

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRIA
UNDER FOREIGN RULE

THE Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation', founded by Charles the Great, was already breaking up in 1804. A decree of Francis I, its last emperor, made its death inevitable. Its underlying principle, the unity of God and the world, the *civitas Dei terrena*, had lost force and efficacy. But in the Austrian empire it survived the downfall of the Dual Monarchy, and notwithstanding all it lived on through Austria's First Republic. Not until the 13th of March 1938, when Hitler's swarms imposed the *Anschluss*, was this last embodiment of a great political ideal eliminated.

The centuries-old unity of spiritual and secular rule had endured nowhere on the Continent of Europe so long as in Austria. Ruling and ruled alike, in the realm of State and Church respectively, saw the continued stability of this alliance as the direct, clear outcome of deliberate policy on the part of State and Church, but also as the only possible working plan for the prosperity of both realms. The throne protected the altar and the Church preached loyalty to the established government as a duty-binding Christian virtue. An acquaintance with these facts is essential if the seemingly special relationship between Church and State, the conditions inside the Church and the life of the Church in Austria are to be understood and correctly estimated.

In addition, we have the outstanding fact of nineteenth century Freemasonry and its concentric onslaught on this one surviving bulwark of the 'dark' Middle Ages. To the Freemasons the 'Catholic Habsburg State' was the last, and therefore more hateful, bar to progress and enlightenment. The Catholics, for their part, saw this assault on the Church as one of the most grievous it had ever had to face. And so they endeavoured to ward off the Freemasons' attacks with almost passionate fear and with all the resources of the nation. The separation of Church and State, effected with such bitterness of feeling in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, seemed to them a stroke against the very life of the Church of that land.

With the end of the first world war came the breakdown of the political unity of the Alpine, Sudeten and Carpathian lands, now seen to be regrettable from many points of view, and the last Habsburger (another Charles) had to leave the country under British protection. In the new Republic, the Church's relations with the State were determined for some time by their opposition. The controversy

between Church and State was coloured by the Church's longing to re-establish the pre-revolutionary interdependence. Then the situation changed gradually; the Church only slowly and reluctantly grew accustomed to the new régime and the new government, although finally persuaded to it by the closely connected Christian Social Party guided thereto by a prelate, the secular priest and statesman, Dr Seipel. The tension caused by conservative aversion on one side and distrustful revolutionary antagonism on the other, sharpened the determination of clear-sighted people to establish the boundaries of the two powers in the way best suited to the new ideas and changed relationships. But Social Democracy, at that time still hostile to the Church and under the sway of free-thinking conservatism, believed itself bound above all to guard the State with unrelenting hostility from any renewal of contact with the Church, and at the same time to drive the Church right away from any participation in public life.

Corrupt party politics, individual ambitions and passions of all kinds, fatal misapprehensions, and some notable 'accidents' led to the authoritarian régime of Chancellor Dollfuss in 1933-38—the man who is today so readily branded and dismissed with the bald appellation of 'fascist'. Yet all that Dollfuss wanted was to bring about a conscious synthesis between essential authority and liberty, so easily abused. He undertook the task as a true Catholic, with his knowledge of Thomistic thought to guide him, and profoundly influenced by the principles of the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.

A democracy on a professional basis appeared to him as the one hope of deliverance for modern society against the threat of Marxism. The separated powers of Church and State now drew together again in Austria, though there was no question of their being reunited. Today ignorant and ill-intentioned persons try hard to make out that the Austrian Government of those years intended to bring about a sort of theocracy or even a caesaro-papistic state. The agreement between Church and State is dubbed out of hand 'clerico-fascist'. A study of the terms of the Austrian Constitution, and especially a thorough examination of the terms of the Concordat with the Holy See, and all the measures taken in those years to establish peaceful relations between Church and State, all prove the contrary of these foolish allegations. However, unscrupulous and extremely skilful propaganda is always able to assert itself against the truth, for a time at least—and even in the face of incontestable facts. To justify this false judgment, the fact that the leading statesman and certain of his colleagues were practising Catholics was sufficient.

