

and theological speculations, we cannot know them. If there was geometry, its traces are lost in the earth it sought to measure. We cannot assert that there were these things, but just as certainly we cannot say there were not. We have some idea of what was lost to us in the great fire at the library of Alexandria; we can have no idea of much else from the past that is lost. We know that we have only a few plays by Aeschylus preserved; by a fluke, we could have been denied those we have. We know that Homer composed in an oral bardic tradition; how many other epics have there been that have perished for ever? In recent years, archaeologists have replaced earlier suppositions about the builders of Stonehenge (Druids, simple farmers, etc.) with new suppositions about sophisticated astronomical observation; these latest speculations pay the builders of Stonehenge the compliment of regarding them as sons of Adam rather than as primitive men, but all speculation about the distant past is tied to the random physical traces that are left, and work on such a basis can give us at best an uncertain and a hopelessly incomplete picture.

We have no solid basis for supposing that men in the distant past were stupid, unimaginative and brutish, no reason beyond our own inferences from tiny pieces of evidence and from lack of evidence. If we look at the tangible evidence from the past we possess with humility instead of with contempt, Adam reappears, walking with God in a garden: we cannot know much about him with certainty, but we can reasonably suppose that this first human being was a full human being, and that the narrow arrogance of modern western culture is yet another passing show. Immensity is no longer frightening if the first human being is recognised, over however great a distance, as father and brother.

## **The Papacy and the Historian VIII: The Perennial Papacy?**

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In the preceding papers I have looked at the papacy historically, from the borderland of history and theology, but historically none the less—and socially. I have tried to relate developments in the papacy to certain features in the social structure of the day. I have passed a good deal by. I have said little about the Reformation, what I did say was by way of a criticism of Calvinist notions of Catholicity, a criti-

cism made on theological grounds. I have said nothing about Luther because it seems to me that Luther's phenomenal achievement of turning the Bible back from a rather quaint law book, which is what the canonists had made it, into the source of a personal encounter, which is what it was meant for, has been absorbed as much as it ever will be into the general Christian mainstream. Outside his capacity as a supreme master of the art of reading Scripture Luther seems to me to have been a disaster. His theology of Church order, if one can call it that, led from one Babylonish captivity to another: his social and political teaching were ruined by his need to creep to the German princes, his protectors. He was after all Philip of Hesse's paid pander. But most important, the Reformation has only indirect lessons to teach for the student of papalism. If the Reformation was not simply a theological movement but a social movement too, an important stage in the development of a revolutionary capitalist society, then, if I am right, the papacy's contribution to this movement of revolution had largely been made. In the event the papacy did little in the Reformation period except to serve as a symbol, a rallying cry.

The Reformation was a time when the papacy had things done to it. Not only by Protestants but also by its own supporters. It is individuals and parties that matter. The famous Tridentine renewal of the Roman version of Catholicity, and the Counter-Reformation that turned that renewal from conciliar decrees into social reality, owed little to the papacy as such. It was men like More, Contarini, Caraffa, Ignatius Loyola and so on who did it. By the end of the sixteenth century the papacy was largely the resolution of their debates and tensions. I get the impression no one thought very much or very deeply about the role of the pope in the Church. The Catholics were stuck with him, accepting him more or less gladly. (The weight of the emphasis Ignatius Loyola and his Jesuits gave to blind obedience to the papacy is significant here. Acceptance is something to be prescribed for the Jesuits where for Gregory the Great and his generation it was something to be taken for granted.) But no one thought very deeply about the papal office and its relation to tradition. Nor for that matter, did anyone think very deeply about tradition. Both sides accepted a static, normative, Church that had certainly existed in apostolic times in perfect working order. They merely disagreed about what it was.

This can be well illustrated by the famous case of the 'Tridentine' liturgy. The Latin Mass people have made us acquainted *ad nauseam* with the papal claim to have created an incorrigible liturgy. But, of course, that claim is pure heresy. If one pope could bind his successors he is more of a pope than they are. Every pope is equidistant from Christ whose vicar he is and St Peter whose successor he is. Only Christ can bind the ages, only Peter can be the Rock: every pope derives his authority from them and no pope can claim more authority than any other pope. It follows that no pope can bind his successors: whatever its other merits—and a decent English prose style is not one

of them—the vernacular liturgy has shown the infallibility of the Church in action: even papal heresy has been expunged from the body of tradition.

It may well be that some kind of Christian Marxist exploration of the Reformation will reveal the papacy in a negative rôle acting as a brake on the unfolding of the consequences of Capitalism for good or ill: but that kind of study is in its infancy. It seems to me that certain contradictions in contemporary Marxism will have to be resolved first.

