

Editorial

Law and Order

OUR summer number editorial on the issue of law and order prompted an unusually large post bag, and we should like to thank those who wrote to us on this important issue. Our editorial was written before the election was announced, and we were as much taken by surprise by that announcement as most of the rest of the UK public. We want to stress that law and order was our subject, because not all correspondents seem to have realised this. We believe that the Bible enjoins Christians to be good citizens and to support governments and civil authorities. Certainly Christians may use their influence, like other citizens, to seek to change governmental policies where they believe them wrong, but in our view it is doubtful if Christians ought *ever* to participate in violent insurrection or treasonable activities likely to involve or promote violence. We put the matter in this way because it is just conceivable that circumstances might arise in which a state might be so evil and aggressively satanic that Christians had to oppose it actively with the possibility of violence. But such circumstances would have to be unmistakably clear, and even if they were, it would be highly debatable whether anything more than passive resistance would be compatible with the Christian ethic.

Let us take a recent example, and by common consent about the most blatant one this century, that of Adolph Hitler. Not even the most right wing partisan would defend Hitler today, and yet how easy it is to be wise after the event. Anyone who reads the history of the 1930s and the debates within England and the Church of England about the emerging Nazis can see just how difficult it was to be sure exactly what Hitler was up to, how far he would go, whether good men in Germany would be able to contain him. Churchmen themselves were deeply divided in Germany, and in England it is well known that Bishop Headlam and Bishop Bell had many a clash on the Nazi issue in Church Assembly. We must stress just how easy it is, since 1939, to

idolise Bishop Bell and regard Headlam as a stuffy old man out of touch with reality, afraid to take a firm line, and so on. All that is the wisdom of hindsight, but at the time Headlam held the relevant official position in the Church of England and Bell was the unofficial critic. And Headlam took his line after A. J. Macdonald had been over to the continent to see for himself, and Macdonald had been sent officially by a Church House board. An issue like Nazism, with its terrible persecution of the Jews, is easy to see in its full horror *now*, but honest men, Christian men, were divided on its threat in the '30s. We may look at the facts *now* and marvel at their blindness *then* (actually it was not so simple as that, and we shall be exploring later some interesting new evidence on Nazi attitudes to the churches in the '30s), but it remains a fact that Christians were not agreed at the time when action was needed.

Returning to the present, we regret that law and order has at times threatened to become a political issue between the major parties, and we regret even more that some radical Christians have seen fit to attack the whole concept of law and order, since they seem to regard it, quite erroneously in our view, as a blind and unprincipled defence of the *status quo*. We are aware that some are seeking to advance a Christian theology of revolution, and it is incumbent on any serious minded Christian to hear what such people have to say, but until they have made out their case and supported it with serious biblical theology, the rest of us can be forgiven for continuing in what we believe to be our biblical understanding of supporting law and order.

Several of our correspondents plainly wanted us to attack the South Africans, and presumably get at the South African Christians since ours is not a political journal. Our reply was, and is, that we should of course be glad to consider serious and reasoned Christian comment on apartheid, however critical it might be, but that since *The Churchman* readers in South Africa who are familiar with the problems of apartheid and some of whom at least are likely to be sympathetic to it, we should feel it proper to give such people the right to reply from their particular Christian standpoint. This provoked the reply from one writer that if *The Churchman* was considering prostitution, the editor would surely not consider inviting a prostitute to defend her trade. We refrain from comment on that line of argument save to note that it illustrates all too clearly how much emotion enters into any discussion of subjects like apartheid, and sometimes emotion seems to take over from reason and theological thinking. We conclude this section by stressing once again that we are firmly committed on the law and order issue, but we have not, and shall not, take sides on matters like apartheid. We shall encourage serious and informed discussion of the issues involved, so far as space allows, but we shall not take sides.

The Nature of Christian Political Involvement

SINCE Bishop David Sheppard led his campaign to stop the South African cricket tour (with other bishops opposed to him), the World Council of Churches has given considerable financial aid to guerilla groups some of them openly committed to violent ends. According to press hand-outs, some of the money came from special funds, and some from general funds contributed by member churches. What is clear is that the decision was not referred back to member churches, and that a good many church leaders have been critical of the decision (including the Archbishop of Canterbury). Recently the Archbishop wrote to the Prime Minister, with the support so we are told of one hundred bishops, seeking to dissuade him from selling British arms to S. Africa. Again there was considerable reaction, and a number of prominent members of the House of Laity, men and women of varying ages and churchmanships, sent an open letter to the Prime Minister urging the selling of arms to S. Africa.

