

Christian Faith and the Janus-Headed European: Observations on Modern Trends in East and West

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Introduction

The contribution of a Catholic theologian from the West is inevitably going to be different from contributions based on direct experience of the battle with Marxist state power, which are historical testimonies to the struggles, sufferings and thoughts of Christians over the past four and a half decades. This will be a personal reflection — both philosophical and theological — based on the situation of people and society in Central and Eastern Europe today and on the challenge this situation presents to Christians and to the church. It will also be necessary to add a few, rather briefer, observations on modern trends in the West, because the current revolution has to involve a new encounter between the Christians and peoples of Eastern and Central Europe and those of the West, where the church situation is of course quite different.

I refer in the title to ‘the Janus-headed European’ in order to suggest that ambivalence which is characteristic of the current situation in East and West. I talk about ‘observations on modern trends in East and West’ because we are here dealing with such a complex and fluid problem that it hardly seems possible to offer anything more. An additional problem is the fact that scientific evaluation of these human and social problems has scarcely begun.

My analysis is divided into two main sections. The first deals with modern trends in the East. The first of two sub-sections attempts to describe the current problems which are facing the nations of Eastern and Central Europe. The second sub-section reflects on the Christian faith and the church as it faces this challenge.

The second main section adds a few observations on modern trends in the West, as well as on the challenge these pose to the Christian faith and the church. This short second section also points to dangers which lie ahead here and clarifies the issues which should be kept in

mind when considering the development of the churches in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Observations on Modern Trends in the East

The Current Problems of the Nations of Eastern and Central Europe

The radical changes currently under way in Eastern and Central Europe, from Ukraine and the Russian Republic to Magdeburg, from Riga, Kaunas and Vilnius to Sofia, should not be seen merely as a process of political change. We are rather dealing with a process affecting politics, society and the economy — in short, all aspects of life. In this sense it could easily be called the greatest cultural revolution in recent European history.

When we describe it as a process of cultural transformation, we are of course proceeding from a modern understanding of culture. Since the Enlightenment the *'status culturae'* has always been contrasted with man's *'status naturae'*. T. S. Eliot — continuing a 19th-century tradition of thinking about culture — defined culture as 'the whole way of life of a people, from birth to the grave, from morning to night and even in sleep'. This whole way of life is constantly being supplied by history, but from time to time is expressed anew in a striking and creative way during great historical upheavals. Culture as a 'whole way of life' always includes three distinct but connected elements. Firstly, the culture of a nation is always the *social order* of that nation: how its members live together and how they are accustomed to behave. In addition each culture is just as much a public expression of an *ethos*. Each culture at its deepest springs from people's self-fulfilment and equally articulates in a specific way people's ethical obligations, the standards which they acknowledge. Finally, culture is always — in all its forms — the expression and *meaning of life*. The meaning of man's existence on earth is expressed through culture accordingly as it is discovered and confirmed by a given society or people.

A tension always exists between a given culture and the Gospel. This entails both a difference and a relationship. The Christian faith supplies man with an identity coming from God — through salvation in Jesus Christ — which puts man at a basic distance from culture in all its manifestations — as social order, ethos and the meaning of life. Culture becomes a relatively finite aspect of existence, shaped by sinful constructions as much by human authenticity.

Taking this concept of culture as a starting-point, how should the current upheaval in Eastern and Central Europe be interpreted?

Schematising the recent cultural history of the Russian empire — cultural history in the broadest sense — one could call the period from Peter the Great to the October Revolution the first great experiment designed to produce a modern way of life. This was a massive undertaking, aimed at changing the face of Russia from above by government action and at changing this empire into a significant partner for the modern powers of the time. For all its great achievements in the field of literature and music — to name just two facets of culture — this era leads more or less directly from the rapid spread of serfdom in the 18th century to the great social self-doubt which characterised the beginning of this century and resulted in the October Revolution of 1917.

Now in 1990 we are at the end of the second great experiment in building a modern way of life for the peoples of Russia. Undeniably there were at first outbreaks of burning enthusiasm — I am thinking here of poems from 1919 and 1920-21 — but soon an icy frost descended. The great Russian poet Osip Mandel'shtam spoke in 1930 of 'the century of the wolf'. Why? Because here a comprehensive cultural system based on pseudo-scientific theories was imposed by force. It was a culture whose ethos was characterised by partiality and partisanship. It was a culture whose inner meaning was based on a materialistic view of man. Against this system, this ethos and this meaning nothing could hold out — neither the real historical differences between the peoples of the Soviet Union nor their different cultural or religious traditions, let alone the intrinsic value and rights of the individual, the family or social groups.