The strength of Marxist explanation as it has usually been done is its profound and sophisticated exploration of the concept of freedom. We have learnt, I think, that liberties are not things one is given by a freedom loving authority, but things one takes and earns by earnest thought and action. Unless we first realise that freedom is indeed the recognition of necessity, so that no situation offers an infinite selection of possibilities but only one or two possible courses of action, and that even these can only usually be undertaken in concert with others, then we cannot arrive at the obverse of the *dictum*, that freedom is creative activity. Marx has taught us that no one is wholly free, that all thought and action are contaminated (in the classical scholars sense of the word) by the action and reaction of the solitary person and the social group, of person upon person and group upon group. We no longer study forms of government as though governments were composed of free persons choosing freely this policy or that according to merit. We know that all government is confined within social structures, that a dominant group or groups impose, for the most part, limitations on what their government must do or may not do. We can apply this kind of wisdom to the form of government known as the papacy and come out with perfectly sensible answers to perfectly relevant questions. We can see that the concept of the papacy as form of government is largely adventitious, explained by the social structures that wanted that kind of papacy, but that by pressing criteria like these there is an element in the papacy not accountable as a form of government at all.

Secondarily when we think of Marxist explanations we think of Marx's analysis of social structures into competing, and/or warring classes. The resultants of these tensions conform to laws, whether we call them social or historical laws seems to be a matter of taste, and once Marx adumbrated them they serve as the basis of predictions. By their aid we can understand why our world is in crisis and the only way out that necessity permits. Inevitably Marxists have concentrated their attention on the times of revolution, which they correctly identify with times when the deepest habits of thought and feeling are subject to scrutiny and radical change, and naturally enough most of them have concentrated on the creation, development, and crisis of Capitalism. This presents problems for someone studying an institution like the papacy—I shall leave aside for a moment the force of 'like' here. Some of these problems are not of the kind that arise when sense cannot be made of the papacy: it is easy enough to make sense

of the papacy by strictly traditional methods of scholarly study. They are rather problems about the adequacy of Marxist explanations of some social phenomena in pre-capitalist societies in general.

A Marxism derived wholly from the study of capitalist society is inadequate on two main grounds. Marxism without the power of prediction from one kind of society to another is not real Marxism at all. The apex of Marx's thought is the account of the necessity for a qualitative change from one kind of society, capitalist, to another kind, i.e. socialist, society. But if Marx's kind of thinking is valid, then his analysis cannot be relative to one kind of society only. If it is not to be one more epiphenomenon of Capitalist culture—an anti-capitalist non-Marxist could produce some powerful arguments on those lines—then his predictions that Capitalism can and should be negated by Socialism have at least a family resemblance with kinds of explanation about how earlier forms of society have been similarly negated by qualitatively different forms. It seems to me that very little Marxist writing takes seriously even, how Marxist doctrines work out in the convenient test beds offered by pre-capitalist societies.

In an earlier paper I pointed to a number of developments in early medieval theology and spiritual feeling, notably the origins of devotion to the crucifix, and sought to relate them to the social structure of the day and the pressures some social groups—I mean monks—put on those structures. Some East German Marxist scholars have offered a different and depressingly *a priori* explanation. These developments were the Church manipulating the exploited class: an ideology to maximise social conformity and minimise social discontent. I said *a priori* because this is the 'Religion is the opium of the people' syndrome (a dictum, incidentally, that derives originally from the Revd Charles Kingsley, not Karl Marx). In fact the new theology and the new sensibility that went with it were not directed to the lower classes: the peasantry was probably still three-quarters pagan: in England for instance the covering of the country with parishes seems to be post-Viking, and until that was done the peasantry cannot have been touched very deeply by Christian things. No, these things were directed towards the ruling-class, in which because of the nature of the social structure and the very small number of very great men, the 'conversion' of the individual could produce remarkable results. This set of theological developments were irritants, not palliatives, socially subversive, not reactionary. On the other hand the study of the revolutionary changes that ended the classical world and created the medieval world—I don't think it helps much to call it feudal—has been profoundly affected by Marxist scholarship. But the new teaching does not fit very easily into the old-fashioned and schematic kind of Marxist theory of pre-capitalist society still largely unrevised even for modern and sophisticated Marxists.

It seems to me that a study of pre-Capitalist society suggests some reserve about some conventional Marxist approaches to cultural history, especially about the application of the notion of revolution.

