THE CRUCIFIED WORLD

By HUGH KAY

To be is to suffer. In the mere fact of human limitation, diversity and complexity there is always an element of punishment: the struggle to make a constant and effective distinction between pluralism and fragmentation. Only the divine simplicity is beyond it. To be limited and yet to have a hunger, a certain capacity, for the limitless is to live on the rack. To struggle in the temporal order for organic unity, the stitching up of diversity into patterns, is the essence of human toil: a toil constantly illumined and often transformed by the zest of the hunt for truth and the joy of a kind of discovery, yet none the less a pilgrimage through a dusty desert. To know one's power of love depends on one's freedom and proneness *not* to love is the ultimate basis of all human insecurity. At the heart of the human predicament is the basic theological question: how can a sheer and perfect God conceive of limitation, much less give it life? To think such thoughts is to panic, and at the end of the day all one can say is that knowledge of the ultimate truth must be grounded in unknowing: that our natural posture is to be prostrate with the bewildered and frightened Christ.

As for the person, so for society, crucified to a historical dialectic. Social unity is discovered at the price of personal survival. Personality is restored to its throne, only to lapse into an individualism that at best blasphemes against human nature and at worse provokes by way of antidote a new and more grievous tyranny. Leave men to themselves, and they prey on each other at all levels. Give them remedial social structures and the top preys on the bottom, or there is anarchy. Everything becomes a sign of contradiction. After two thousand years of christianity, the right relation between personal rights and social obligations has not been found. In a fast-moving world of extreme complexity, the commonweal seems to demand an ever-increasing centralization; which means, however, that the better educated we become the more people are excluded from a share in the major decisions affecting their lives. We are affluent zombies, puzzled, cynical and frequently smug. These, indeed, are the tears of things: when dictatorships dehumanize yet committees become synonymous with inefficiency; when increasing

prosperity and social justice kill the political sense and drive that flourished in the poverty-stricken masses, and hire purchase becomes the best guarantee against civil war. Almost everything society's martyrs have died for has turned to dross in the end. Democracy becomes a playground for the 'fixer'. Union leaders become either bosses' men or purveyors of disruption and class war. Nationalist leaders betray the voters who swept them to power, and offer them tyranny, wars and the big sell-out to one or other of the foreign imperialisms. Today, pseudo-moral indignation has become an instrument in the power game, a way of working off guilt neurosis, a substitute for work. The best you can say of most negotiation is that it balances up the various interests, cancels some of them out, and leaves you with emasculated answers that represent the least of the available evils. Realism? Enlightened pragmatism? But what has this to do with the gospel? Only that it is the stuff of which Christ's agony was made. Try an unambiguous solution, and men will call you reactionary or anarchical. Try for an honest synthesis, a balance or a mean, and you incur the hatred of both sides. There is, it seems, no truth.

The chickens have come home to roost in the scourge we talk of as world poverty. But, of course, it is not *world* poverty at all. Some of us are sitting pretty, while 1,500 million people (apart from the mainland of China) suffer. Though the total volume of resources flowing to developing countries has nearly doubled in a decade, the overall picture is gloomier than it was ten years ago. This is partly due to the failure to understand the widely differing problems of the various aided countries, with the result that a lot of aid has been wasted. It is also true that the size of the problem has been underestimated, and the population of the developing countries has grown more than twice as fast as the population of Europe. So income in these countries has increased by less than two per cent a year, though production has risen by 4.8 per cent. The average income per head of the rich industrial countries is ten times that of the under-developed regions of the world. (In 1962, 470 million people in India enjoyed an average income of less than ten shillings a week ($1.40), while the average for Western Europe was an annual £350 ($1000), and for North America three times as much.)

