

## *Lethargy to Liturgy*

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An aftermath analysis of the student demonstrations against the Catholic hierarchy in the Philippines — against Cardinal Santos in particular — does not tend to show that the demonstrations were indicative of a reaction against the Church as such. Rather, they were merely among the series of demonstrations the students took to task in carrying out as a matter of student reaction against the establishment, not the Church in particular. As a matter of fact, the fad died down even before the expressed goals were achieved, just as the upsurge in student unrest in other areas dies down as fast as it is built up. Some observers attribute this to lack of organized action, others to lack of effective leadership, still others to lack of well founded objectives. Excess energy, perhaps, seeking an outlet which the students found in rallies and demonstrations.

But let us not be led into our own unfounded presumptions about the trend. Youth unrest is a worldwide phenomenon which in the breadth of its rampancy is definitely indicative of something. We may not fully grasp what that something is, but it is there, real and waiting for some opportune time to spring up and cause something really serious.

In the Philippines, the phenomenon has not yet proved fatal to the Establishment. How long it will remain under control, however, cannot be predicted. Situations in the international and local scenes are not conducive to attempts at pacifying the growing concern. The trouble is that we do not know what the youth is really concerned about. We can only speculate. But how valid are our speculations, we who have been brought up in a generation where fear was understood as discipline, apathy as refinement, and submissiveness as culture.

It may perhaps be closer to the truth to say that the youth reactivity which we frown upon today is only a materialization of our instinct to revolt against the colonial mentality of the times in which we were brought up. In which case, the unpredictable trend and direction of today's student unrest is only normal and understandable. It is no more than the projection of our own impulses which were suppressed in our times but given vent to in the present generation.

Have we not, in the past, been bearers of grumblings about the way the Church was run? About how our priests behaved? About how Church finances were being directed to channels other than those we thought were the right ones, so much so that we refused to contribute to our Church? In fact, we murmured against what the priests preached, which we could not stomach because they set unedifying examples. We were then laboring under a conflict between repressed insurgency and an obsession for what we thought was prudence. The truth is that we lacked appreciation of our Church.

Now we are having a dose of our own skepticisms being thrown back at us by the younger set. Many of us now take a defensive and apologetic attitude, to cover up perhaps for our own immaturities.

When, therefore, Vatican II came up with an overhaul of the Church, many of the proposed innovations scandalized us. To illustrate, how many of us can stand the a-go-go Mass? Or the unveiled women in church? Or priests in jam sessions? Yet we still go for the *santacruzian* and the practice of kissing statues which border on idolatry. And how we rush in "holy" pilgrimages to out-of-the-way places at the news of showering petals or crying icons or miraculous statuettes!

Come to think of it, we are a gullible but lethargic brood. We are a bunch of contradictions. That is why we deserve to be jolted from our apathetic slumber, if the jolting is to be done by those who are less matured in age, but who are perhaps the more mature in insight.

When the students demonstrated against the Church hierarchy, maybe they did not accomplish their planned mission, whatever that mission was. But one thing they did accomplish: they jolted us from our lethargic complacency. The mere fact that we agonize at the thought is indication enough that we were hit at our weaker side.

In the face of the dare, shall we call the bluff? The enthusiasm that goes with student demonstrations, no matter how childish they appear to us, may no longer be a bluff. History tells us that societies which fought the reaction of their youth were sooner vanquished by the emerging generation — on its own terms. We are running the risk of a boomerang if we call the bluff where the bluff is not.

But we cannot turn a deaf ear either. That is what we have been doing all along, but the voice of the youth has become so loud and so penetrating, that our callousness is no longer an effective defense. The time has come when we must do something positive and constructive. Not in a join-'em-if-you-cannot-lick-'em attitude, but by getting really involved with a mature and honest involvement and a deep interest in the welfare of the youth and the welfare of the Church.

This is the spirit which Vatican II is trying to impart to us — to be tolerant but concerned, gentle but guiding. A good shepherd, if we may invoke our time-worn traditional parables, does not lead the flock with a whip but with the sound of his voice, a voice that creates confidence in the flock. How very characteristic of the principles of modern and scientific management. A good leader in our modern day concept does not coerce, he only persuades. He does not throw his weight around, he creates incentives that, in turn, create voluntary obedience. He does not dictate, he builds up a sense of belongingness and participation. He is not callous to the needs of his subordinates, but is quick to listen and offer solutions.

The purpose of liturgical reforms instituted by Vatican II is precisely this: to make liturgy pastorally efficacious to the fullest degree in terms of clearer understanding of the faithful and for their easier participation with devotion and action. We are not only to be devoted, but active and participating. We are not to be members but leaders and agents of change. The work of the Church is a continuing process, for it is in this process that the life of the Church is. Liturgy is the life of the Church, and this life is Christ, this life is God. No matter how we look at it, God is not dead, in spite of Nietzsche. Nor is He sleeping, in spite of the situationalists. The farther man goes out to the galaxies, the closer he comes to the awareness that God lives. And there is much to undertake to make His life felt all over the world.

The revolt of the young is in perfect harmony with this undertaking. They have made us realize that they — and we — are still searching for something, something still absent in our lives. Vatican II has provided us with the incentives and the means by which we may find that something. It has given us a revitalized liturgy, a new life sensitive with the impulsiveness of youth. There is in the whole scheme some sort of the Bergsonian *elan vital* which continuously operates in the life of the Church and in the life of each of us as members of the Church. Or some sort of a *Ki* in the Zen-oriented *Aikido* which sustains and directs every move of the individual, physically and spiritually. The unrest of the youth is energy which can be appropriately directed by our own well directed energies.

Therein lies the challenge. We are breed of an apathetic generation being jolted from lethargy by the innocence of youth. They want something from us, and we cannot afford to ignore the demand. We are in fact under obligation not to ignore the demand. We have to act, and to act now. For now is the best time to make up for our negligences, inadequacies and apathy.

In our awakening, or reawakening, we are not without the necessary tools and incentives to carry out our new-found tasks. Vatican II has given us liturgy, the youth has given us the jolt out of our lethargy.