There are two reasons why Marxism-Leninism has withered and died as a social system for the Soviet Union. In the course of the last few decades international cooperation amongst nations has shown that this system has such fundamental weaknesses and serious limitations that it cannot survive when confronted with the social systems of other modern nations. It should be noted here that any great culture, as the way of life of a particular society, represents both the means of overcoming the future and the means whereby that society asserts its identity over and against that of neighbouring nations.

Another lesson concerns relations amongst individuals, groups and nations in this multi-ethnic state. This system is not compatible with their most elementary needs, with their demand for a reasonable system of public and social life and for an ethos which reflects their fundamental feeling for justice and their desire for meaning in life. The Marxist understanding of the world and of society, as a guideline to the meaning of human life and death, does not satisfy this desire.

The situation of the nations of Central Europe differs considerably from that of the nations of the Soviet Union. In the 19th century they did in fact follow the same path towards modernisation as the Western European nations, enjoyed a short period between the two world wars when they were able to develop greater independence, and then as a result of the Second World War were subjected more or less brutally to the dictates of the Soviet Union during the latter's second, communist, drive towards modernisation.

The following observations refer particularly to the situation in the Soviet Union. Occasional references will be made to the situation in other European countries.

What sort of problems now face the peoples of the Soviet Union? It is a question of generating a new, modern way of life, a new comprehensive social order, of establishing a new ethos and articulating a new understanding of the meaning of life.

First of all, the question of the social order. For the first time in recent history the peoples of the Soviet Union face the task of establishing for themselves a new political and social order. Up until now orders have been imposed on them. Now for the first time they are being called upon to grow into the role of modern nations; and, as historical subjects, they must now create for themselves their own social order or, on a higher level, their own political system. Whether they will succeed in doing so is at the moment a completely open question. It is an extraordinarily difficult task. What do the peoples of Russia bring to this decisive task? A uniquely broad history of suffering, a deep historical consciousness of their identity — despite an imposed Marxist-Leninist way of life — and an upsurge of national feeling. It is remarkably difficult to estimate the level of real consciousness of freedom among the population at large. What is clear, however, is that there is a lack of practical experience in building up a social and political order based on freedom and law, and that no corresponding theoretical reflection or discussion is going on. A glance at the development of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe shows how laborious the process of learning how to build such a social and political order in fact is. Germany's laborious path towards a sort of constitutional monarchy, the precarious situation of the law-governed state and of democracy in the Weimar era due to an inadequate sense of social responsibility, the return to barbarism under National Socialism, finally the establishment of the Federal Republic: Germany's example shows how thorny such a path is.

The experience of trying to set up democracies in Latin America, for example, and the lack of a real understanding of democracy in those societies demonstrates the difficulty of solving such problems successfully even under today's conditions.

Here the question of relations between nations in the current political situation must be raised. States and nations in today's Europe can no longer preserve their character on their own, but only in supranational groupings.

I would characterise the second major problem of order within a culture as the setting up of a free economic system: establishing a partnership between producers, the market and consumers, in interrelations which transcend national boundaries, while at the same time not only guaranteeing the liberation of creative forces, but also ensuring that all those taking part in the economic process fulfil their social duties. Complicated readjustments are necessary in modern economic life to protect the basic principles of human value, freedom, responsibility, equality of opportunity and social justice. It is even more difficult to realise these politically in the face of a cartel of united interests.

Current difficulties in transforming East Germany or Poland show that deficient experience and lack of a developed theory generate additional obstacles. The distorted modern economic systems which undoubtedly now exist in different countries, with their remarkable hybrids of liberal economic concepts and quasi-feudal structures, illuminate the dangers the Russian peoples face in their current task.

Even more problematic than the development of an appropriate social order is the formation of a new ethos. Contemporary Russian literature shows how difficult this process is. Men and women have been declared not competent in educational institutions and at the workplace, and the authorities have taken away from them the responsibility for making important decisions affecting their lives, such as choice of higher education or profession. Individual responsibility and a commitment to others in solidarity have thus been stunted; and so has the realisation that the community must work for the good of its individual members and does not simply represent an end in itself. The ethos of human rights is not common to all citizens, and it does not put its stamp on everyday life and its institutions.