The developing countries, of course, are starved of the foreign exchange so vital for their growth. This is because, although their exports have risen in volume by an annual six per cent, the average prices received for those exports have been falling by an annual

average of 0.2 per cent; while the volume and prices of the richer countries' exports have been rising by an average of seven and one per cent respectively. Thus the developing countries' share of world exports has fallen from 22 per cent of the total in 1960 to 20 per cent in 1964. Yet in 1955 it was 26 per cent. The underlying problem is that trade in manufactured goods (most of which occurs in the rich industrial countries) has been expanding very much faster than trade in primary products (on the export of which the poorer countries mainly depend). Technological advance often results in a far smaller consumption of raw materials per unit of output, and in many sectors man-made substitutes like synthetic rubber and plastic components have taken over from natural materials. The problems all this presents for the world's developing regions can only be solved on a very long-term basis and with massive cooperation from the wealthy West. But what happens in fact is that two of the most generous nations, Britain and the United States, contribute to the developing countries no more than 1.09 and 0.96 per cent of their national incomes respectively, and this covers both official aid and private long-term capital investment. Only 38 per cent of Britain's aid is given in the form of grants, and until recently she charged interest of 3.9 per cent on loans. The United States gives 56 per cent of its aid in the form of grants, but charges lower interest rates and extends repayment over 33 years and more. It is estimated that the developing countries could absorb 50–60 per cent more aid than they get at present. If all the richer nations stepped up their help by this amount, all it would mean for Britain would be an extra £100 million a year (or 1.2 per cent of the national income). The excuses we all give for not being more generous are specious: balance of payments problems at home, the dangers of imbalance in the world economy if the strict laws of the open market are not observed. Yet many of these risks could be avoided if we were willing to lower our own living standards – and not by so very much. Until we do, the fact remains that the rich are growing richer precisely because the poor are growing poorer; yet there is no need for hunger and want in a world that could feed many times its present population, given a fair distribution of the fruits of the earth as we know them and can extract them.

Throughout this pessimistic scene, however, runs the thin red line of providential activity, and, even if life has to be lived on the Clausewitz theorem of 'two steps forward, one step back', an evolving growth pattern may be discerned through the movements of

history. When the clock moves forward and then seems to regress, it will often be found that it has not regressed the whole way, and a small advance is left. It is on the graph of those resultant advances that the action of the leaven in the mass may be plotted. So let us first see where history has been leading us and where it may now invite us; for history is the story of a partnership between divine grace and human heroism.

To begin with, we no longer confuse the ideal with the achievement. There have been few nobler social ideals than those of the middle ages, and in particular that of the holy roman empire; yet few ages have known more neglect, despair and misery. The rise of the social sciences is the reflection of man's refusal to die for a thought unless it be incarnate in a concrete historical situation. Hence the Marxist *praxis*, and the modern theology of hope which invites us, not to a world above to which the present is merely a path, but to a future ahead which, in one sense, is already fulfilled, yet in another depends on what we make of it. The resultant conviction of the need for universal and personal commitment to the service of the brethren now leads to a groping for what is being called 'participation', the involvement of the rank and file in social and national decision, not simply by way of electing the decision-takers but also by bringing direct and effective influence to bear on them and sharing their ultimate responsibilities as widely as possible. Hence the new insistence, not only on the worker as shareholder (a matter of tearing off counterfoils from share certificates), not only on the worker as co-manager (no really efficient formula for this has yet been devised), but as a partner with property rights *in the job he does;* thus bringing director and worker into direct relationships through the actual *work* of the company and ending the uneasy collaboration of different and conflicting social levels, with the company's work as a bargaining factor between them.

