

Editorial

The concept of authority is perhaps one of the most difficult for us to get straight: there are plenty of naive accounts which underrate or overestimate it. The publication this year of *Problems of Authority* (edited by J. M. Todd; D.L.T., 25s.) would therefore be noteworthy in any event, a team of theologians giving the question careful treatment; but one article in particular makes it necessary reading for a thinking Christian. This is the chapter called 'the authority of the councils', by Peter Fransen, S.J., containing a theological analysis of the nature of authority in the Church generally. A single extract must suffice to show its quality:

Since authority is divine, it is never the private possession of any man. It is divine and was given by the Father to his Son, our risen Lord, who is the one and only High Priest just as he alone is our King. Every other exercise of authority becomes by the same token, and in a very real sense, a *diaconia*, a ministry. 'Minister' means 'servant'. We have already seen that we do not possess truth, it possesses us. So too we do not possess authority, authority possesses us.

Without this thoroughly Catholic notion of authority it would not be possible to understand how submission to its command does not in any way inhibit our freedom to think as boldly as we please. In the last century it was Newman who saw the point most clearly, and showed his grasp by a consistency of behaviour which to shallower men looked like an uneasy shift between the extremes of the liberal and ultramontane parties then in the Church. Mistakes in this matter are certainly easy to make.

It follows that we must often ask ourselves whether we are rightly exercising our Christian privilege of thinking freely. An article in this month's *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* brings out some of the points to be watched. To mention but two - are we in a position to ask 'awkward' questions without prejudice? Are we, in matters of faith, free to make mistakes and so to learn from them? We have also to consider our children. Are they being taught their religion in such a way as to be opened to the gospel freedom, able, as Dr. Lawlor tells us a free man is, 'to take full responsibility for themselves and their decisions and actions, to be self-determined and self-aware'? Anything less than this in our faith is acceptance of something less than the perfect humanity that our Lord recovered for us, and into the fulness of which we must learn, all our lives, to grow.