Happily, it is clear that the various peoples of Russia have heralds of this forthcoming ethos in the shape of their great poets. One striking feature is the extent to which they have been treating the ecological problem as an ethical one, although there has been less treatment from an ethical point of view of the question of how the various nationalities are to live together. Just as rare, it seems, are attempts to develop an ethos of work or of economic activity. This is understandable, because attention here is focussed on the argument with the institutions of state and party power. A further difficulty in developing a modern form of ethos seems to lie in the fact that the churches, because of their past record, are not acknowledged as a

source of moral authority. We will go into this a little further in the next section.

Let us turn now to the question of developing a new explanation of the meaning of life. The mendacity and unreality of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the meaning of life is clearly to be seen in so-called Socialist Realism and in the reaction of modern art against this glorification of a healthy world of workers which ignores guilt and atonement, sorrow and death, the deepest human hopes and longings. But the question nevertheless arises as to the direction in which this new interpretation of life is leading. On what foundations is it built? What were its formative influences? It is noticeable how strongly certain leading ideas from the 19th century are now making themselves evident again, in literature for example: the worship of Mother Earth; a certain mystique of Slavdom; a mystique of the soul of the Russian nation; also a mystique of the Christian tradition as it has been expounded in a widespread belief in science, one of the legacies of Marxism-Leninism to the peoples of Russia. This involves the myth that society and human relationships can be created and shaped at will. For most of the population, this understanding of the meaning of life is not linked with militant atheism, although it is linked with a type of positivist agnosticism.

The Christian Faith and the Churches in the Light of this Challenge

The following reflections can offer no more than general observations. The author is conscious that these statements need to be modified to suit different concrete situations, because the churches in Eastern Europe have very different characters, the moral authority they exert varies in importance, their histories over the last half century have been very different, and the various churches have had very different patterns of identification with each individual nation. On the other hand the situation as a whole is so clear that one is quite justified in making a series of general statements.

A first general observation concerns the changed role of the church in society. In a comprehensive piece of research entitled *Fünf Jahre Religions- und Kirchenpolitik unter Gorbatschow*, Paul Roth shows convincingly that it is only since 1988 that a perceptible change has been visible in the relation between the Soviet State and the various churches. Until that time it was possible to speak only of a greater or lesser degree of persecution of churches and believers, or at least of repression.

In a situation of persecution and oppression the Christian faith — with its central dogmas of God as Creator and Saviour who in Jesus

Christ, crucified and raised from the dead, justifies men — offers the individual the opportunity to assert his identity at a fundamental level, in that it allows him to take up a clear position against the public lie presented as ideology, and against violations of human rights. In such a situation the community of believers — the church — clearly becomes the sacrament of healing for society, even though this may involve much sacrifice. To the extent that it openly confesses faith in its Lord is it already, *ipso facto*, a public symbol of opposition. Its moral authority is weakened only when it allows itself in one way or another to be led into serving the ruling policy and becomes an instrument of the dictatorship of the regime and party.

Because of fundamental opposition between the faith of the church and the public ruling ideology, secondary aspects of church life, such as its system of law and order, its living historical traditions and the form of its theology are of little relevance in a situation of persecution and oppression.

As persecution abates and there is a gradual move towards freedom of expression, however, the situation of the church changes considerably. In such situations substantial difficulties very often arise. The situation of the Spanish church after the Franco era provides a typical example, as do the difficulties experienced by the Latin American church after extended periods of military dictatorship. How, then, can we characterise the changed situation in Eastern Europe today?

Alongside the church, the community of believers, other groups and institutions are springing up which have directly political, social, scientific, artistic and social goals: citizens' associations, new parties, national movements, trade unions, scientific and artistic associations. New publications are starting to appear. Social life is suddenly becoming more colourful and diverse, more pluralistic. Now that the community of believers, the church, is no longer *the* visible symbol of a genuine social order, it is the minority aspect of the church which has become more evident.

A second aspect of the changed situation in Eastern Europe is that there is now public discussion and argument about the correct way forward. In the past, everything was bound up with the rejection of an intolerable regime; but now the question is how to restructure social, political and cultural life. The question of what the next step should be takes on a new significance in the light of this new agenda. The focus of attention shifts. New people come forward and new talents are needed. The great characters who were towering symbols of resistance in the past perhaps lose their authority. The same goes for the small groups of dissidents. They often do not possess precisely those political, administrative and scientific skills and knowledge which are

now needed in this time of upheaval in order to plan what practical steps must be taken. New elites are thus being formed.