Society has not reached this point without a long and arduous pilgrimage of pain, which has also led to the current zest for new forms of revolution. The history leading up to this may be recalled briefly. In the concept of the holy roman empire the principle was one of organic unity in which there was a degree of pluralism, but which strove for social unity through unity of faith. Those were the days of the *sacrum imperium*, in which secular life was seen as a function of consecrated activity and secular power as an instrument of faith. It was logical that in this dispensation heresy should be seen as a social ill and that the secular arm should be invoked to repress it in

the interest of saving souls. But popes and monarchs who should have been divinely appointed agents of the people assumed all power to the ends, not of the people, but of policy. Liberalism and freedom of conscience arose by way of antithesis, but overspilt into an individualism that wreaked injustices graver than those they had sought to cure. Reason was not a sufficiently unifying factor to preserve man's social sense. The democratic ideal, struggling through history for recognition, ran into perversion in the age of reason, when the will of the people became identified with the will of the state. But the tidiness of totalitarian rule came to be welcomed as an antidote to the mess created by individualism, and thus arose the great modern tyrannies of communism, fascism and national socialism; while in countries more impressed by british rather than french democratic concepts there arose a class warfare rooted in the capitalist system of industrial society and hopelessly opposed to the (theoretical) corporatism of the middle ages.

The modern christian ideal is concerned, not to restore the *sacrum imperium*, but to recognise the liberty of man united to God by grace. It would establish an organic unity with a much wider degree of pluralism than its medieval forebears, recognizing that tension is essential to the search for truth and offering a forum for God's revelation and God's creation to teach and enlighten each other. In this kind of organic unity, the secular order is an infravalent or intermediate end in itself, supreme in its own sphere. Conscience is paramount, freedom of faith and politics is guaranteed, and the basic human rights are of the essence. The unifying factor on the level of the state should be a christian ideal, but one which allows free play to all principles which, though not congruent, are consistent with it; and which, under the principle of the lesser evil, tolerates much that is inconsistent. The state is to exercise as little authority as necessary, and the most authentic social developments will be those that arise naturally from below, as distinct from being imposed from the top. The abuses of private property are to be met, not by abolishing it, but by seeing that everyone has some. Ownership is essential to human dignity, but must never work in such a way that, through inequitable distribution of wealth, one class holds the rest of society in thrall. We are still a long way from achieving this ideal, but christians and humanists are working in tandem towards it, discovering, as Pope John urged them, common ground in their common human nature.

The current urge to social revolution is wearied of monolithic

systems. Thus the communists in the streets of Paris this year were invited by the students to 'return to Moscow'. Rather the urge is to induce spontaneous revolution, and through the revolt itself to forge the ideas that will govern a new order of society. In this there is much that is heroic, but a *praxis* uninformed by a vision is as dangerous as a vision that is denied incarnation. In christian terms, contemplation and activity must infuse each other. Man must have a road to walk along. He must also know where it is going. The truth is that there will be no harsher crucifixion than the attempt to re-establish the modern 'mixed' economies on a christian basis. It is less glamorous and less satisfying in theory than total demolition and a complete rebuilding of society, but in practice it is the only way to meet both the personal and social demands of human nature. The partnership of state and private enterprise, the development of cooperatives in which each man is an owner but exercises ownership in community, state and international regulation of the way we exercise it in the open market to ensure social justice: all this demands a sacrifice more adult and more difficult than a frantic return to the barricades. Demolition is any fool's game. Control and reshaping is a man's job. If Pope Paul's prescription in *Populorum Progressio* were to be taken seriously, it would, for example, mean a substantial cut in the standard of living for all the prosperous nations. It would mean higher prices in the shops to ensure fair prices for developing countries' primary products (which is why Pope Paul called for a world authority to regulate the free play of the open market where social justice is imperilled). It would mean opening up western markets to more of the developing countries' manufactured goods. Above all it would mean that western countries would open more plants on foreign soil, setting up shop in the developing countries themselves and finding ways in which foreign and domestic capital could associate in joint ventures. What the developing countries need is not largesse, but the means of getting into orbit on their own account and managing their own affairs.

To this end, western fiscal and financial policies which actively discourage the outflow of business capital to developing countries easily become immoral. It is not right, as the British Council of Churches has pointed out, that our aid or our imports from poor countries should be the first candidates for the axe. If we fear for our balance of payments, then we have a moral obligation to get that balance into shape by other means, whether by deflation, incomes

policy, increasing industrial efficiency, restricting expenditure on tourism, on imports from rich conntries, or on military commitments.

