with their disturbing thoughts. Yet is this suggestion ultimately compatible with Christianity? Can the discussion of fundamental points be in principle confined to an élite; can any of us dare to separate off from the men who share with us 'the liberty of God's children'? The proud claim of Christianity is to be common, to belong to all.

And it is just this which in the recent past it has so signally failed to be. People have been given the impression that there is something esoteric about Christian thinking; the Church, instead of being at the living centre of our consciousness, has found its place in some odd corner or other. Theology became a kind of luxury, an option Christians could meaningfully reject.

What it comes to is that one has to choose between insulation from real life and possible error. No one, least of all its author, would deny that there are mistakes in *Honest to God*, but passages like the following must have struck home into the Christian consciousness of many who

had failed to recognise its essential orthodoxy in more orthodox presentations: 'How easily one finds oneself giving pious advice to a person faced with a decision, to "go away and pray about it" But, if I am honest, what enlightenment I have had on decisions has almost always come not when I have gone away and stood back from them, but precisely as I have *wrestled through* all the most practical pros and cons, usually with other people. And this activity, undertaken by a Christian trusting and expecting that God is there, would seem to *be* prayer.'

Does a statement like that weaken the hold of Christianity by drawing away attention from the more usual idea of prayer as a *special* activity done in specific circumstances? Doesn't it rather, by its appeal to the equally long tradition that prayer itself is ordinary, bring new hope to those who had given prayer up as beyond their capacities. A book such as this pulls Christianity back to its rightful place at the centre of life, just as the writings of Küng and others help to do.

Yet the most important task of the Church today concerns the meeting point of theology and prayer; it is liturgy that has somehow found itself out on a limb, and it is this we must restore to its right place as the common work of God's people. All the senses of 'common' come into play there; liturgy is as ordinary as the day's work, the day's talk, as reading a novel or turning on the radio. Mr Wicker, in his fine book *Culture and Liturgy*, reminds us that 'the assertion that "culture is ordinary" is completed by the assertion that "liturgy is ordinary"'. It is at this point of intersection that the hope for the growth of a Christian society really lives. The element that has been lacking in the religious protest, however, and which needs to be restored to it, is the conviction that the development of our industrial civilisation is perhaps the most important advance ever made in history towards such a common cultural ideal'.

The last twist of the argument may surprise us. Catholics, however immersed in industrialism they may be, aren't used to considering it as a proper form of Christian society. Perhaps the surprise is only an indication that so long as liturgy is off-centre, political and social thinking will be off-centre too. So long as we fail to celebrate, in Fr Kerr's phrase, 'visibly, audibly, sensitively, intelligibly, in a word, *decently*', we are liable to fall for romantic solutions to political problems. But change is taking place. The decade of popular theology, of restored liturgy, of the Council at Rome, well may come to be seen as a turning point in the continual struggle to recover Christianity for the mass of people, to see it once again as *ordinary*.