On the 13th of March 1938 the Austrian State was abolished and the Church then found herself overnight on those same distressing

terms with the new occupying powers which had become recognised and operative in Germany after the seizing of power and the faking of the Concordat. Nor was this all. Austria became in this as in many other questions the 'nigger-colony', the experimental research station for the far-reaching, anti-Catholic plans of a Rosenberg. In a conversation with the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, the 'Leader of Greater Germany' had told the Prelate, in a marvellously executed display of overflowing cordiality, that the event was an historical one. Innitzer's visit was supposed to inaugurate a new period of cooperation between Church and State in new Germany. As a proof of their faith in this statement of Hitler's, a very few weeks after the *Anschluss*, the Austrian bishops issued their much-criticised manifesto which expressed all readiness for Christian fellowship and, animated by a hope against all hope, offered their support in a collaboration between Church and State which either side should respect.

But shortly after the 'plebiscite' of April 10th, 1938, the 'Commissar for the inclusion of Austria in the German State', Bürckel, let the mask fall. The 'Hitler Jugend' of Vienna broke into the episcopal palace with the intention of committing arson and pillage. Two of the Cardinal's chaplains were killed and thrown out of the window. These events formed a worthy counterpart to the firing of the synagogues and a fitting prelude to the measures which aimed at the complete destruction of the life of the Church in Austria. Indeed, soon after, religious education was forbidden in most Austrian schools, Church property was confiscated and made over to the Party, and the numerous institutions run by the Catholic *Caritas* were occupied by the N.S.V. The religious houses were handed over to the Army or the Party, and hosts of priests were thrown into prison, removed to the concentration camps, sent into exile, or compelled to silence.

The Church was no longer a properly recognised and frankly admitted factor in public life with real rights of its own. It was free merely to maintain the remaining church buildings at its own cost and to provide for its clergy.

So it was that the Catholics in Austria suddenly found themselves deprived of all the ways and means which they had hitherto taken to be of absolute necessity for the life of the Church. The majority of them were at first in a state of acute mental anxiety and hopeless indecision. Most succumbed to indescribable despondency. One priest was heard to exclaim, with tears in his eyes: 'All is lost!'—so strong was the idea of necessary unity and alliance between Church and State, although the separation of the two powers had, in fact, long been effected.

Often in those agonising days the Austrian Catholics asked them-

selves bitterly and accusingly: how has all this come about? Good will to resist had not been lacking, but when it came to the point it was powerless. Great sacrifices—sometimes of blood and life itself—had been bravely and confidently made.

And now it was all for nothing. How could God allow it? The events that had occurred seemed to be a mockery of all their expectations. 'He who prays and keeps the commandments', people had said to themselves, 'is surely proof against anything and lives his life in God-given security.' Now the insecurity of human existence came home to the Christians as a shattering and overwhelming fact.

The believer was a believer in his belief in God, but he had thought he could believe without believing in the Devil. Philosophy and theology had turned Satan into an abstract definition, a hollow symbol, and psychology explained him away as hysteria. As an article of belief, the devil was felt to be in urgent need of revision, something left over from more primitive religions. But now it was a matter of experience that a hierarchy of unclean spirits had received power to become the rulers of this world, and that the history of the world is no other than a ceaseless struggle between the fallen angels and the hosts of God, full of triumphs and disasters; that the scene and the object of this struggle are not only the poor human heart but also the universe, the whole of mankind as a unity bound by original sin.

In this light National Socialism soon appeared not so much as a political, economic and sociological affair, as above all an outbreak and uprising of devils. One has to have experienced its development and downfall to understand how inseparably the tangible and the praeternatural are here interwoven. It was an experience that did not only rouse our anger and disgust and utter loathing. We in Austria were able to witness in amazement the wide confines within which, to the general confusion, Satan's might holds sway and can freely display its deceptive splendours. In short, we became aware that the devil and those he had possessed have power in this vale of tears to fight through to the kind of victory which was never at any time intended for the crossbearers and servants of God.

The question of guilt for the events of the very recent past must, of course, be thoroughly explored—but with what circumspection and humility! Bernanos writes in his famous novel, *The Sun of Satan*, of how the devil may tempt the saint, temptation breaking like thunderbolts into the very depths of the soul. This is not poetic exaggeration but gruesome fact. The devil pursues a man, even into his very intimacy with God, confusing, deluding, sullyng.

