

THE BENIGHTED CHURCH

By P. G. WALSH

IN A RECENT supplement of *The Way* devoted to St Ignatius's concept of the Kingdom,¹ Fr Peter Hebblethwaite made a trenchant distinction between 'Kingdom' jesuits and *ad Amorem* jesuits. The K-man, whose central credo is the Kingdom-exercise of Ignatius, envisages his life as an unremitting struggle with an alien world. He lives out a regimental life within the bastion of the Church, intent on the repulse of the demonic forces without. His criteria of success in the defence of the city of God are 'a great increase in communions' and 'heavy work in the box'. The liturgy he enjoys is of the splendid and traditional kind. By contrast, the aA jesuit seeks his inspiration from Ignatius's *Contemplatio ad amorem*. For him the world is a gathering of fellow-travellers with whom he seeks to be open and to engage in dialogue, and from whom he obtains insights into reality which he does not gain from institutional christians. He prefers the kind of informal liturgy which arises naturally from immediate concerns. In the realm of personal responsibility, he tends to assert a civilian's conscience against the soldierly K-man's trumpet-call of authority. The sting of Fr Hebblethwaite's article comes in the tail, where he bids his comrades abandon the fantasy that they combine the best of both worlds, as K/aA men *par excellence*; the alternatives are exclusive.

This division between Ks and aAs runs much wider than the circumscribed province of the english jesuits, and the issues involved here are central to the sufferings of the benighted Church. Temperamentally, I find myself nodding at Fr Hebblethwaite's observations, knowing all too well the infuriating traits of the jesuit (or secular priest, or layman) he criticizes. Yet intellectually one must recognize that the nature of christian commitment is too complex for the either-or conclusion. This complexity is reflected in the position of Ignatius himself, the author of both the K-document and the aA-document. It would be unfair to put Fr Hebblethwaite's article out of court by baldly asserting that what is good enough for St Ignatius should be good enough for his disciples, and that Ignatius is clearly

¹ *Supplement to the Way*, 18 (Spring, 1973), pp 64-75.

K/aA. But what has to be maintained is the priority of K. It would be optimistic to claim that those who seek K first have aA added unto them, but the ideal aA christian has already got a load of K.

I hope that this is more than a debating-point. These K and aA labels are in fact close to the more familiar descriptive terms 'vertical' and 'horizontal'. In an ideal christian world the two not merely complement but also interact on each other. The difficulty is keeping the two in equipoise. Before Vatican II the Church was demonstrably too Kingdom-centred. We now have to pose the question whether, in our concern to preach the theology of the world, we are putting the Kingdom too far from sight. It is certainly worrying to witness the mass abstention of our youth from explicit forms of christian commitment. In our universities, for example, catholic societies attract little support, and in some cases are being wound up; 'catholic' is a word to be spoken softly. It looks very much as if the great twentieth-century heresy of secular christianity is coming home to roost.² It may be that if the young see no distinctive sign, no beckoning beacon, we have been undercutting or ignoring the supernatural and mystical elements – and this at a time when sensitive persons are most alive to 'the sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused'; at any rate, a surprising number are looking for these elements elsewhere.

The fact is that in the phenomenon of christian conversion (and cradle christians have also to be converted, or remain immature believers), the K-vision is overwhelmingly more important. The transcendent God, the risen Christ, the kingdom that has no end: *once a commitment to these is taken for granted* we can open our eyes more generously to the positive cultural values, as to the needs, of the wider world. In this sense we applaud men like the jesuit Matteo Ricci for setting the unique claims of christianity within the cultural frame of sixteenth-century China, or a contemporary like the benedictine Bede Griffiths for seeking a similar accommodation with the religious values of India. Such men would be the last to devalue the efficacy of christian sacraments or to delimit Christ's revelation to all men, though people of narrower vision may fail to comprehend this.³

² On the heresy, see E. L. Mascall, *The Secularisation of Christianity* (London, 1965).