What is the task of the church, as the community of believers, in this situation? If the church wishes to bear witness to the faith in this situation — the eschatological, vital faith in Divine salvation in Jesus Christ — it must not withdraw from public life nor simply issue direct or indirect instructions. It can do justice to its task only by showing itself to be the protector and mediator of the Spirit of God in this turbulent, complex situation. On the subject of church authority I would like to refer to the words of Dante, who at the end of the Middle Ages and on the threshold of the modern world assigned to the secular powers, to the emperor and the nobility, the task of bringing universal practical reason to realisation, but to the Pope and the bishops the *paternitas spiritualis*. If, then, the church is called on at a time of upheaval like this to be the sacrament of the Spirit for a society in the process of reshaping itself, what does this mean in practical terms?

To answer this question we must go back to the three elements which are integral parts of culture as the whole way of life of a people: order, ethos and meaning — that is, the historical, concrete form of the church which enables it, within a given culture, to be the accessible, visible sacrament of salvation. What cultural form is the church to take within a given culture? The cultural form of the church is to be understood as the incarnation, and final revelation within history, of the Spirit, without which the church cannot authentically bear witness to or mediate God's constant work of salvation in history. It is a question of the face of the church, which John XXIII wished to clear of wrinkles and blemishes through the deliberations and reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Let us begin with the question of order in the churches. The question of order touches naturally on universal church law as it exists in the Catholic Church. But equally it touches on the legal orders which individual national churches adopt. 'Order' is concerned with what kind of relationship there is between bishop, priest and community, with how 'open' or 'closed' a church is, with authoritarianism, traditionalism and even with the spirit of renovation which can express itself within the context of order.

At this current time of upheaval the church has a considerably enlarged room for manoeuvre in which to tackle the task of articulating its own life anew. It cannot therefore avoid the question of what form its own order is going to take. In this kind of situation there is always a great danger of simply trying to restore the *status quo ante*. This was quite clearly the case with the German bishops directly after the end of the Nazi dictatorship, partly motivated as they

doubtless were by a shortsighted glorification of the past. What is absolutely necessary is a critical assessment of the real prospects for the future. When a new order is to be established in a church, the fundamental question must not be how to return to old familiar forms. The question must rather be how to set up a church order which will enable the church to become the sacrament of the Spirit in a society which is moving towards a new level of real freedom. The church cannot be such a sacrament if its internal organisational structure does not require Christians to be mature and responsible, if it does not demand initiative, openness and a sense of responsibility on the part of the faithful. Here I am not making a simplistic plea for the democratisation of the church. I am making a plea for the independent development of forms of respect, responsibility and maturity which proceed from the Christian spirit and which are rooted in Christian tradition. They must become part of the life of parishes today, if this faith is indeed to be valid as a faith for modern society.

The system of order prevailing within a given church, and the way it operates, have a considerable influence on the way church communities judge major political and social developments in the spirit of the Gospel. The quality of this kind of spiritual judgement ought to have a significant influence on whether new forms of social life succeed or fail, on whether they are healthy or deformed. One must constantly be asking oneself, for example, what would have become of the Weimar Republic if the German churches, both Protestant and Catholic, had had a different attitude to democracy. And to take a contemporary example, I might cite the attitude of the Polish Primate's Commission for Social Affairs, which this year issued a statement seriously questioning the bases of democracy — freedom and equality — and openly supporting Catholic integralism, as the Polish church had done in the years between the two world wars.

An extraordinarily difficult question in this connection is the problem of the national identification of the churches. In the past few decades the task has obviously fallen to the churches in a special way of being the guardian of the cultural and historical identity of their peoples. This is not without problems, as demonstrated by the conflict about the language of the liturgy — for example in Belorussia between Polish or Belorussian — or over the return of churches, as in Ukraine. Even more urgent, however, is the question of how the church can work to imbue this resurgent nationalism with the spirit of openness which is essential for peaceful coexistence between nations and for building those supranational links between various nations which are so vital today. Clearly, ecumenical dialogue must be taken seriously by the churches in the first place because they are responsible for the

unity and credibility of the Gospel and, in the second place, for the sake of the social and political effects of such a dialogue.

