

Editorial

IN the lecture which he delivered to the National Congress of the Free Church Federal Council at Cardiff in March of this year, Professor Emil Brunner tackled a question of supreme importance to our contemporary Christian thinking. In what way does the new social order in this country affect the Church's task in its presentation of the timeless gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? The lecture in its printed form¹ makes challenging reading; and brief though it is (and somewhat expensive too for a pamphlet of under 30 pages) it certainly should not be missed.

Professor Brunner begins by making clear that the real task of the Church lies beyond any social order for the simple reason that the Kingdom of God—which it exists to proclaim—transcends all social orders, whether they be good or bad. The Kingdom of God is not a social order of man's creation. Indeed, it is not man's creation at all, but God's. Moreover, the Kingdom cannot be identified with any *order* as such; it is, in fact, wholly different from any order. The Church of God, which for all practical purposes is the Kingdom of God in its present manifestation, is fundamentally personal and not institutional. "The *Ekklesia* of the New Testament is something entirely personal, namely, the communion between Christ and His people, who are His by faith, and the communion of these people with one another through their communion in Christ. The essence of the Kingdom is love; God's love given to man, man's love towards man. Love, however, cannot be institutionalised. The *Ekklesia* is in no way an institution, an order, but a personal life flowing from beyond the temporal world; it is God's own life sharing itself with men through the Mediator, Christ" (p. 11).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that every existing social order presents to the Church its own particular challenge—and its own particular problem. Hence in our own age and in our own country the Church's task assumes a distinctive form. Professor Brunner expresses it by saying: "If it has become the supreme task of society to personalize and to communalize the relations of men in the new social order, it is the specific task of the Churches of this day to personalize and to communalize the preaching of the Word of God" (p. 20). And he adds: "Both the Church and theology are about to discover a double fact: the sociological meaning of the Word and the theological meaning of community; or, to put it in one concept, the unity of the Word and Sacrament" (p. 21).

Professor Brunner's stress, then, is upon the essentially social or communal significance of the Gospel, the Church, and the Sacraments. The Word of God creates *koinonia* both on the vertical and on the horizontal level, both between man and God and between man and man; and the focal point of that *koinonia* is Christ. This means that the Church's emphasis must be upon "personal community" as

¹ *The Church in the New Social Order* (S.C.M. Press, 1952, 3/6).

being one of the vital factors involved in the making of Christians and in the growth of believers towards spiritual maturity. The Church's business is not simply the conversion of so many individual sinners but the integration of those who are saved through Christ into a truly personal life of communion with God and man. The individualistic approach to religion and worship is inadequate. The ultimate effect of both the Word and Sacrament is to transform the individual into a member of the Body of Christ.

Dr. Brunner's words on this latter point are particularly penetrating. "Our Reformers, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, were right in denying that the Sacrament is the transformation of the elements, bread and wine, into the Body of Christ. But they did not see as clearly that indeed the Sacrament *is* a transformation, not of the elements, but of the persons who eat and drink, into the Body of Christ. The Roman doctrine was right when it said: In the Holy Communion the Body of Christ is produced; but it was terribly wrong when it said that this Body of Christ is the transubstantiated bread and wine. The Body of Christ which the Sacrament produces is no other than that which in the whole of the New Testament is meant by 'the Body of Christ' as the communion of those whom Christ unites with God, with Himself and with one another" (pp. 22, 23).

Perhaps enough has been said to indicate that Professor Brunner has something of real value to communicate to us with regard to the Church's witness in the new social order. The truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ is community truth. It operates on a community level. It proclaims the saving grace of God by which men's lives are changed from those of lonely and isolated individuals into members of the redeemed and redeeming fellowship of the Body of Christ. It is this truth which the Church is called upon to declare and to demonstrate in the face of our modern society.

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