It is easy to talk as though the whole of history is, or ought to be, in a state of permanent revolution. It does violence to language not to see that times of authentic revolution, such as 1789 or 1918—and not 1688 or 1848—when the old ways fall apart never to be restored are not, cannot, nor should be the normal condition of life. It is the political equivalent of seeing an ideal society as consisting of one orgasm after another. That a socialist society needs to guard against bureaucratic sclerosis, needs constant vigilance and, if necessary, strong action, goes without saying. But to call this living in a state of permanent revolution is merely verbal diarrhoea. This sort of Marxism leads especially to the reduction of all cultural activity to propaganda for or against the revolution, the sort of thing represented by Lukacs's book on the historical novel. Here we are invited to see Walter Scott as a progressive and creative artist because he is supposed to have taught succeeding generations a new historical consciousness. Lukacs scarcely seems to recognise the complexity revealed by the empirical study of the rise of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century. That consciousness was often reactionary in its social effects and in any case Scott contributed little towards it. To present the opinions of early Victorian Scotland tricked out in fancy dress is not what I call creating a historical consciousness.

Now Marxism can often open a whole new approach to works of art—Klingender's studies in the aesthetics of the Industrial Revolution seems to me a case in point. But not every work of art, novel or poem or whatever, is eligible for illuminating comment from Marxists qua Marxists. Christians have learnt painfully that they do not have to have a Christian view about everything and this seems to me no less true of Marxism. To have nothing to say about the Venetian painters of the high renaissance except what can be got from a study of their accounts does no service to Marxism or anything else. In my particular context to have to say something about the medieval papacy in a Marxist sense and to come up with meaningless platitudes about the feudal Church is to make noises not sense. What is needed is a non-reductionist Marxism that recognises that not everything can be explained in terms of a class war or an approaching revolution. It would need to recognise the non-relative element in social life expressed so forcibly by Vico: 'We observe that all nations, barbarous as well as civilised, though separately founded because remote from each other in time and space, keeps these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead. And in no nation, however savage and crude, are any human actions performed with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity than the rites of religion, marriage, and burial'. It is in this sphere that the essentials of the history of the people of God are located: to say this in no way invalidates the insights of Marxist critics where they are relevant.

The whole conception of a new chosen people, a new Israel, a new creation, has important affinities with the Marxist notion of a proletariat. In both cases membership is not something automatic, but

depends on the interpretation of experience leading to a social consciousness that illuminates future experience. Both are first divisive, separating those who see from those who do not : those with a true consciousness from those with a false consciousness. But both are secondly unifying turning their members from a collection of individuals into social groups with some idea of where they are going, with a common will, and the power that inheres in social groups based on something more than common self-interest. If both are within their limits, creators of true consciousness they need not be identical but they cannot be antagonistic and their differences will be differences of emphasis. This, I take it, is the sort of line so brilliantly explored by Denys Turner in his article in *New Blackfriars* (June 1975). Where they legitimately differ is that the proletariat are necessarily mainly concerned with ending Capitalism and creating Socialism. Their thought and action are directed to making what claims to be an absolute into something merely relative, showing the transience of Capitalism as part of the process of getting rid of it. The new creation, on the contrary, is turned to the constants of social life, 'Birth, copulation, and death'.

No good purpose is served by confusing these two tasks; a Christian Marxist has to live with both types of consciousness, and this seems to me to demand no more than a properly developed sense of relevance. In a well-known essay Dr F. R. Leavis dealt with two very fine examples of the irrelevant approach, a Marxist and a Freudian interpretation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Dr Leavis had no difficulty in showing how much there is in *Pilgrim's Progress* that the Marxist critic in particular can neither admit nor account for. *Pilgrim's Progress* belong very emphatically to the world of birth, copulation, and death. Of the opposite kind of irrelevance one could cite *Rerum Novarum* and the constitution of the Irish Republic. The papacy makes sense only within the consciousness created by the New Israel. To seek to understand it as a form of government, as a means of ruling a state within a state, is to commit precisely this kind of irrelevance. In the consciousness of the proletariat the papacy has no place, makes no sense, is wholly without function. It was the false consciousness, false in both the mind of the New Israel and the understanding of the proletariat, known as political Augustinianism that created the distorted papacy of the high middle ages, and made the papacy look like a form of government. These theological cum political theories are dead now beyond recall, though they have left a kind of afterglow for the kind of Catholic that wants a Pope to prescribe a moral life for him, like a doctor prescribes medicine for measles. But what is involved in restoring the papacy to its place in the consciousness of the new people of God?