Let me now raise one final point on the question of order within the church. It is intimately connected with the task of constructing a new economic and social order. The churches have traditionally had a very close connection with the peasant and artisan order. In the course of their long history they have developed a range of liturgical forms in the context of which this traditional way of life has been integrated with the churches, and has found in them a frame of reference. The relation of the church to the modern economic world, to the market economy, to the social problems of work, to workers and trade unions has developed only very slowly and with great difficulty. The character of these relationships varies a lot from church to church. It is well known, for example, that the large gatherings of the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin and Puebla distanced themselves almost completely from modern science and technology and spoke critically about it. How are the churches in Eastern and Central Europe going to proceed? It is vital that they maintain close contact with economists and trade unionists working to solve these problems and with different groups coming forward with new ideas. Intensive theological and ethical study are also needed.

Let us now move on to consider the question of ethos in the church. This question might appear strange to some. I follow Aristotle in understanding 'ethos' as the prevailing public system of morals, the moral system as it exists in reality, which is to be distinguished from the 'ethics' of the *theoria ethike*. Ethos as a system is not simply identical with doctrine. Even within the church the two things are to be distinguished. The parishes and the churches have a distinct ethos through which they articulate and give concrete form to the great moral principles, such as the dual command to love God and your neighbour. This ethos is also manifested in the customs of Christian families and parishes as well as in general Christian exhortation. It finds its expression in the rules and spiritual systems of certain communities within the church. The ethos is also apparent in one's expectations about the scale of values a priest or a good Christian will have.

What sort of ethos characterises the churches in Eastern and Central Europe? It is hard to give an answer. Judging by the testimony of literature, and taking into account historical probability, it is predominantly a pre-modern, peasant-artisan ethos with a scale of values typical of traditional societies. It is somewhat easier to characterise the challenges which are now presenting themselves to the churches. Without question, society is calling for the articulation of a modern ethos of human rights. Human rights are, on the one hand,

rights which can be established at law. At the same time they are the expression of an autonomous moral ethos. This is an ethos which challenges individuals and groups, and also nations and whole countries, to act creatively and to be prepared to take responsibility. It is an ethos which in a radical way respects the freedoms of others and incorporates them in a system of rights. Unlike the highly determined, traditional ethos which clearly defines the role of the individual and of groups as well as of the whole of society in its many forms through custom and tradition, it is a highly indeterminate ethos. It is an ethos which significantly alters the position of those persons and institutions which exercise autonomy in society. In this ethos of indeterminate freedom authority, of whatever sort, justifies itself precisely through service of the general good, which is essentially measured by the yardstick of freedom. The peoples of Eastern and Central Europe are struggling to achieve a moral basis for public life. One aspect of this is the 'solidarity' impulse. It is only in the aspiration towards solidarity that all members of society will find appropriate opportunities to integrate themselves into society as independent beings and to achieve self-realisation in the course of recognising their own interests. The ethos of human rights is to a great extent characterised by individual achievement and by competition: individuals and groups have to use the freedom available to them to achieve a standard of living worthy of human beings. In such circumstances, the protection offered by established systems or inherited privileges declines in importance.

The hazards of a public ethos of this kind are obvious. A society characterised by this kind of ethos can relatively easily degenerate into permissiveness, acquisitiveness and consumerism and produce superficiality and immaturity at both the personal and the social level. Why? Because individuals as well as social groups use their freedom properly only when within this indeterminate ethos of human rights they develop an ethos of their own which is considerably more precise. When they fail to do so the ethos of human rights breaks down. Marriage, family life, the education of young people: none of these can be properly managed solely with the help of the human rights ethos. This is where the churches have a considerable and difficult task. They must nurture in the parishes a precise form of the Christian ethos which will serve as yeast and salt within the public ethos of human rights.

The church is here faced with a challenge which has not previously existed in this form. In previous centuries church ethos and public ethos coincided to a considerable extent. In the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries the Roman Catholic Church in particular produced insular subcultures within modern society. This was possible because the public pluralism conveyed through the mass media

reached young people only after their religious socialisation had taken place, i.e. as adults. The situation is different today in so far as modern mass media expose young people to the public ethos of a plurality of possible world views and alternative lifestyles earlier, in the middle of the religious socialisation process. The question of personal conversion, the development within contemporary society of an individual way of life imbued with the Christian faith, and the formation of a corresponding common ethos at parish level: all this presents a completely new challenge. Moreover, contemporary man expects of this particularly Christian ethos that it will provide a firm basis for a successful personal and community life.

