

During the unity octave this month English Catholics will have especially in mind the discussions taking place between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. It has often been said that the issue here concerns, in the end, the problem of authority. Many of those who leave the Anglican for the Roman communion say that they do so because in Rome is to be found a clear authoritative teaching; and, of course, very many more stay away from Rome for exactly the same reason.

If we think of authority as a matter of being told what to think and what to do, then it can become for us a means of avoiding personal responsibility. From this point of view, the Catholic church will be seen as a refuge for the immature. So she is and so she should be. We are all immature in some respects and we are much more likely to mature if we can find a refuge to do it in; this, after all, is how children grow up. The church is the refuge of sinners, it is meant for the intellectually timid and dishonest, the self-deceivers as well as the adulterers, swindlers and murderers. The point is not whether the church welcomes the immature and protects them from the intolerable strain of pretending to be grown up, but whether she keeps them that way: whether her exercise of authority is such as to fixate her children in infantile attitudes. For authority exists to help us to grow; not so that we may become isolated autonomous individuals but so that the community we form may become more and more a free community of love. Authority does not exist merely to help the immature; in the sense of the relevance of the whole community to any one of its members it is integral to the Catholic concept of the adult Christian life. My faith cannot be just my own, it must be a sharing into the faith of the whole church; my hope is not concerned with my private destiny but with the coming of the kingdom.

If we see authority merely as a therapy for the immature, then a man may wield it because he is an expert or simply because he is willing to take responsibility: but if we see it as the presence of the whole community to one of its members then a man can wield it only if he represents and speaks for that community. It is the Catholic belief that the college of bishops does, in virtue of the sacrament of order, represent and speak for the whole people of God.

If there is, as Cardinal Heenan tells us, a crisis of authority in the church in England, it is because those who wield authority are not, in any ordinary visible way, representative of their people. This did not matter much so long as authority appeared mainly in its therapeutic aspect; so long as bishops could be seen as supplying clear consistent answers to other people's problems. That era came to an

end, perhaps providentially, with the debate about contraception. After all the delays and discussions and back-stairs bargaining it is hardly likely that any pronouncement by Pope or bishops could be received as a simple directive. It will be authoritative, but in some much less mechanical sense. There is a crisis because it is not easy to replace the broken image of therapeutic authority by one of representative authority. We believe that our bishops represent sacramentally the people of God, but at the Council there seemed so wide a gap between our hierarchy and that of the rest of Europe and now back home there seems such a gap in style of thinking between the bishops and their people that the sacrament of order seems to be like the eucharist used to be in the worst days of liturgical decadence: a valid sacramental sign, of course, but not one that could be seen by men for what it is.

Perhaps the setting up of diocesan synods of priests and of parochial councils of laity may help to establish the kind of communication between hierarchy and people that will reform and renew the sacrament of order – though the experience of the Church of England suggests that this will not be an automatic result. When we have achieved this renewal, perhaps in the next generation, we may be able to share with our Anglican brethren our rediscovery of what we do and do not mean by authority.

H.Mc.C.



CAMBRIDGE

Events and their Afterlife

The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante

A. C. CHARITY

Dr Charity considers the treatment of historical events as symbolic of other (usually later) events, in relation to the Bible and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He shows the importance of this way of looking at history to Biblical and theological study and to medieval literature and art generally.

60s. net

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS