

VI

THE CHRISTIAN CELL

The concept of the Christian revolutionary cell, in dialectical relationship with both the thetical church and the world, is a third theme in F. Hastings Smyth's rapprochement between Marxism and the Incarnational process. The revolutionary cell has a very different history in Smyth's thought than either materialism or dialectics. It developed not out of theory but out of the practical reality of trying to make Metacosmesis effective in the world. It is therefore a theme that develops later than either materialism or dialectics and, more than either of them, reflects the social and political realities of the immediate situation. The revolutionary cell comes to have increasing importance in the late forties, as the theological rapprochement between dialectical materialism and Metacosmesis runs into difficulty, as relations with secular Communists begin to break down and as Smyth begins to see the true locus of revolution as the S.C.C. cell and the Anamnesis.

There is virtually no positive reference in Smyth's theological writings before the founding of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth in 1939 nor in Manhood Into God to the need for a group of revolutionary Christians to set itself apart from the institutional church to promote the

Incarnational process. The early Living Church articles and Manhood Into God consistently speak of the revolutionary Incarnational process as the vocation of the whole church, not a particular portion of it. At this point Smyth is addressing the whole church, attempting to call it to its true vocation of revolutionary action and suffering. No provision is made for a smaller group with a special commitment to this vocation or for a vanguard working in the broader church or the world. Indeed, the one reference in Manhood Into God to religious communities is negative, stressing the non-Incarnational character of their withdrawal from the world in the middle ages. (MIG 137-8)

However, at the same time, Smyth had established an oratory, gathered a group of students and others around him committed to the Incarnational process and in 1939 formed a religious society. I have already discussed the genesis of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth. Its roots were in the religious orders, communities and oratories of the catholic revival in the Church of England in the last half of the nineteenth century. Smyth had much contact with such groups in England, particularly the Community of the Resurrection (Mirfield), the Order of St. Benedict (Nashdom), the Society of the Sacred Mission (Kelham) and the Oratory of the Good Shepherd.¹ As an Anglo-Catholic returning to the States and seeking to minister to students, Smyth naturally turned to the model of a religious community.

There are at least two reasons for the lack of any mention in Manhood Into God of the formation of small groups of Incarnational Christians, even though this was what was developing in Smyth's practice at the time. First, in the beginning years in Cambridge, the formation of the community was in a very immature stage; Smyth ministered to many at the Oratory who lacked any commitment to the Incarnation. There were individuals committed to the revolutionary process but no stable community. Smyth was not yet in a strong enough position to commend this route in his published writings. Second, as an Anglo-Catholic, Smyth was deeply committed to a strong theology of the church, over against the individual believer or sect. The latter two he associated with protestantism. In the late thirties Smyth was seeking converts to the church, not to his own particular community. Likewise, he saw the revolutionary Incarnational process (Transubstantiation) as a mark of the whole church, not simply a sect.

The latter point is very clear from the paper entitled "Suggested Principles for an Oratory within the Parish of Christ Church, Cambridge (Provisional)" dating from early 1939. Smyth notes that the oratory "affirms its corporate solidarity as a functional part of the Catholic Church", through the local parish to the diocese to the catholic church throughout the world. Smyth continues,

Any weakening of this principle would mean a complete stultification of the principles of Catholic corporate solidarity upon which the Oratory takes its stand. The Oratory cannot exist as a thing apart in itself without this parish connection, unless it becomes in some sense sectarian and thus deny its own very life principle.

Smyth goes on to urge that the "closest bonds" may be established between the oratory and the parish, that oratory members shall be communicants of the parish church and that baptisms and confirmations of those associated with the oratory be held in the church rather than the oratory. Smyth concludes, "All this implies that the life and work of the Oratory shall be looked upon as one of the activities of the Parish, rather than as a separate sort of activity which the Parish might hospitably permit to function independently within its jurisdiction."² While some allowance must be made for the purpose of this paper, namely to gain support for the oratory within the parish, it is also clear that Smyth's strong catholic ecclesiology resisted at this point any sectarian separation from the rest of the church.

At this point, Smyth argued that the role of the oratory was to win friends for the church among "those secular forces which so largely dominate the social front today". In his report on the oratory's activities in 1938-1939, prepared shortly before the establishment of the S.C.C., Smyth writes,

The Oratory has won many friends among labor leaders and progressive middle-class people in the community, most of whom are not only lapsed, but often disgusted with and openly hostile to the Church. It is felt that there

is a great opportunity for exerting a positive Christian influence among these people, and for leading them back into the Church.

Again, the oratory is a functional unit of the church, constituted to work amongst those on the political left alienated from the church. In his covering letter to C. Leslie Glenn, Smyth reiterates that he and the oratory have no desire to be "separatist" or "sectarian".³

Throughout the late thirties Smyth and oratory members worked closely with American Communists. The discipline of Communist Party cells also began to have some influence on Smyth's concept of a religious community. As I indicated in an earlier chapter, in talks to oratory residents in the summer of 1939, Smyth warned them against contact with the middle class, including friends and relatives, "except when an appropriate objective is in view." Social events are to be avoided unless they are for "strategic ends".⁴ The same talks also very strongly emphasized the role of obedience in the oratory.

Smyth's worsening relations with Christ Church helped push him from a simple oratory to a religious community. His disillusionment with the Episcopal church was also growing. In preparing for the founding of the S.C.C., Smyth re-wrote the "Suggested Principles for an Oratory" paper in terms of the proposed Society of the Catholic Commonwealth. The resulting paper omits any mention of a parish relationship, including the theological justification quoted

above.⁵ Instead, the individual "houses" of the Society relate directly with the diocesan bishop.

Shortly before the founding of the S.C.C., Smyth prepared a draft of the Society's constitution and rule, which later developed into the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth manual. It consists of a typewritten text with insertions in pencil. It provides a clear theological justification for the establishment of small Christian cells to promote the Incarnational process. The draft begins by noting that the S.C.C. will exist to combat individualistic and extricationalist Christianity and goes on to put forward the Incarnational process theology of Manhood Into God. Smyth notes the importance of the emergence of small groups of Christians to promote the Incarnational process. The original typewritten text reads,

This kind of corporate redemption of the world, into a redeemed Sacramental Humanity continuous with Our Lord's individual humanity, must ever be initiated through the visible emergence of Sacramental Nuclei, as seeds of a more widely spreading Social Process. This Society of the Catholic Commonwealth proposes to be one such Social Nucleus.⁶

The emended text adds the term "cell", speaking of "the visible emergence within human society of Catholic Sacramental Nuclei or Cells, such that they may serve as the seeds of a more widely spreading Social Process".

The emended text goes on to say that the S.C.C. shall be a group of men "attempting to re-initiate in micro-

cosm, what shall one day appear in macrocosm, as the Social order of the Kingdom". As such, the "social emphasis" of the S.C.C. in the world shall be the perfection of the Eucharistic Offertory, "the bread and wine of Our Lord's natural humanity, formed within this material world, that these may be fitting substances for transubstantiation into His Body and Blood." The text goes on to elaborate on the kind of practical work in theology and philosophy that S.C.C. members might pursue.

Smyth goes on to point out that "the newly forming Social Order of the Visible Kingdom . . . must have a profoundly radical impact upon the disordered arrangements of our present day world". The world must be "re-created in the form of a non-competitive society" with the production of goods for "common and universal use rather than for individualistic profit". Members of the S.C.C. will give leadership along such lines, supporting and working with secular movements moving in this direction. At the same time, the S.C.C. will witness that a "purely humanistic" attack upon the world does not go far enough insofar as such an attack requires divine completion.

The S.C.C. will need to stand over against the church, which has "ceased its warfare with the world's social and economic arrangements" and become "The Chaplain of Capitalism". Smyth continues,

We accept the bitter conclusion that much of the present

human organization of the Church must be destroyed. Fortunately, it is possible, at any particular time and place, to make a distinction between the Sacramental Organism of Our Lord's Body and its human organizational framework. Therefore, it is also possible for us to affirm, at this present point in history, that much of the human structure of the Church needs to be pulled down if the Organism itself is not to be stifled. Pseudo-Ecclesia Delenda Est! [The false church must be destroyed!]

Smyth sees the S.C.C. as an agent of the "Sacramental Organism of Our Lord's Body" against the institutional church which has betrayed its divine vocation.⁶

In this draft, one sees the emergence of the ecclesiology that characterizes Smyth's theology in the forties and fifties. The institutional church has fatally compromised itself with capitalism; however, the means of its rebirth remains in the Christian sacraments which it continues to practice. The S.C.C. has emerged from within the church as a prophetic remnant that, through its teaching and practice of the Incarnational process (including, of course, the sacraments), will attack the evil social order of both the world and the institutional church. In this process, it cooperates with secular (and especially Communist) forces that are seeking the same ends, taking up and fulfilling these secular revolutionary activities in the Incarnation. As Smyth wrote to William Chase in January 1940, the S.C.C. is "a fighting revolutionary group".⁷

The first edition of The Society of the Catholic Commonwealth (the "Red Book") appeared at the end of 1941.

It is Smyth's first published reference to "cells" and takes up the themes and phrases of the earlier draft. The manual first outlines the Incarnational process theology of Manhood Into God, relating it to the vocation of the whole church. However, Smyth then moves on to the peculiar vocation of the S.C.C.: "The Society therefore sets itself the task of forming one or more social seeds or cells of that new social order required by Our Lord's extending humanity."⁸ The units consist of both members regular and secular. The latter "work to leaven their respective communities, to change and reorganize them in ways which shall bring their common relationships somewhat more nearly into the pattern of Our Lord's humanity than is possible under our present social and economic organization".⁹ Both groups of members offer up their accomplishments at the Eucharistic offertory.