On the other hand, however, it is certain that when a real Christian ethos is developed — that is to say, a Christian ethos which is the vehicle for fulfilment of the human longing for freedom and not a restriction on it — the Christian faith and the church will have the opportunity to influence the development of this emerging new society in a truly spiritual and fruitful way.

Let us now turn to the question of the meaning of life as interpreted by Christian faith and the church. Our point of reference here is of course the testimony of Jesus Christ who was crucified and who ascended into Heaven. Let us look more closely at the problem: how do people go about seeking the meaning of life, and what form does the quest take amongst leading influential figures in Central and Eastern Europe today?

All human activity implicitly involves an instinctive attempt to give meaning to life. Why is this? Because all human activity, every act of existence is a movement from the present, with all its familiar features, into a future about which one can know very little. As Ludwig Wittgenstein so aptly declared: 'We cannot predict future events on the basis of present events.' There are of course many different bridges into the future: the firm expectation that the sun will rise tomorrow; the natural sciences with their systems and laws; technical data and statistics. All these mean that future events are to a certain extent predictable; but they are all no more than approximations. Even the greatest thinkers recognise this limitation on what can be known. The recognition that the future cannot be known also helped to overcome Marxism-Leninism, which is ostensibly founded on scientific certainty. The future cannot simply be planned, or taken for granted. It does not run along a predetermined course, nor does it run according to dialectical laws.

Whenever he thinks and acts, then, man takes a step into uncharted territory, and his whole life consists in risking the future. He nevertheless has a general feeling of confidence that the risk is worth taking. And it is in the way that an individual responds to the

challenge presented to him by existence that he simultaneously answers questions about the meaning of this life.

When one looks at the great novels of modern Russian literature it strikes one that there has been a considerable change from the profound portrayal of life in the second half of the last century. In Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* the reading of the Raising of Lazarus from St John's Gospel gives Raskol'nikov, a modern citizen of St Petersburg, an insight into the fragility of modern psychology and justice. However, the key scene in Chingiz Aitmatov's novel *The Place of the Skull* has a completely different character. This novel too is largely about modern man's entanglement in guilt. Here too the meaning of life is discovered in Jesus Christ. But this Jesus of Nazareth says to Pilate: 'It is not I, who have only the distance across the city to Golgotha left to live, who will return, resurrected; it is you, the human race, who will come again to live in Christ. . . In other words, I will return to myself in men, through my suffering. . . That is why I was born on earth, to serve as an eternal example to men.' When one comprehends the message of the novel in abstract terms, Jesus Christ now appears as the perfect ideal to strive for, an ideal striven for continuously throughout history — but in vain. Kant formulated the new concept philosophically. Imperfection gives rise to suffering for the sake of truth and justice. In a finite world there is the will to achieve perfection. There is also continued failure within time, which brings everything to an end. The horizon of the meaning of life is, significantly, the finite nature of time. And it is precisely in holding firm to goodness, in spite of fact that one does so in vain, that the meaning of life lies. It is not by chance that Avdy Kallistratov is expelled from seminary, nor that he describes himself as belonging to a 'new church'. One frequently comes across examples of this kind. Characteristic here is the concluding passage of Valentin Rasputin's short story *The Fire*: 'He [Ivan Yegorov] saw himself from a distance: a little man walking over the spring earth, having lost his way and despairing of ever finding his home, and soon he would be on the other side of the wood and would disappear forever. The land was silent, either greeting him, or seeing him on his way.'

What challenge faces the church and the faithful? In the face of the danger of resignation which follows from this interpretation of the ultimate meaning of life, Christians are called upon not simply to reject this interpretation, but to demonstrate with credibility how real hope grows out of the cross of Christ; to demonstrate that participation in the sufferings of Jesus Christ and in the complete act of his death brings with it redemption, reconciliation and eternal life, since God has already redeemed the world through the cross of Christ. Faith in reconciliation and justification must be the firm basis for

shaping existence in this finite world and for making continuing reconciliation possible. Questions arise: how is it possible to live a life like this, based on faith, hope and redemption? How can preaching and liturgy help with the transmission of this faith? Above all, what form should pastoral and parish life take so that this Christian interpretation of the meaning of life can be authentically realised in a free society? These questions are difficult to answer. At the very least, everyone involved needs to be very familiar with the living and working conditions of people today, with social relationships and with the tendencies at work in society. What is also required is that a new culture of prayer, Scripture reading and religious discussion be developed in families, groups and parishes.