We do not intend to get involved here in the rights and wrongs of selling arms to S. Africa, but all this makes us consider the nature of Christian political involvement. The general public has gained the impression that the churches are now on the side of the guerillas, and that the Church of England (or at least her bishops) is against arms for S. Africa. One does not have to be very well informed to realise that churches, like other groups of people, are divided on these controversial political matters, but the mass media have conveyed a rather different impression to the general public. Here we advance three propositions on the nature of Christian political involvement. They are of course based on a knowledge only of the British situation, and we are aware that things may be different in detail where political parties have more or less overt links with particular churches.

First, there is need for some sort of control over pronouncements that give the public the impression of speaking for large groups of Christians, and a need to ensure consultation beforehand. The committee structures in the BCC, and for all we know the WCC too, need examining to ensure adequate consultation and responsible supervision. At the moment it is too easy for a few enthusiasts (often BCC employees) to get their views made the views of the BCC.

Second, actions by prominent church dignitaries in the political sphere should either be very clearly marked private and personal actions or else done through proper channels of church government. Private meetings of bishops are no place from which to make statements which could be construed as representative Anglican action. If the Church of England is to speak, there is the General Synod. For bishops to bypass this is to mock synodical government and show that it is really an episcopal oligarchy after all.

Third, we think churches should be reticent to wade into a series of

political pronouncements. They rarely have the expertise available to make informed comment quickly on international affairs. On home affairs in Britain Christians are likely to be as divided in party allegiance as citizens generally, and we think churches should not formally attempt to get involved in controversial issues which divide their own members. The way for members of a large national church like the Church of England to make their weight felt is as individuals within the political structures of the country. For the Church of England to take sides formally on disputed political matters is simply to divide her members against each other. There are Christians in all the main political parties in the UK, and it is doubtful if in the foreseeable future there will be any major issue on which Christians will be agreed and political parties divided.

Certainly let Christians be active in civil and community life, but let Christians act through political channels rather than by trying to get a church or group of churches to take sides on issues which divide their own members.

Two Books

TWO recent publications bear on this whole subject. First, Professor Paul Ramsey's *Who Speaks for the Church?* St. Andrews, 189 pp., 8s., in which he criticises the 1966 Geneva ecumenical conference on Church and Society. The ideas, the criticisms of exactly what went on in Geneva and how conclusions were reached, and the suggestions for better church comment on political matters are important, and the reader who struggles through the verbiage of Ramsey's unlovely style will be rewarded. Ramsey makes four main criticisms of Geneva; first on procedures, the pressures not to discuss and commend for further thought but to race ahead to conclusions with a firm eye on the final press conference, and the plenary sessions where little real debate took place, with speeches firmly limited, and drafting committees defending their texts to the last ditch against all comers as there was no real time for substantial revision. In all this Ramsey concludes, and we could certainly confirm his general impressions from our own BCC experience, that there was little real dialogue. Second, the Conference's criticisms of the US in Vietnam, how these were the very opposite of the much quoted *New York Times* correspondent's report that the Southern hemisphere was making its voice felt, whereas in fact the whole thing was largely sown up by the radical Americans who came to find their preconceived conclusions, together with the Russians who were glad to endorse them, and then the pathetic fear of two reports which dogged the conference. Third, a suggestion as to how serious dialogue can take place, and fourth an analysis of the statement on nuclear war. In passing Ramsey makes shrewd comment on the

unbalanced composition of the conference, how clergymen and academics predominated with virtually no one from the administration where political decisions are actually made. He shows up the 'truncated [and thus misrepresented] Barthianism' of the theology of revolution, and how theology as a whole suffered from pragmatic considerations. Perhaps the most revealing sentence is on p. 100 where speaking of the American representatives in the context of the Vietnam debate, he observes ' . . . there was nothing very dialogic about it. By and large, the American participants, composed too largely of the social action curias, clergymen and academics, brilliant youth one rarely met at the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and with no Christian laymen whose vocation it is actually to share in policy making executive leadership in the aspired responsible society, did not come to startling new awareness. By and large, they saw or thought they saw their own reflections in the mirror.'