In these years of Apocalyptic horror and affliction, many prophecies were current. To many, Hitler appeared as the Anti-Christ, and

many, seeing the signs of the times, concluded that the end of the world was imminent. The Führer was only one of the forerunners of Anti-Christ. 'The world and its splendour' have not yet been submerged. But that eschatological point of view has lost none of its effectiveness and significance.

After the National Socialists had marched in, Austria experienced not only the lustful victory of Satan but also the wonder of the almighty 'powerlessness' of God. First of all, fostered and fomented with sweetmeats and gibes by the all-powerful Party, a notably large percentage of Catholics-by-Baptism left the Church. It was now apparent how many tares there were among the wheat, and how much one had relied on misleading figures and statistics. But the same process brought the faithful together: no longer putting their trust in any of the many organisations, institutions or funds which had hitherto been their pride and had made such claims on their energies and foresight, but now trusting only in him who said: 'Lo, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world'. And as it had become senseless to seek help or protection from the authorities and laws of the State, they now turned to those sources by which God grants help and protection: to the Sacraments by means of which his life goes on flowing into ours; to Prayer, which is the uplifting of the heart to him and the downpouring of his goodness to us. Above all to prayer, which had for so long been chiefly prayer of petition, sometimes as though intending by some magical means to make God's will conform to ours. To prayer that now in praise and thankfulness desired but to assent, child-like, to his inscrutable will. As St Paul writes: 'All things work together for good to them that love God'. The truth of this came home ever increasingly to the Church in Austria through all the bitter trials it endured.

It soon became clear that work undertaken in a spirit of renewal in the early post-war years had not been done in vain. The Viennese *Seelsorgewerk* (cure of souls), founded by Dr Canon Rudolf, the first students' chaplain in that city, was the fount from which all the striving for renewal sprang. The realisation of Pope Pius X's intention for the participation of the faithful in the liturgy and the frequent use of the Eucharist was the first goal to be aimed at. Courses of lectures, attractively produced periodicals and frequent conferences had given the parochial clergy a wide experience in teaching and training, with the full support of the leading laymen, which now bore rich fruit in due season. Active Catholics were thus, through the liturgical movement, familiar with community prayer and sacrifice and had experienced the blessed happiness of being bound together and bound to Christ himself. In the Eucharistic union with their Redeemer and Brother they had received an increase of

strength greater than they knew. In virtue of this they began to understand the meaning of suffering and how to endure it. Suffering revealed itself to them not merely as punishment and penalty, but more, as a human task, one which is an inalienable constituent and precious part of life itself. All too many had hoped, by adhering to the Church, to achieve security in their lives as men and citizens, expecting the fulfilment of that promise of long life and prosperity on earth to all who honour father and mother. Now they learned clearly that to be Christ, to be Christ-like, means that the Resurrection and the reign of glory can only come after the Passion and the Crucifixion.

In a single day all organisation and societies were abolished. People could scarcely imagine Christian life without its long-established institutions. The desire to find a substitute, and one that could function in despite of this legislation, revealed the parish as the organic centre of the religious community's life, and the four natural states of manhood, womanhood, boyhood and girlhood as the obvious organic articulations of it. Hitler often repeated: 'The old are of no interest to me. But I will go on with my struggle for the young until they all belong to me'. His wish seemed likely to be fulfilled. The youth organisations of the Third Reich had risen to a position of unbridled power. Nevertheless, at the *Glaubenstunden*, the children of Catholic parents met in the parish church. The Party and the Gestapo took steps to prevent it, but the children continued to come and received there the religious instruction they would have formerly had in school. And this new kind of instruction opened up entirely new possibilities. The word of God was no longer taught to small children and older ones as it had been in those school rooms now used for teaching of a quite God-less nature, but in the Eucharistic presence of God himself. And the man who spoke to them was no longer a mere teacher of religion who came into the class after smoking a cigarette and pacing the corridor with other teachers, but a priest, adorned with the tokens of his priestly dignity, in cassock and stole. There was from the beginning no difficulty with discipline. There was none of that concealed opposition, which had been traceable to unbelieving parents who sent their children to the religious instruction classes only out of duty to state regulations, and were often frankly hostile.