³ Vincent Cronin's fine study, *The Wise Man from the West* (London, 1955), shows how the missionaries who came after Ricci preached the Kingdom in more simplistic terms, and by denying to traditional chinese wisdom the status of a *praeparatio evangelica* destroyed the bridges which Ricci so laboriously built. Fr Bede Griffiths' Ricci-like vision is under attack as I write this (*The Tablet*, London, 7 July, 1973).

Some christians, however, seem to find religious fulfilment solely in the vertical relationship. Having attained the truth by reason and faith, they see no need to come to terms with the thought of the world, or even to serve it. Evelyn Waugh comes to mind as a striking example of this cast of mind, a man totally certain of his *patria* in heaven, and contemptuous of the waste land of the world. (Admittedly there may have been something here of the affected misanthropy of the professional satirist; paradoxically this mask of contempt was the means by which he served the world.) Are we to condemn this vertical vision as a one-legged christianity?⁴

The problem is particularly complex because the western christian tradition from the outset demanded the renunciation of the world. Tertullian was the archetypal K-man – *quid Athenae Ierusalem?* and so on.⁵ St Jerome was ravaged with the subconscious fear of being condemned as a ciceronian instead of a christian.⁶ Listen to another fourth-century K-man, Paulinus of Nola, describing how God extracted the christians from a shipwreck, and allowed the rest to drown:

The malevolent jews and those guilty of arrogant schism alike perished, but all those signed with the orthodox faith of Christ were recognized by life as her own. Death had no power to consign christians to the ranks of the dead, because glistening on their foreheads was the sign before which death falls in subjection.⁷

Paulinus feels ashamed at being caught out quoting Terence or Virgil, and virtually the only occasion when he makes some concession to the temporal order is when the barbarians are spilling across the northern frontier.⁸ Even Augustine, whose wide-ranging intellect achieves greater balance on theological and pastoral problems, thrives within the cocoon of the closed christian community; and the *City of God* is a K-man's text if ever there was one.⁹

This monstrous taxi-ride through ecclesiastical history could be extended indefinitely to make the same point. But enough has been said to formulate some obvious observations:

⁴ See Fr Thomas E. Clarke's thoughtful article, 'Holiness and Justice in Tension', in *The Way* (July, 1973), pp 184-190.

⁵ *Praescr.* 7, *Apol.* 46. What about his contemporaries Justin Martyr and Irenaeus as good K/aA candidates?

⁶ *Ep.* 22, 30.

⁷ *Carm.* 24, 127ff (PL 61, 617ff).

⁸ *Ep.* 7, 3; 22, 3 (PL 61, 181 and 255); *Carm.* 21, 1ff (PL 61, 571ff).

⁹ See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 1967), especially chs 22 and 25.

1. Though the Church has always been an amalgam of K-christians, aA christians, and christians occupying all manner of intermediate positions, most of those who are recommended to us as models of heroic witness have been or have become overwhelmingly K.
2. These K-men have made vital contributions in their day to the mission of the Church. We may sigh at the narrow vision of a Tertullian, yet we have to recognize that in an age of proliferating gnostic sects his uncompromising attitude clarified the uniqueness of the christian claims. Jerome the cranky polemicist could hardly have grappled so heroically with hebrew and failing eyesight without the K-vision which riveted him to his scriptural studies and which impatiently rejected all the business of the secular world.
3. Temperament, training, experience, the *zeitgeist* determine the particular mixture of an individual's commitment. An american K-jesuit (are there any left?), if assigned to a university chaplaincy, will almost certainly mellow into aA, whereas a social worker converted to catholicism in a hostile environment like Sweden's might well stiffen towards K.

It is particularly important for those of us who have become aA to grant a place in the christian sun to the K-people. One-legged christians they may be in the glare of the Vatican II searchlight, and it is distressing in this day and age to see men and women whose kappa-quotient makes them so critical or suspicious of the world that they cease to exercise any influence in it. Yet within the believing community as a whole, they may provide a salutary counterpoise to those who have plunged so enthusiastically into secular concerns that christian commitment and supernatural vision have all but reached vanishing-point. The mean or equipoise between the pull of the vertical and the pull of the horizontal, the tension implicit in the phrase 'christian humanism', must be the balanced position recommended to both extremes as the point of reconciliation to which they should aspire.