The first question is : is it genuinely a perennial institution? and we cannot answer this without also touching on what sort of functions it ought to fulfil—and on what sort of functions it ought not to fulfil. A people of God is a primitive, untidy, comparatively formless—at any rate in the bureaucratic sense—sort of notion : much less easy to think



than the superstate of the political Augustinians. A people develops, outgrows some things having relied on them for years, discards, adds new things when necessary. Consequently it is possible to ask, what to the Catholics of a past generation would seem an unaskable question, do we still need the papacy? All the attempts to weld the papacy to the Church by appeal to justifications outside the experience of the people of God I have suggested fail. We can justify Simon bar Jonah's conversion to the Rock on which the New Israel was to be built on Scriptural grounds but we cannot do the same with any theory of his succession. I have suggested that at least as many Roman as Scriptural assumptions lie behind the equation of the Petrine Office with the episcopal succession at Rome. I have also pointed out that that equation survived the fall of traditional Rome and that the survival was fully justified by the purposes of the people of God it served. I have suggested—very summarily because this is a very new area of scholarly enquiry—that the same equation also made a contribution to the transition from the feudal world to the beginning of a bureaucratic, rationally organised, more impersonal, form of social organisation that cannot have hindered and probably helped the accumulation of capital necessary to the bourgeois revolution, and at the same time helped to influence secular governments in a more bureaucratic direction, so that political society was much readier for capitalist forms of government than would otherwise have been the case. (If this point seems trivial let us recall the contribution to the worst aspects of Stalinist government made by the fact that the Bolsheviks took over a half-feudal, absolutist, government machine.) But granted that equation has served very well is it perennial?

The obvious parallel is the question of the ordination of women. The Church has set its face against this for as long as the bishop of Rome has been identified as the successor of Peter. But it is obvious that precedent is no longer a guide. The social position of women made the notion of a woman priest incredible, but the social position of women now makes it perfectly credible. It is still possible to argue that something in the important psychological differences between men and women still inhibits the Church from ordaining women. But this rather points to the paternalistic impedimenta surrounding the priesthood, and even quite old-fashioned parish priests seem to find this more and more of an embarrassment. I do not know what the Church will decide and I do not greatly care one way or another, but I know that I think within a generation we shall have ordained women. The very fact that such a question can be raised (and if it is answered as I have suggested it will be the point is all the stronger) must prompt a new scrutiny of old certainties, and the papacy cannot escape.

To put the question against the example of the ordination of women is to see the difference immediately. The papacy as the succession to the Rock owes much to contingent circumstances. But an institution that has endured the experience of three of the four epochs into which Marxists divide history up to the present is not open to the

kind of criticism that makes it possible to contemplate the reversal of the Church's policy on ordination. Some of the things it has done in the past it is unlikely to have to do in the future but some seem likely to endure. John XXIII did not say, like Chairman Mao, let a thousand flowers bloom, but in the Church, unlike China, they actually did. Plainly the old monolithic Church is gone for ever. Tension between groups, private enterprise leading to a new and different groups, division within the Church, is almost certainly going to increase if the Church is not to disappear when the present generation of those broken into Catholic parochial life die off. What the New Israel requires because it is physically a scattered people is a source of recognition. This it seems to me is the perennial function of the papacy and one that cannot be discarded so long as the New Israel exists. Someone one can point to and say that to be in communion with him is the normal criterion for recognising a fellow member of the people of God seems to me essential. This carries with it a certain right and duty in the source of recognition to judge who is and who is not an authentic part of the New Israel. If we think in the primitive terms the concept of a chosen people invites us to think in, instead of the sophisticated legal and bureaucratic terms the medieval canonists twisted this necessity into, the pope is a kind of witch-doctor cum referee. Like the witch-doctor in some tribes at any rate he has the power to legitimate. The more the Church produces new groups and new tensions between them the more important it is that (where they cannot be shown to be un-Catholic) they should be legitimated and accepted at least to that extent by their opponents. In an individual example I despise and reject most of what Mr John Biggs-Davison says he stands for; if I stood next to him at mass I certainly wouldn't kiss him, but I would not, could not, deny he was a Catholic so long as that is what he claimed he was and that claim was not denied. What seems likely to lie ahead of us are rather more socialised forms of the same experience.

