

■ *Sursum corda* ! The familiar words embody a hope that does not alter. Each day the sacrifice is offered : past mercy is remembered, present grace bestowed. And all that is done is a pledge of a glory that can only be known hereafter. Christian hope stays suspended between the poles of what has been and what is yet to be.

And hope fades, and finally fails, when either pole is distorted, so that religion becomes either a nostalgic longing for a golden age that is no more, or the expectation of a future age which will end the meaningless misery we know. But much more usual is the rejection of past and future alike: religion is *now*, and *here*, and its only intelligible terms are the human relations of our present condition. God is not *there*, or *then*, and the inheritance of the past – or the promise of the future – can only have the value of a mythical equivalent of our present need.

Within the Catholic Church the strains of the contemporary crisis of faith – and hope – are indeed reflected. And so they must be, if the Church is to realize her mission in the living world of men, at a moment of time, in a setting that marks the mortality that is hers to redeem. The dramatic changes that have so radically affected the Church's image in the world are but the external signs of a perennial truth: that a concern for the present, the capacity to change, can only serve man's deepest necessity if there is a constant point of departure, a fixed point of return.

The hope that Christ proclaims – and which the Church in her turn is to mediate to men – is grounded in more than an optimistic assumption that things are bound to improve, that reasonable good will and the right conditions will give man a measure of content. Newman's words may seem harsh but are worth remembering: 'We ought not to be sanguine about anything: the right rule is to hope nothing, to fear nothing, to expect nothing, to be prepared for everything'. And he is right to expose so sharply the distinction between a hope that is human and the hope that looks to God.

It is when religion itself assumes the categories of human hope that its very purpose ceases to be. If all that is involved is tolerance and understanding, an appreciation of the worth of human love, and if human society is the only arena in which the truths of faith – if truths there be – can be seen to exist, then the humanist is entitled to ask why need there be religion at all. Why should there be the structures and formalities of an

organized Church to express the simple givenness of being a man?

For the truth that Christ not only preaches but makes incarnate in himself is not just a truth about man: it is the truth about God. The hope that Christ offers is not only a new awareness of the worth of the humanity that he has come on earth to share: it is the means of reconciliation and return, so that the creature can come back to the creator. But not on his own terms. Man's hope is caught up in Christ, and suffering and death are the means of his redemption. Not in themselves indeed, for they are but the stages of a paschal mystery that is to achieve a final glory. But here is the very pattern of hope, transcending the categories of a human measurement merely in terms of what we will and want. Christian hope is for glory hereafter, and for grace each day: but the grace that orders man's days in serenity and love is more than the realization of his own humanity in an absence of conflict and pain. For the source of that grace is a Saviour whose own suffering and death have made all that is human an occasion of grace. Nothing any more is secular save sin.

To those who tremble a little at the prospect before them, who feel that so many of the old securities seem gone, the theological understanding of hope is needed as never before. At the pragmatic level of changes—in liturgical forms and languages, in the idiom of theology itself, in debates about moral teaching that yesterday seemed imperative but now seems everywhere to be in question—Christian hope provides the true perspective. For the needs of the present—the vision that was Pope John's in calling a Council to give to the Church and the world a new awareness of the redeeming work of Christ—are only to be met if the past and the future preserve their constant place in the hemisphere of grace. For grace is of the present—the grace of the pastoral changes that are to revivify the worship of the faithful no less than the grace of the Council's constitutions on the Church and on Ecumenism—but it grows out of a past and it looks to a time that is still to come.

There is no room, then, for dismay. And disquiet about this or that innovation, or the abandonment of some familiar feature of the Church's temporal image, must be seen in the context of a hope that is rooted in God and in his purpose for his people. Above all, the mood of criticism within the Church must be subordinated to an absolute confidence in the Holy Spirit of God. In a recent appeal to the faithful, the bishops of France have emphasized this essential foundation for any true renewal within the Church. 'Let us, with the help of God's grace, abandon all futile wrangling', they write. 'This is not the time for the spirit of criticism, but for hope! For the Holy Spirit is using the strength of all Christian people to accomplish the magnificent work of renewal to which we are all committed. He is the Spirit of strength, who enables us to undertake the task and to persevere in it with a truly supernatural courage despite all difficulties. He is the Spirit of peace who will ease our distress and

establish in us a serene and joyful trust. He is the Spirit of unity who gives vigour and cohesion to the whole Body and binds pastors and faithful together in strong bonds of respect, service and love'.