Finally, I would like to make one or two remarks about modern trends in the West and the challenge of faith to the church in the West. This seems to me to be vital if the people of Central and Eastern Europe are going to have a clear idea of the dangers besetting modern society and be in a position to recognise the difficulties and limitations which affect church life here.

*Observations on Modern Trends in the West
and their Challenge to the Christian Faith and the Churches*

The German sociologist Franz Xaver Kaufmann has argued plausibly that from the middle of the 1960s in Germany and the other western industrial countries there has been a kind of cultural revolution which has overthrown all previously valid social relations. Kaufmann's thesis is that, in contrast with the forms of production, the market and public and social life, until the mid-1960s the cultural forms of private and family life largely followed the old, traditional patterns. An indicator which confirms this thesis is the fact that up to the mid-1960s approximately 65 per cent of the Catholic population of West Germany — evenly spread through all age groups — attended Mass every Sunday. With the student protests at the end of the 1960s and the great expansion in the visual media, there began a phase of exploration of new cultural forms in individual and family life, and the relations between the sexes altered fundamentally. There was a fundamental re-examination of attitudes to marriage and family. Young couples tried new forms of living together. There were all kinds of experiments. In the course of the past two decades there has definitely been a process of consolidation. Various ways of life have proved to be unrealistic. As a whole, though, western society today is characterised by a considerably larger number of models of individual and family life. Everyone is convinced that one should seek one's own

style in complete freedom. People rarely realise that they are often slavishly following worn-out clichés and common consumerist habits.

This change has gone along with a loosening of links with the church, especially among young people. Two other processes are also at work. Firstly, people are realising that they are involved to an increasing extent in an anonymous modern system — through their education, through their work and various organisational forms of public and private life. Integration into the system requires a high level of discipline without moral demands. To take one example: each worker in a modern industry is so expensive and his products of such high value that accurate work and a high level of discipline are vital, otherwise the firm risks financial damage. However, this high level of discipline demanded of workers in the modern production process, as well as in service industries, is simply integral to the system. No appeal is made to the deeper ethical aspects of the human personality.

The second process at work is that social integration — integration into human society — is increasingly taking second place to integration into the system. Children see schools now primarily as places designed to encourage achievement. The classroom is no longer primarily a class community designed to educate the child as an individual personality and as a social being. The whole organisation of western society is such that it is no longer easy, within the family circle, to integrate the different individuals which make up that family. Young people have their programmes for their free time as well as for education and training; adults have their own work patterns; and these taken together with the different roles each person has to play combine to make integrated family life exceedingly difficult. The most important conclusions which emerge from this situation and which pose the most serious problem for society are the following.

Many people, especially among the young, find it exceedingly hard to discover their own identity. This process, with all its associated problems and anxieties, is so difficult because inadequate social integration gives rise to a lack of those close and intense personal relationships which allow young people — through identification with people they accept as role models — to adopt a scale of values and thus to secure their own identity.

It is in this area that we see the greatest challenges to the community of the faithful, to the church today. At the same time, though, it is clear that the church is perceived largely as a system, as a bureaucratic institution, and not as a living, social community in which personality is formed, and the faith passed on, by means of personal contacts. It is here that the crisis in transmitting the faith to the younger generation has its roots.

After the Second World War, the church in West Germany tried to build up a closed social subculture, continuing the pattern established during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Catholic associations and Catholic youth groups were re-established. People were to a certain extent protected from the rest of society. An insulated church of this kind is no longer possible today. Church subcultures have been broken up and have become obsolete. Over the last few decades the churches in Western Europe have experienced a tightening-up of central control and an enormous increase in bureaucratic structures. Because of this it has become increasingly difficult for the church in western countries to pass on the faith in a living way.

I am convinced that only a radical rethink and a reorganisation of church work will provide a solution. Effective change will take place only in so far as the church grows from the initiative of the faithful, from the base upwards, and is not simply ruled and regimented from the top. The churches in Central and Eastern Europe need to give careful study to these one-sided developments in the churches of the West.

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