

Commentary

PACEM IN TERRIS. The great outburst of acclamation which greeted the Pope's Easter gift to the world—to the world, not merely to the Church—showed how deeply his words had touched the hearts of men. Now that it is over the period of assimilation has begun. The tone of the encyclical, it has been noted, is one of overflowing charity and immense confidence in the men of today, in their fundamental goodness, their desire for justice and peace and their ability to achieve this by means other than war—a striking confirmation of the new trend in the Holy See's attitude to the great division of mankind, due, all are agreed, to the personality of the Pope himself. The now famous and already much quoted distinction between false philosophical teachings on the one hand and on the other the historical movements which have originated and still draw inspiration from them, the great *apertura a sinistra* of the encyclical, even if its first reference may be to continental socialism with its roots in the eighteenth century, plainly refers also to the possibility of co-operation between Catholics and Marxists in countries of the eastern bloc, co-operation and not mere co-existence. The distinction works for two reasons—the false philosophical teachings are static whereas the historical movements are in constant evolution and may be profoundly modified, and more notably still, the historical movements may contain worthy elements, elements morally validated because in line with reason and the reasonable aspirations of men. Here is the foundation for the international order the encyclical stresses and for the world authority it envisages as necessary to establish and maintain it.

Two further points may be noted in this connection. First, the encyclical goes on to give more than a hint as to how this co-operation might begin; it speaks of meetings for the attainment of a practical end and of work in common for the achievement of economic, social, cultural and political ends. But the decision whether the moment is opportune and what methods may be used rests primarily with those 'who live and work in the special sectors of human society in which these problems arise', with, that is to say, the men on the spot, granted always of course that they are guided by the teaching of the Church and the virtue of prudence. To whom does this apply? It could be argued that the Pope has in mind especially the contacts between Catholics,

non-Catholics and non-Christians in the United Nations and the other international organisations to which he has given such authoritative backing generally in the encyclical, but it has been widely accepted also as a new charter for relations between Catholics and Marxists in such socialist states as Poland and Hungary. The visits of Cardinal Koenig to the primates of these two countries, and the probable visits of Cardinals Koenig and Wyszyński to Rome have been and will be eagerly watched for signs of some new rapprochement on a practical level.

A second point to be noted—obviously nothing new in the Church's teaching—is his insistence on the personal dignity of every human being even though in the eyes of the Church he may be in error. 'In every human being there is a need that is congenital to his nature and never becomes extinguished, compelling him to break through the web of error and open his mind to the knowledge of truth.' The encyclical places this in a context of faith and unbelief, but it is perhaps one of the points at which we may be allowed to expand or explicate its teaching, whether the unbeliever in question is an anti-clerical western radical or an iron-curtain marxist. To put an extreme case, it would be absurd even if it were not intolerably patronising to expect to convert a young Russian party member immediately to Catholicism, the difference of culture for one thing is too great, but the new stirrings of Russian intellectuals, writers and artists, for example, may be, must surely be, seen as the working of that force the Pope speaks of. The poems of Yevtushenko, Solzhenitsyn's novel 'A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisov', are not criticism of Marxist Socialism in itself, only of oppressive elements in the regime, of mistakes and brutality, but though they do not evidence any lack of belief in Marxist socialism as the instrument of human progress they do introduce a new emphasis on the need of a certain individual freedom within the regime, a freedom for the development of the potentialities of the individual which seems not far removed from those basic assumptions on which the Pope's teaching rests. The encyclical is addressed to all men of good will; we should be aware of this good will in whatever form it manifests itself.