II

The editor's suggested brief for an article to be entitled 'The Benighted Church' sounds for all the world like the K-man's *cri de coeur*: 'There are many today who feel that a good deal of the glory and much of the strength has gone out of the Church – that it

is comparatively a desolate place; they do not feel at home any more'.

It would be an interesting exercise in religious sociology to analyse the proportion of british catholics who feel this way, and to classify them according to age, sex, social class and religious provenance. It would be easy to do this for the more militant elements who form the membership of groups like *Una Voce* and the Latin Mass Society; what would be useful would be to ascertain how wide this feeling extends beyond them.

My impression is that very few of the anguished protests have come from the backbone of the Church in Britain, the working-class cradle-catholics. Yet most of us over the age of forty were reared as K-christians, and we look back with a nostalgia compounded with horror at the distinguishing marks which then set us apart from the world, at the signs glistening on our foreheads. In my native Lancashire town, our parish used to process once a year through the public streets; and to the enthusiastic accompaniment of the Barnoldswick Brass Band, the Church and Oswaldtwistle Co-operative Band, and sundry other wind-exponents, we would bemuse the onlookers with messages of this kind:

Arm for deadly fight. Earth and hell unite,
And swear in lasting bonds to bind us.
Raise the cross on high. Jesus is our cry.
With Jesus still the foe shall find us!

or again

Arm, arm for the struggle approaches,
Prepare for the combat of life.
St George be our watchword in battle,
St George be our strength in the strife!

We were so busy flourishing our boxing-gloves that we were happily oblivious of where much of the good fight was being fought. We knew little, for example, of the heroism of the Salvation Army in Skid Row, and there were scholastic discussions on the morality of putting a penny in one of their collection-boxes. As a community we were ninety-nine per cent vertical in our christianity. The Latin mass. The devotions which we now call para-liturgical – Benediction, Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Holy Hour. Retreats. Regular confession. Fasting from midnight. Friday abstinence. Giving up beer for Lent.

These were the things we stood for when we sang 'Faith of our Fathers'; these were the signs by which outsiders hazily knew us, together with one or two other distinguishing marks. Our passionate allegiance to Rome – in those processions we also sang proudly of 'The golden roof, the marble walls, the Vatican's majestic halls': what a gulf between that and the young catholics protesting at the modest cost of the new Bristol cathedral! Our catholic education. And our larger families, with the proper means of calling a halt to them. It was clearly an unworthy and inadequate christianity, though two things have to be said in qualification. We were an impoverished and uneducated community, and there is much substance in the view that one has to take out before one can put in; we were not ready to serve the wider world. Secondly, as the chrysalis of an educated catholic community began to form, there were many who had anticipated Vatican II's pronouncements on the christian in the world. We were already K/aA. So though we are nostalgic at times (for example, in Holy Week where so much has been lost), we are not distressed. We acknowledge that something has been lost, but know that a great deal more has been gained. And we are sanguine about our losses, partly because many of the forms of our K-observance were so unsatisfying.

As the indians, so the chiefs. By and large the hierarchies of England and Wales and of Scotland have emerged from this background, and have reflected its interests and concerns. Our rather rude K-vision was also theirs, and this has been a factor of considerable psychological significance in the turmoil and squabbling of the past few years.