One often comes across the statement that in Germany a preponderating part of the thinking section of the population remained permanently antagonistic to National Socialism, whereas in Austria they hurled themselves bodily into the new system with loud cheers. These intellectuals are said to be responsible for the mental invasion of the Austrian people. That is in the main true. The higher officials

of every shade, doctors, notaries, lawyers, the teaching profession at all levels, for the most part sabotaged the Austrian resistance of the years 1934-38 and welcomed the *Anschluss* as the realisation of all their political and social ideals and aspirations. But now the boys and girls in the upper classes of the secondary schools and universities started coming to church in increasing numbers. They sought contact with certain chaplains and became believers, showing a practical sense and a power of devotion that would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. To how many secondary school boys and girls between 15 and 18 had it happened in former days to get up, however cold the winter night, and join their fellows long before school started in community Mass? And now it had become almost customary.

Nor is that all. The Church had been accused of reducing the care of souls, the *cura animarum*, to little more than a professional activity, a *cura taxarum*. The priest's office hours did indeed take up a very large part of the day's work. And as a rule he met his parishioners only now and then, when they had to come to him for a document of some kind. The National Socialist régime soon relieved the Austrian priests of this burden of office work. With the ebbing of the flood of birth certificates, he was more free to devote himself to the care of souls. A further bond was thus established between priest and parish.

Two decades earlier, Pope Pius XI had called the Catholics of the globe to *actio catholica*. The response he got was meagre and unsatisfactory. No one knew how to make a start with this 'new-fangled' idea. Some suspected it hid a political intention, which seemed to be connected with the altered state of affairs in Italy turned fascist. Others considered it was just one more society. Yet others thought a workers' union based on earlier organisations was being put forward as Catholic Action. It was some time before it was recognised that the Pope only wanted to challenge people to take account of a quite obvious factor in thought and life: the collaboration of the laity in the apostolate. That had already been an urgent and burning concern of the German reformation. It had indeed been recognised and defined as a doctrine, but the practical application remained to be worked out. Not only because the paucity of ordained priests made this collaboration more and more imperative, but also because the particular function of the laity in the organisation of the Church was being reconsidered and newly interpreted, the idea of Catholic Action now became practicable. The resistance the Papal idea encountered in its own ranks was now broken as a direct result of National Socialist oppression.

Very special graces are needed to describe spiritual conditions and

transformations, to speak the unspeakable and to bring deeply hidden things nearer to the light. And these remarks constitute only an inadequate attempt to do so. For hundreds of years God had spoken to Austrian Catholics in the language of peace. Since the end of the Age of Enlightenment the Church had remained secure, taken all in all, from evil-intentioned encroachments on the part of the State and lived its own life undisturbed, with open support from the State in earlier days and later in an atmosphere of neutrality, more benevolent than not. Its prayer, *ut ecclesia tua in secura tibi seruiat libertate*, had been fulfilled without ever bringing about its sanctification. It had ceased to comprehend those words about peace. And so God, who speaks to us in many different ways, spoke in the language of war and affliction. And now many have come to understand. With the help of his grace we hope that we may long keep in our hearts this manifestation of himself of which we were witness, so that we may now be truly Christian and nothing but Christian.

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ON HOLIDAY IN STYRIA

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IN Styria, or at least in a wide region around the Benedictine house of Seckau, the first week-end of August is a pilgrimage week-end to the tiny church of Maria-Schnee, in honour of the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows on August 5th, this year Bank Holiday Monday.

A truck-load of sundry Graz welfare workers—*Fürsorgerinnen* proper and *Caritas* voluntary workers and myself representing the Red Cross and C.C.R.A.—set off on the Saturday morning, made a tour of the beautiful church at Seckau, and then scattered to our various billets. Three of us were staying at a neighbouring farmhouse, the bunch of *Fürsorgerinnen* were going two-thirds of the way up the mountain that night, to sleep in a hayloft and have a shorter walk to the top at daybreak. The farmhouse where we stayed was of the indescribably attractive small-holding variety, not lovely, rather poor and cramped, but satisfactory because the people were completely satisfactory. It is a one-man show, with wife and two daughters, one of them a teacher at the village school. The household is overshadowed by the loss of both sons, always a double tragedy in a peasant's family, and news of the second death, over a year old, had only recently come through from Germany, after the reopening of postal services.

There was a small lake to bathe in and a cool, musical stream