

THE UNIVERSITY, THE CHURCH AND THE POLITICAL CONSCIENCE

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by ARCHBISHOP D.E. HURLEY

It is pretty widely accepted, I think, that we are in the throes of a cultural mutation from which the human race will emerge with characteristics vastly different from those it has known in the past. Possibly, with due regard for the difference of circumstances, the people of the fifteenth century went through an experience similar to what we are going through now. The world that we now call the medieval world was dissolving before their eyes. New attitudes were emerging, attitudes that could not be easily identified or described, because they had not yet begun to fall into patterns. Probably they were beginning to show as unaccountable departures from the norm. No one could foresee what they were leading to, and this must have been most disturbing. Who could have foreseen that before the end of that century, Italy was to become the epicentre of a cultural explosion such as had not been known since the flowering of the Greek mind eighteen centuries before; the Polish priest, Copernicus, was to be involved in astronomical observations that would open up a new world of science; and Western man, with Portugal and Spain leading the way, was to set out on an adventure of discovery that would make him master of the world for five hundred years and place in his hands incredible political and economic power. Western man emerged from the crucible of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries adventurous, exploratory, artistic, scientific, technical, conquering, colonising, aggressive, acquisitive, self-assertive and individualistic - and as Christian as all these interests and characteristics permitted him to be. For five hundred years it looked as if the world was his to dominate for all time.

A little reading of history should have warned us that there could be no guarantee to this effect, that empires had come and gone and cultures had risen and fallen. In due course the West tore itself to pieces in two ferocious wars, and in Marxism found itself with a fierce re-

action on its hands against the individualistic and acquisitive spirit that had become so characteristic of it.

It is not difficult to recognise that this era of Western dominance has come to an end and that the culture of the so-called modern period is going through a mutation of great magnitude. Another culture, or another pattern of cultures, is being born, and we of the 1970's find ourselves very much in the position of the Europeans of the 1470's who felt that the old medieval sanctities, securities and assumptions were rapidly dissolving, and had no idea what was in store for them.

We of the 1970's have no idea of what is in store for us. Each quarter of the present century has witnessed enormous changes. If the last one runs true to form, the world of A.D. 2000 will be vastly different from the world we know today; and if, after that, the pace of change continues to intensify, as seems likely, what lies in store for the human race is beyond imagination. Of course we may blow the whole thing up, and enter on a period of stagnation and even regression. It would not be the first time that humanity, or at least a section of it, has run out of steam. The situation we are in at present may be one of decay and dissolution. We may be due for another 500 years of Dark Ages.

But presuming and hoping, we are not, while it would be temerarious to sketch the blueprint of a culture now in the throes of birth, it is not, I think, entirely idle to speculate on the opportunities that lie ahead, especially for two great institutions that, for better or for worse, have contributed much to the moulding of the Western culture now in the process of mutation - the Church and the University.

Both, I think, have a wonderful opportunity of contributing to the future by adding a new dimension to what their con-

cern has been hitherto, the dimension of the political conscience of man.

When I speak of the political conscience, I am using the term in its broad classical connotation, with reference to all the great community concerns of man. In this sense all that concerns the community is political: not merely matters of government, but matters of culture and economics as well. And when I speak of conscience I mean not only awareness of right and wrong, but also the motivation associated with doing the right thing, the motivation to achieve the right, the motivation to share this achievement with others and so make a contribution to the betterment of society.

The contention that the University as such should concern itself with social betterment may cause some uneasiness among listeners, to whom there is no dogma more precious than the dogma of academic freedom and neutrality. Committing the University to concern for social betterment sounds like committing it to a system, to an ideology, the very thing the universities of the Western world feel they must avoid at all costs if they are to maintain their academic ideal.

With all respect for this ideal I cannot help feeling that it should be questioned. One of the criticisms levelled against representatives of the Church is that they do not question their dogmas enough. There are occasions when representatives of the Church enjoy returning the compliment. As a representative of a Church that has indulged in an absolute orgy of dogma-questioning in the last ten years, I feel a positive delight in inviting other institutions to share the experience.

As I see it, the dogma of academic freedom and neutrality, unqualified by concern for political conscience, means that the vast majority of students acquire from the University a refinement of human capacities without a corresponding refinement of social or political responsibility. We may say what we like about the ideal of academic freedom and neutrality in the University, but in actual fact the great majority of people who make use of what the University has to offer do not take up an academic career. They enter the professional, industrial and commercial world; and in the West this means a world of competitive capitalism where the rule is often the rule of the jungle: "eat or be eaten". A society may evolve a thousand legal safeguards to check the jungle mentality; but in the long run there is only one effective control, the human conscience, the community conscience. The University of the future must give some thought to this.

How it is to be done, I would not dare to suggest in this brief talk; but basically what is required is an endeavour to pass on to students a realisation of the human consequences of political and economic behaviour. At home and at school and in our everyday contacts we learn something of the impact on others of our personal and domestic behaviour, and we are led to adjust accordingly. But on the scale of the large grouping, the economic group, the social group, the race group, we learn very little. The result is that what would pass for callous and cruel behaviour on the personal level is condoned on the scale of the larger group as perfectly acceptable. Conscience operates at

the personal level. It is almost non-existent on the political level. People who profess a christian faith and give some evidence of christian practice on the personal level are, as we all know, capable of justifying the most horrifying oppression on the political level and seeing no anomaly in it. Why? It is a different dimension of life. It requires a new perspective. Should it not be the concern of the University?