■ This will be a summer of hard work for the commissions that are preparing the texts for the fourth session of the Vatican Council. Much remains to be done on decrees such as those on the missions and on religious life, but it is Schema 13 ('The Church and the World') that presents the greatest difficulties – and it is certainly the area of the Council's work that attracts the greatest publicity. For here the hopes and fears of all men everywhere are in question, and the Council has the opportunity to express the very conscience of mankind.

The sub-commission on peace and war can hardly hope to propose more than general principles, though a forthright declaration of the right of conscientious objection could hope to influence those governments – mostly in countries of Catholic tradition – which still refuse to accord it. The brief debate at the last session of the Council, and the interventions in particular of Archbishop Beck (of Liverpool) and Bishop Hannan (of Philadelphia), showed how unlikely any agreement to a general condemnation of nuclear weapons would be. Bishop Hannan's conviction that 'we should be humble and rely greatly on military experts and the proven capacity and wisdom of our leaders' may give comfort to the Pentagon indeed, but it is less likely to console those who remember Hiroshima.

No one need suppose that the dilemma is not a real one, and bishops are as likely in practice as anyone else to inherit many of the patriotic attitudes that so easily equate national security with a moral purpose. But even though the Latin language can find expressions for the sophistries of nuclear 'knock-out' and 'second strike', the cause of peace is hardly likely to be served by using the Council to advance the casuistries of military strategy.

There is a recurring ambivalence in all moral discussions that touch the realities of war: either they attempt to work out a permissible policy in terms of the evidence the experts provide, or they concentrate on stating the absolute principles at stake and so invite the charge of refusing to face the actual facts. *The Road to Peace* (S.C.M. Press, 2s. 6d.), which is the report of last year's conference at Friedewald of the Conference on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament, reflects precisely this difficulty – which was only underlined in the recent Conference called by the Bishop of London to follow up the Friedewald discussions. At the latter meeting, the Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain (Archbishop Cardinale) expounded the teaching of *Pacem in Terris*, and was surely right to insist that what is needed above all else is the informed conscience of Christians as a serious element in the formulation of national (and hence of defensive) opinion.

If it be true that the Catholic tradition has insisted too strongly on a moral theology that can seem remote from the realities of political choice, it is equally true that the uncertainty of Liberal Protestant ethical philosophies can create casuistries of another sort. In the meantime there is an urgent need for an ever deeper awareness of the primacy of conscience and of the inviolable rights it confers. In the end the individual has a choice to make, a stand to take, and he is entitled to ask that the Church should defend his right and at least apply the unchanging moral law to the circumstances that are his.

■ There has been much discussion recently in this country of the need for a closer understanding between theology and the social sciences. Proposals have been canvassed for establishing an Institute of Religion and Society, which might provide a centre not only for sociological research but for academic teaching that would relate the study of theology to other disciplines. And it has been widely recognized that such an Institute should be ecumenically inspired from the outset. It is sufficiently evident that all Christian churches have a common concern to relate their theologies to an existing social and cultural situation: the academic study of theology can too easily be isolated from the incarnational context which it is always its business to interpret. And the specific Catholic experience gained from the admirable work of the Newman Demographic Survey – and the moral to be drawn from its closure – should help to give a concrete and pastoral emphasis to studies that might otherwise become simply further refinements of faculty cross-fertilization. It must be hoped that the Catholic seminaries and houses of theology – and in particular the ambitiously planned Jesuit university at Heythrop – will welcome any plan which, at this stage of the ecumenical movement, provides the opportunity for intellectual co-operation at a level of seriousness which ecumenical work requires unless it is to remain a mere exchange of unspecified cordialities.

■ In forthcoming issues of *New Blackfriars* a continuing series of articles will discuss the impact of the Council and its work of renewal on such matters as the liturgy, spirituality, religious life and biblical studies.