Ramsey's book is much more than negative criticism. On the one hand it exposes the methods of these ecumenical conferences, and just how little dialogue is actually involved, with all the quest to impress the world through the journalists. On the other Ramsey suggests that Christian groups should not try to do politicians' work for them, but should play a more indirect role, informing the community conscience rather than issuing edicts to governments.

The second book is very different. E. Jorstadt's *The Politics of Doomsday*, 190 pp., \$4.95, Abingdon Press shows the theological disputes in America between liberalism and orthodoxy stemming from the 1890s and how later there developed a political far right linked with some kinds of theological conservatism. The main characters in the drama are Carl McIntire, Billy James Hargis, Edgar C. Bundy, V. P. Kaub and of course various groups including the John Birch Society. The disputes of J. G. Machen with the Liberals, and then Machen against McIntyre are the backcloth. Then after the last World War these far rightists joined, ironically enough, with RC Senator McCarthy in espousing the conspiratorial view of American life, seeing Reds under many a stone. Jorstadt claims that ecclesiastical separatism and civil nationalism united in the far right. He takes us through the right wing alliances between RCs and evangelicals in favour of Goldwater and his RC running mate Miller, and against Kennedy. It is not easy to disentangle the various strands of revivalism, dispensationalism, mere anti-communism, serious conservative theology and the ridiculous divine-inspiration-claim for the AV. Dr. Jorstadt has provided a working chart for the exploration of this particular sea, but what he has not really done is to study the political polarisation of American Christians into liberal and radical on one side, and ultra-orthodox and right wing on the other. In the light of such a book it is easier for non-Americans to understand how so called neo-evangelicalism, or the new evangelicalism, is emerging in the USA. But Jorstadt's book is a

clear warning against political involvement by Christian groups reacting on each other, each making the other more extreme. It is not a very seemly or impressive story, and the Christian virtue of *moderatio* is singularly lacking.

F. F. Bruce

IT is not our normal policy in these columns to dwell on personalities, but this time we must make some exceptions on account of those who have contributed to our columns in the past. The first concerns Frederick Fyvie Bruce, currently Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University. Paternoster Press, with whom FFB has had a long connection, are to be congratulated on their *F.F. Bruce festschrift* presented to him on his sixtieth birthday. *Apostolic History and the Gospel* edited by W. W. Gasque (FFB's pupil) and R.P. Martin (FFB's former colleague), 378 pp., 50s., contains twenty four essays from a distinguished galaxy of international scholars together with some preliminaries connected with FFB himself, the man and his work. The select bibliography and list of editorships runs to over thirteen pages of small print, which gives some indication as to the prolific output of FFB. It began in 1933, and right from the start the classical background, the careful attention to philology, and the linguistic erudition, which always characterise FFB's work, are prominent. The range of his writings is far greater than many modern academics. The technical and learned are of course there, mainly in a multiplicity of articles, but there is a marked concern to relate scholarship to the life of the church and especially to students in their theological problems. It is in no small measure due to FFB that conservative scholarship in biblical fields has been made respectable and respected, that some of the wilder radical Bible speculations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been exposed, and that an altogether more constructive approach has emerged. FFB's conservatism was an invaluable bridge, in fact several bridges. It demonstrated to the academic world that it was possible to combine a biblical Brethren faith with serious scholarship at the highest level. It rescued evangelicals from a theological obscurantism which was both an understandable but also an unfortunate reaction to nineteenth century modernism. It gradually encouraged a less exotic mode of biblical interpretation amongst FFB's fellow Brethren. But above all it showed evangelicals how to retain their faith in the Bible, take scholarship seriously, and learn from sober biblical criticism rather than rejecting all technical criticism as the machinations of the 'Higher Critics'. We look forward to many more years of judicious biblical scholarship and writing from FFB. The book is a worthy tribute.