What part can the christian Church specifically play in relieving the world of the cross of poverty? To begin with, it has the unique advantage of having a direct exercise on a community in every village and town in the prosperous countries, and can thus, if it will, do more than anyone to arouse a new national conscience, a sense of obligation and an urge to action. Here too it has a unique opportunity for recruiting professional men and women willing to spend some time overseas and teach their expertise to countries avid for education and technical know-how. Secondly, the christian missions throughout the world offer astonishing oportunities for directly relieving the hardest hit victims of poverty. Their role in the mission countries has changed, of course. The school, hospital, social welfare centre or leprosarium has become the responsibility of the local state, with missionaries staffing and collaborating with the project, rather than running it. But there is something else. Wherever there is a missionary, there is a potential cooperative or credit union, if he is trained to get one going, and wherever there is a cooperative there is salvation from grinding poverty. It may not bring affluence to the local community, but it will mean that people who have been scratching a living from unwilling soil can now live securely. A few outboard motors multiply a group of fishermen's catch by five. A small dam, built by a lone missionary with local amateur help, brought security to thirty starving families. Multiply that effort across the developing countries – and at least starvation is disposed of.

The christian churches, too, can and do try to collect funds for direct application abroad. The net totals are probably a tithe of what could be collected if efficient methods were used and the generosity of the faithful were really challenged. In this connection, however, it is pertinent to ask how far expensive programmes for catholic education in prosperous countries are justifiable in face of the desperate needs of the developing countries. No one would suggest a demolition of all specifically catholic education in any country. To do this would be to inflict a wound on secular society as well as the catholic community itself. But it seems fair to ask whether we should aim at a place in a catholic school for every catholic child, when what we are really doing is to off-load the responsibilities of home and parish on to a catholic school which,

in all too many cases, also fails to fulfil them.

The problem of birth control and of *Humanae Vitae* in particular has received such a thorough going over in these past months that it would be superfluous to enter into the arguments again here. A few observations may, however, be offered: (1) even apart from the development of synthetic foods and the vast untapped possibilities of the arctic and antarctic wastes, the earth *could*, at current levels of know-how, be made to feed very many times its present population; (2) a massive breakthrough in synthetic foods has already been made with the new grain and rice plants developed at the Ford and Rockefeller Centres and the new process for extracting protein from leaf; all of which may mean that India need never face famine again; (3) a new and daring approach to emigration could mean that hundreds of millions of people in overcrowded lands would be helped to build new nations in the vast wastes of the under-populated regions of the earth, and set the earth to work there; (4) we do not yet know what it will be like to live in a society wholly based on the family limitation principle. It might, for instance, inhibit an evolutionary advance of contemporary man who, in his greater knowledge of sexuality, might perhaps be able to learn to control it in human, as distinct from artificial, ways. Though the Lambeth Conference of 1968 reasserted its teaching of a decade before, some Anglican bishops privately admitted that the 1958 resolution had been a failure. It laid down conditions for the moral use of contraceptives, but in practice these have been ignored. It remains true that there are arguments to be adduced against an *absolute* ban on artificial contraception. But it is significant that, in its 1966 ban report on world poverty, the British Council of Churches made no direct reference to this and concentrated instead on the christian obligation to work and sacrifice.

What is certain is that 'participation' implies duties as well as rights, and that the duty of the churches is to preach 'the trustworthiness of reality', to dispel fear and announce hope, and to release the human spirit at the deepest level, as the BCC report expressed it. It added that the process upon which we are embarked is revolutionary – in the cultural habits of whole peoples and in the very structure of their society; and this revolution requires the assertion of a corporate will, a will which must be trained, informed and revitalized by the gospel. When this is achieved, the world will not descend from the cross, but with Christ it will reign from the cross in expectation of the resurrection.