Equally this kind of legitimation serves another perennial purpose. When there is any important change in the experience of the new creation and their social arrangements change accordingly then, as with any change, some individuals fortuitously benefit and others suffer. The question of merit does not arise but the experience of the people of God does require such change and the point of a legitimating authority is to cope with the kind of problem that results—without it there would be no need for legitimation at all. Legitimation is successful when the losing party accepts the new arrangements, and thus unquestioned authority is as necessary as sympathy and understanding for this success. Legitimation implies some kind of judgement, something that can easily be made to look like a High Court judge in action and is nothing of the sort. The legitimating authority has to adjudicate sometimes, has to decide when to accord and when to withdraw legitimation. Without this kind of activity sectarianism and a rash of Orange orders seems the likely fate of the Church. But such activity is not judicial. There are few statutes to which appeal



can be made because in this kind of situation there is nothing generally recognised as statute law, or at least not very much. The legitimating authority, the power conferring recognition, has to behave much more like a referee of a game in progress, but one of which he has to make the rules up very largely as he goes along. The only kind of authority in the Church that can make this credible is one with the traditional habit of authority behind it.

It seems to me that this kind of authority must be exercised by a single man at any one time. A committee would inevitably disagree and the source of recognition become completely obscured. The committee could not perform the function. In the late middle ages many earnest scholars and thinkers thought that matters might be improved if the pope of the day were subject to a general council. Some people think this conciliarism a solution for our own times (Francis Oakley's *Council over Pope* is a good statement of this point of view) but this is a point where the consciousness of the New Israel and the proletariat overlap. A council can only be called and freely attended if the political authorities in the countries where Catholics live find what is likely to be done unobjectionable. Would the Brazilian government let Helder Camarra attend a council with condemnations of capitalism on the agenda? Would General Pinochet allow Chilean bishops, even as pliant as his present lot seem to be, attend a council in which military takeovers as illegitimate authorities were under discussion? If the pope showed himself a little less friendly to the view of the Church as the Common Market at prayer, would the member governments of the Common Market be keen to host such a council? It is not inconceivable that at some point the papacy should dispose of its shares in the European Iron and Steel community in ways very obnoxious to that institution. What would happen if a council were called to authorise such a transaction? It seems to me that the conciliarists were wrong in the high middle ages, that this is a lesson we ought to learn, and that if we are to have a source of recognition and legitimation it has to be something in recognisable connexion with the traditional papacy. But let us remember that means a family resemblance between the functions of the papacy at various times not complete identity.

But must the successor of Peter also be bishop of Rome? Père Benoît has argued he need not be. If my version of papalism and tradition is accepted this view must be rejected. The pope's connexion with Peter arose precisely because the Church equated Peter with Rome. It is certainly a contingent fact with nothing necessary about it. But, as I should have thought the Avignon experiment showed, it is precisely the capacity of the papacy to be obviously the source of recognition that is endangered if traditions of this sort are interfered with. The Avignon schism lasted much longer than it need have done because the removal of the papal curia from Rome made it so difficult to see which was the pope when dispute arose, and dispute arose precisely because authentic popes had abandoned Rome in practice if not in theory. In any case Rome works: not a major power centre,

inhabited by people neither very white nor counting as coloured, and without any tradition of racialism; geographically as convenient as anywhere. But let us simply speculate on where the papacy, if moved, would be likely to fetch up. It seems to me moreover that the sort of reform of the papal election machinery sometimes proposed is also misplaced. The college of cardinals is quite incorrigible and will one day have to be abolished. No kind of conciliar-type election will work in its place for precisely the same reason that you cannot entrust the power of recognition to a council. Since the pope is the bishop of Rome and likely to remain so why not make him more Roman? Make him act as bishop—the Roman diocese is small enough—first and pope second. Obviously the papal office cannot be exercised for a few minutes after supper. The structure of the Church of Rome—in the municipal sense—must differ from that of other dioceses, and the pope of the day will need helpers who ought to be reasonably representative of the various groups that compose the Church of the day—not the nationalities as at present. Why should not the cathedral chapter of Rome be the proper electing body for the Roman see? The college of cardinals was only created because the eleventh-century reformers could control that but not the chapter. That chapter, like the college of cardinals, might well contain distinguished men from outside Rome. But let them live in Rome and work there and let there be a sufficient element of local Roman clergy to make it clear that the chapter is a chapter and not a purged college of cardinals. It would be important to prevent this chapter from acquiring the kind of prestige the cardinals get, and perhaps this might be achieved by allowing them to serve only for a limited time and sending them back to positions of complete obscurity afterwards.

But these problems will solve themselves if the Church gets the papacy in perspective. There have been nearly three hundred popes and almost all of them have done nothing in particular and done it reasonably well. This is as it should be. The papacy is for the performance of vital but routine and mundane tasks. When it does them properly and retires into the background the people of God can get on with what the Holy Spirit wants them to do, which is after all, what they and it are there for.