For all the time there has been another kind of catholic church in Britain, tiny by comparison with our legions of 'poor, reckless, rude, lowborn, untaught', but influential beyond its numerical strength. Many of this group have been in constant torment since Vatican II. Some belong to the ranks of the minor gentry, representatives of whom stud the membership-list of that strange conglomerate, the Catholic Union of Great Britain. Many are middle-class converts from anglicanism. Some are figures of account in the circles of literature, art and learning, who have given the Church in Britain a touch of sorely-needed intellectual respectability. What appeared to us as our rather unworthy, over-vertical religion had a different facet from their different vantage-point. We seemed to put first things first, to present a clear and comprehensible platonist-christian vision of the world, backed by a divinely-constituted authority

which was the guarantor of our necessary beliefs and code of living. They were attracted above all by the stability and order, the discipline and asceticism which many had glimpsed over the garden wall. If many of us are K/aA, many of them are aA/K. With a tradition of service to the community and an assured presence in the world, they found it wanting.

There they were, a tight, well-drilled community jogging along the familiar course, keeping the faith. But the style of the journey has suddenly changed, and the distinctive marks effaced. Even the appearance of their spiritual mentors seems transformed. Those ascetic mandarin-figures, so detached from and so much wiser than the world, are edged out by jesuits and dominicans resembling nothing so much as mountain-goats, or worse still, training their mutton-chops with sellotape.

It is not difficult to isolate the main areas of pain, nor to diagnose the causes. They centre chiefly round the changes in the liturgy, of which the loss of the Tridentine Mass is the harshest grievance. The ham-handed handling of this issue precisely reflected the hierarchy's ignorance of the psychology of this group. It was one thing to recommend the new form as the more authentic and logically-structured representation of the earliest liturgy of the eucharist, and quite another to outlaw the rite which for so many nobly embodied the elements of mystery and order. There was no compelling reason why the tridentine rite should not have been allowed to continue until the revised latin missal was well established and gradually replaced the old.

The truth is that most of our bishops and priests experienced no harsh sense of deprivation at the virtual disappearance of the ritual and music which had exercised such a strong appeal to a section of our community. Here are the reflexions of Robert Speaight on attending a Gregorian Latin Mass celebrated and sung as part of the Aldeburgh Festival in the parish church at Orford by a visiting priest and choir from Kiedrich in Germany.

When Eric Gill first heard *Deus in adiutorium meum intende* in the Abbey of Mont César, he felt as if the gates of Paradise were opening to him. One felt the same thing at Orford; and the packed congregation of devout anglicans or reverent agnostics must have consoled themselves in the illusion that, in spite of what they read in the newspapers, the Church of Rome stood where it once stood. My own reflexions were very different. I realized that if ever Orford parish church were to fall within the jurisdiction of a catholic hierarchy, the splendour at

which we had assisted would be tolerated – if it were tolerated at all – as an antiquarian curiosity. We take our cue obediently from the century of the man' . . .¹⁰

The word 'splendour' in that final sentence is revealing, but beyond this the disappearance of the Tridentine Mass has entailed two other deprivations of which the traditionalists repeatedly complain – the loss of *mystery* and the loss of *order* in worship. The loss of mystery is clearly associated with the change from latin to the vernacular. Those of us who have roots in the lower stratum of british society know very well the substantial development in participation in community worship which the change has brought; we smile indulgently when our higher-born friends tell us of the many who loved the latin without ever knowing a word of it. For there may be an element here of *fabula de eis ipsis narratur* – it is a striking thing that some of those who cried most harrowingly for the retention of latin could not tell an accusative from an ablative. Their relative ignorance of the latin is in fact precisely the point of attraction. Those who read latin well don't much mind the mass in english – provided it is english, which is not always the case with those responsorial psalms – for in either case the experience is similar; they know exactly what is being said. But the enthusiasts less practised in latin find in its texture a distancing element, almost a romanticizing element which keeps God at his properly remote distance; they believe that the familiar address of the vernacular trivializes him. The argument is similar which defends gothic vestments, candles and incense, the symbolism of which itself underlines God's transcendence; and I must confess that when I attended the liturgy of the marvellous jesuit community at Yale a few years ago, and saw them concelebrating in shirt-sleeves, I thought the argument had its point.