From Assembly to Synod

THE old National Assembly of the Church of England, commonly known as Church Assembly, has passed into history and the new General Synod has completed its first session. It is too early to predict what changes this may involve. Evangelical membership appears to be a little more than in the old Assembly. Some of the vices of the former body are already evident, and possibly on the increase—the tendency of the platform to resist all and any amendments of substance and to resort to the pathetic argument of the urging members to pass everything at breakneck speed, and the shuffling of feet and ungenerous and ungentlemanly shouts of vote particularly when younger laity are speaking. These are but first impressions, and the new Synod may benefit considerably when it gets its panel of expert chairmen, for the platform and the chair were open to considerable criticism in its first session. But the one really ominous development was a certain aggressive intent on the part of the New Synod Group, a body created to destroy parties (whether they are real or of NSG imagination is a matter of opinion) and yet one which bids fair to become the most aggressive party caucus ever known in recent church affairs. This is particularly sad at a time when catholics and evangelicals are drawing together and seeking to understand one another rather than attack each other.

Turning to our other personalities, Professor Norman Anderson of London University, a contributor to our pages and author of a recent study guide on the Permissive Society (*Man's World?*), has been overwhelmingly elected chairman of the new House of Laity. In our estimation this is a just tribute to one who started as a missionary early in life and has risen to the top of the legal profession. He was only a member of old Church Assembly for about seven years and yet his impact on debates was clear, and respected by the whole Assembly.

The former House of Laity chairman, Sir Kenneth Grubb, and the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Theo Levett, did not seek re-election. We quote below what Theo Levett said of Sir Kenneth on behalf of the House of Laity. The tribute speaks for itself. For ourselves we stress just two things. First, like FFB mentioned above, Sir Kenneth was a bridge builder. He was of course an evangelical, but much too big a man ever to put sectional interests before those of the Church of England as a whole. What Sir Kenneth did was to change the House from a place where turbulent and at times acrimonious debates took place into a place where the dominant ethos was a concern to try to understand each other's case and to meet it. Under his chairmanship the atmosphere in the House of Laity was transformed. His chairmanship was scrupulously fair. He answered a host of correspondence from members with great diligence, and was always sensitive to moods in the house and to minorities feeling hard done by. And in earlier days

when evangelicals in the Church of England were more interested in inter- and un-denominational societies and tended to ignore the Church of England's central councils, Sir Kenneth strove with zeal but also complete fairness to see that their case did not go by default.

Theo Levett said of Sir Kenneth:

'We all know that the past 10 years have been some of the most strenuous and controversial years of this House since the Prayer Book Measures of 1926. There have been very difficult times in debate which must have meant considerable strain for you as Chairman. Yet through it all you have never let us see any sign of strain on you at all. In fact, it is an extraordinary thing that in spite of these matters of such controversial import there has during this period arisen in this House a much greater spirit of unity and fellowship than I for one have ever known since I have been on the Assembly. Whilst admitting that we believe that this is largely in answer to our prayers that the Holy Spirit do work among us, we must not blind ourselves to the fact that it has been possible under your leadership.'

New Publishing House

READERS may care to know of a new private press publishing venture, The Langford Press, 12 Essex Close, Romford, Essex. The stated intention is to publish beautifully produced classics in limited editions at reasonable prices. They start with that famous Caroline High Churchman, Jeremy Taylor. Anne Lamb, wife of the BBC's Kenneth Lamb, has abridged Taylor's *Holy Living* into 173 pp. (45s.). The production is elegant; the type is Joanna unjustified, the binding is elephant hide, the paper a high quality, and the whole gives a pleasing effect. We wish the Langford Press well in its publishing career, and look forward to more volumes.

The Churchman

LIKE most other publications, *The Churchman* is not immune from the inflation that has hit the printing industry recently. Due to the generosity of Church Society, the price has hitherto been kept down to a level far below comparable journals, but there is a limit to subsidies, and from 1971 the price will be 20s. for an annual subscription, or 6s. a single issue, with postage extra.

Christianity Today

THE editor has been informed of a considerable run of this periodical (plus a few volumes of SJT and ET) which might interest a library or private reader. Volumes 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 are available unbound but complete, and vol. 10, 1-16. Anyone interested please write to the editor, Appleford House, Appleford, Abingdon, Berks.