

TAENA AND THE LAND

THIS is in the nature of a few comments on the suggestion made in Dom Griffiths' paper that a literal return to the land and manual work might be a necessary condition for the symbolism of the Bible to come to life in all its manifold richness. Our experience in a lay community of families engaged in agricultural and craft work suggests that there is a vital relationship between the land and the symbol. But the mystery of the relationship precludes a generalization.

Before we were received into the Church our search for community was a search through the arid wastes of the modern pagan world for the primary universal symbol of Mother Church. We were for many years unable—as are so many today—to recognize the visible Church as this bearer of life because 'Community' was so lacking in practice. At a time when man has become divorced from both natural and supernatural roots and has consequently disintegrated into unrelated parts, it is this aspect of the Church as a Community, as the mystical body of Christ incarnate in human life, which is so crucial. The symbols of community were still there in the sacraments, the liturgy and the teaching of the Church, but it was not being lived in daily life—not taking form—and therefore the Word was not spoken.

When the head and the heart are divorced, we have to return to the sources so that the hidden springs can rise again. The Bible, the Church, speak of the sources of life, of energy. A dogma, a sacrament, are sources of life, symbols which grow and unfold where two or three are gathered together and the sap rises from the multitudinous roots. By living them, the symbols are experienced and progressively understood by all men—whether intellectually comprehended or not. By manual work, prayer, reading, poverty and obedience to God's will, the symbol will spring to life in a way which is obscure to the intellect, in fact the latter is afraid of the symbol because of its power and seeks to destroy it by analysis. To live the symbol is to accept the mystery of the inherent irreconcilable opposites and to suffer the birth of the new form which contains and transcends the opposites—as the man and woman await the birth of the child.

'Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son.'

'He whom the whole world cannot contain, becoming man, was enclosed within thy womb.'

The miracles of our Lord, the kissing of the leper by St Francis, the meeting of hand with earth and dung are mysterious, related necessities.

As townsmen, one of our earliest experiences was to meet the natural vegetative and instinctual cycles for the first time. The earth, the sun, rain and wind; ploughing, sowing, harvesting, decaying; love and death—these became the warp in the fabric of our lives. Through the many personal relationships of the community life we began to be aware of these elemental cycles in the inner experience of each individual—each autumn brings a different kind of death, each summer we harvest what we have sown in the winter and early spring.

Finally we were led to the Church, to the liturgical cycle in the Mass and the divine Office and discovered that here were the same cycles on the supernatural level. The natural was redeemed, life was at one and undivided. It needed no comprehensive analysis to bring all this to life. The life was there in the beginning, taking us in flesh and blood through the Old Testament to the Redemption.

To understand a symbol, to stand under it, means to experience its growing and expanding power of illumination. To work backwards from the New Testament to the Old, to analyse, inspect, is to destroy the meaning and the life—to use the rational faculty in the wrong place. We have to begin at the beginning and wait in silence with the humility of a child, not trying to grasp the meaning before the appointed time.

The following quotation from the Epistle of the blessed Apostle James is incorporated into the provisional Rule of the Community to which I belong:

'Wait, then, brethren, in patience for the Lord's coming. See how the farmer looks forward to the coveted returns of his land, yet waits patiently for the early and the late rains to fall before they can be brought it. You too must wait patiently and take courage. The Lord's coming is close at hand.'

GEORGE INESON