Other troubled tridentinists do know latin well, and for them a developing consolation will be at hand in the new latin rite, provided that the bishops are sufficiently convinced that latin in the liturgy must be preserved. Though I know of stern critics of the latinity and rhythms of some of the new prayers, the criticisms seem to me hypersensitive, and induced by a reaction to what is unfamiliar. Where there is cause for legitimate grumbling is in the excision of some of the most inspiring meditational hymns: for example some great Sequences. What kind of mentality consigns the *Dies Irae*, for

¹⁰ *The Tablet* (London, 14 July, 1973).

example, to the dust of transient works of piety? This fruit of almost a thousand years' meditation on the scriptural admonitions of the final judgment has inspired translators as diverse as Goethe, Sir Walter Scott and Lord Hailsham, and has wrung tears from Dr Johnson. There is a fight to be fought on such issues as this, and it is good to see the Association for Latin in the Liturgy (led by the indefatigable Dr R. H. Richens of Cambridge University) prodding the hierarchy of England and Wales so constructively in matters of this kind. The case for the regular use of the vernacular in parishes is overwhelming; the case for the celebration of latin masses once on Sundays and holy-days in cathedrals, university chaplaincies and the like is equally strong. Seminary teachers will have something to answer for if emergent priests have neither equipment nor inclination to say a latin mass; ultimately the strength of christian orthodoxy will be the strength of our attachment to our biblical and patristic roots.

Some of those who feel that the glory has gone out of the Church are not inclined to blame the vernacular alone. It is the apparent anarchy and formlessness which offends them more. Both the low and the high mass of the tridentine rite had evolved superbly orchestrated patterns of positioning and movement which reflected a sense of order and decorum. This kind of lament may win little response from those of us who attend the liturgy in our local churches with our children, and who rarely attain the pitch of serenity induced by the stately movement of celebrant, altar-servers and choir. I suspect that those who present this particular argument are persons of leisure without distracting family appendages; and we must concede that the passing of the tridentine rite has imposed aesthetic affliction which will soften only as the revised rubrics attain their own measured dignity.

Outside the central act of the liturgy are other sensitive areas. Changes in our devotional practice are facilitating ecumenical progress while leaving many of those who changed their religious affiliation under the influence of our old practices high and dry. Lesser emphasis, for example, is now being placed on the doctrine of the real presence. The virtual disappearance of Benediction means that the poetic meditations on the eucharist as the path to salvation, and on the eucharistic mystery as the focus of the Trinity, have faded from view. Again, the abolition of fasting from midnight was regretted by many. It was a form of rudimentary asceticism which impinged on our neighbours as a recognizable sign, the

streets on early sunday mornings being aired 'only by catholics and dogs'. This reverent expectancy of reception of the eucharist we shared with the Orthodox churches; I have heard archbishop Anthony Bloom regret this change, which severs a link of devotional practice between eastern and western christians.

Another question likely to be contentious is that of auricular confession. The value of regular private confession is far from clear to younger people, and their attitude is tacitly encouraged by numbers of the clergy. How far the new penitential rite will supplant the present custom with a communal ceremony remains obscure. One hopes, however, that the old will be allowed to coexist with the new; the experience of a single generation should not be the pretext for the disappearance of a further distinguishing mark. It should be remembered that auricular confession is a practice embedded not only in our modern devotional life but also in our literary culture. Every thoughtful reader of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or of Bérout's *Tristan* apprehends its penitential and its therapeutic aspects.

III

What comfort and counsel can be given to those whose religious lives seem drab and empty as a result of the changes? First, to stress that liturgy is only the means and not the end of religious piety. Music and ordered ceremony are not indispensable for the right disposition of the heart and mind, which a christian can have in a deserts or in the prison of Boethius's *Consolation*, where God *regit fortiter suaviterque disponit*.¹¹ Second, to urge longanimity: it was inevitable that the Council should be followed by absence of settled order. Third, to support those constructive groups in the Church like the Association for Latin in the Liturgy, which are working hard to retain or to restore all that has proven value and relevance in the traditional liturgy of the western church.

¹¹ Boethius, *Consolation*, 3, 12; cf Wis 8, 1.