In a sense it is. It is certainly the concern of a significant number of University students and faculty members. In our own country quite a few have suffered for this concern. I take this opportunity of expressing my admiration for them and thanking them for the contribution they have made to the political conscience of our country.

But the concern they have expressed should, I feel, be a concern systematically fostered by the University as a whole. This may sound a strange doctrine and may be fraught with pitfalls, but a University cannot be really said to serve a political community well unless the skills and insights it imparts are balanced by the responsibility it inculcates. The modern Western university is dedicated to the principle of freedom; but freedom is not enough. It must be freedom with service. Without service freedom can very easily be selfishness, like the freedom of free enterprise that grinds the face of the worker in the dust. True freedom is freedom to serve. It should not be beyond the ingenuity of the University to inculcate the ideal of service along with the ideal of freedom. That would be a very important contribution to the development of political conscience.

The other institution I mentioned is one with which I am slightly better acquainted, the Church. To say that the Church should be concerned with the political conscience is to say nothing new in christian circles in our day. This position in principle is fully accepted by the theologians and authorities of the major church denominations. It was not always so, of course, and, in fact, up to quite recently has not been so, and is still far from being a conviction that has seeped through into the consciousness of the great majority of ministers and members of the Church. It will take some time before this occurs. It will also take some time before a certain balance is achieved. In the meantime there will be fierce controversies over liberation theology and Black theology, bishops who get thrown out of their dioceses, priests who get shot down fighting in liberation movements, Christian lay leaders banned, imprisoned, tortured and executed, and financial grants voted by the World Council of Churches to guerrilla movements.

It is this concern for the political conscience which may give the Church an important say in the culture that is emerging from our present turmoil. In the Middle Ages the Church tried to exercise an institutional control over politics. In an unsophisticated society this seemed to be the only way. But the very pope, Boniface VIII, who made the loudest and clearest claim to discipline princes, found himself badly buffeted by a prince who fought back, Philip the Fair of France, representative of an age of princes that was determined not to be pushed around by priests. Two hundred years later, with the explosion of the Reformation. The Church lost not only the semblance of power it may have had over princes but even the

ability to influence the conscience of the new age. It was far too pre-occupied with its own internal divisions to pay much attention to capitalism and communism and left to other movements and messiahs, like the French Revolution and Karl Marx, the criticisms of social injustice. Politically it became more and more irrelevant.

But in our own time, the tide has turned. A powerful awareness is sweeping through the Church that if it cannot influence the political conscience of a people, it has no right to be around at all. That is the significance of men like Beyers Naude. As I have said, it will take some time for this concern with the political conscience to become the common currency of Christian communities and, in the meantime, many old stalwarts of the faith will wonder what has induced their spiritual leaders to get involved in politics. They have every reason for shaking their heads. They weren't brought up that way, and many of them will never see that, if the Church continues accor-

ding to the image in which they were brought up, it has a very short future ahead of it. The biggest sins of mankind are political sins, so if the Church is against sin, as it is supposed to be, the political sphere is the most important for the preaching of repentance—by word and by example.

That, then, is my message on this graduation day. You who graduate today have a pretty wild time ahead of you as you live out the convulsions of a culture in transformation. Such a convulsion creates many uncertainties and misgivings, but also many opportunities. I have stressed two of these: the opportunity before the University and the Church to concern themselves with the development of political conscience. In the ultimate analysis the force for confidence and steadfastness in any time of devastating change is the conscience of the community; the awareness of right and the motivation to do it. Our contribution to that is the finest service we can offer mankind.□

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGY TO BLACK STUDIES

by ELWYN JENKINS

Archaeological research in Southern Africa over the last decade has made a dramatic contribution to knowledge of Bantu civilization in this region before the advent of the white man. Whereas archaeologists have long studied the stone age cultures of Southern Africa, and have been able to give a reasonably definite account of the nature and sequence of these cultures, it was only with the publication of Prof. R. J. Mason's **Prehistory of the Transvaal** in 1962 that concerted efforts began for a scientific study to be made of what used to be called the Iron Age, but is now more accurately known as the 'Metal Age', of Africa south of the Zambesi. Once the findings of research workers reach the history books and percolate through to public awareness, they can be expected to add greatly to the popularity of black studies, and give impetus to pride in black identity, in the countries of Southern Africa.

The true scope of what has been discovered was revealed when most of the workers in this field were brought together in Johannesburg last October for a Symposium on Ancient Mining and Metallurgy which was jointly sponsored by the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy and the Witwatersrand Centre of the South African Archaeological Society. (1)

Archaeologists themselves are surprised and excited at the early dates that are now being ascertained for the first traces of metal age cultures south of the Zambesi. The Carbon Fourteen dating method has been used to obtain

- (1) The papers delivered at this Symposium have been published in the journal of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, Vol. 74, No. 6, January 1974, available at R2,00 a copy plus postage from the Institute, P.O. Box 1628, Johannesburg 2000.