The cells are a foretaste of the reign of God. Every nucleus of the S.C.C. "seeks to show forth in social microcosm that organic order which will be proper to the social macrocosm of the Kingdom of God". The cells become the means by which the Incarnational process takes over and shapes the world:

Each such unit must seek, by Our Lord's grace . . . to be itself a social cell of such living order that it might conceivably grow to engulf the whole world within its own living organism, much as the seed of a vine (our Lord said "I am the Vine") might grow to incorporate into its ordered living structure the random elements of its material environment.¹⁰

If each Incarnational cell behaves in such a way, it is

probable that it will carry "a potential revolutionary threat to its surrounding unredeemed world" and to the "present human organization of the 'Christian' Church" insofar as the latter serves as a "vehicle and defense for a perverted 'extrication Christianity'". As in the earlier draft, Smyth goes on to make the distinction between the "human organization of the Church" and the "social organism of Our Lord's humanity". "It is possible that the former must be largely destroyed in order that the latter may emerge anew."¹¹

As in the earlier draft, Smyth goes on to say that the S.C.C. will work with all secular groups which seem to be working "somewhat in the general direction of the demands of the natural foundation of the Kingdom of God". This natural foundation requires "a genuine commonwealth", "a common possession of the riches and resources of God's creation in such ways that they may benefit all men in proportion to their relative needs". At this point in history, it is secular (although unsaid, Smyth means Communist) groups that hold out the greatest hope of accomplishing these goals, holding out to Catholic Christians "the greatest promise of that more nearly perfected bread and wine" for the Eucharistic offertory.¹²

Here one can see a clear positive relationship between the revolutionary Incarnational cell and secular revo-

lutionary groups. Incarnational Christians require a perfected social order for a perfected Eucharistic offertory. Secular revolutionary groups are holding out the greatest promise of that perfected social order so Incarnational Christians are to work closely with them. While an ultimate goal for Incarnational Christians is to bring secular revolutionaries directly into the Incarnational process through conversion, for the moment there is no strong attempt to convert secular revolutionaries to the Incarnation; rather, their present secular contribution to a perfected social order is recognized, appreciated and supported. Their contribution to the offertory is, in effect, brought forward through the offering of Incarnational Christians. The secular revolutionary process is, in a sense, an autonomous component of the broader Incarnational revolutionary process, to be in due time taken up, incorporated and fulfilled in it. Given such a theology, Smyth is able at the end of the 1941 edition of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth to tell S.C.C. members that it is more likely that they will find themselves working with secular organizations (and "possibly even anti-religious" ones) than with the church since the latter is largely indifferent or hostile.

But secular work is not the main aim of the S.C.C.; it only contributes to the broader aim of forwarding the Incarnational process and the reign of God in the world. Smyth concludes,

. . . we must carry on in the midst of our surrounding world, as a highly prophetic Sacramental unit, microcosmic, realizing in a deep outline of corporate, fully Sacramental, social living, a foretaste of the cultural pattern of the substantial human foundations of the Kingdom of God.¹³

By now, Smyth has come to realize that it will take small intentional groups of Christians committed to the Incarnational process in both faith and action to have any effect on the sinful and disordered structures of capitalist society. He no longer expects the institutional church to take on this task though throughout the forties he continued to entertain the notion that individual parishes might become such revolutionary Incarnational units.

As I have indicated above, while Smyth was writing the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth manual in 1941, he was also involved with the American response to the Malvern Conference through the Church League for Industrial Democracy. The Malvern Manifesto recommended, "In other places [besides parishes] let 'cells' be formed upon the basis of common prayer, study and service", as one way Christians might work for justice in the world. (As I noted above, Smyth wrote "A cell is not a 'study group.' It is more like a bacterium" in the margin beside this recommendation.)¹⁴ As C.L.I.D. worked on its concept of a "Malvern cell" throughout 1941, Smyth sought to influence them in the direction of the S.C.C. cell. He re-wrote the manuscript of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth manual as "A Theological Primer

for Malvern Cells, adding an introduction and changing "Society of the Catholic Commonwealth" to "Malvern cell" throughout. The "Theological Primer" was never published.

The introductory section of "A Theological Primer for Malvern Cells" gives some of Smyth's further thoughts on revolutionary Christian cells. After affirming the aims of the Malvern Manifesto and quoting the recommendation on "cells", Smyth comments that parishes, "have largely lost their sense of corporate social vocation" and "their sense of their own organic living unity", seeing themselves as merely human organizations composed of individuals with similar tastes in religion or who have their personal needs met by certain kinds of religious service or preaching. Given this context, Smyth warns that there is a great danger that the Malvern recommendation on cells will be misunderstood and the only result will be new parish organizations (whether study groups, prayer circles or even action groups) that will not understand the depth of the meaning of "cell".

Smyth goes on to discuss the nature of the Christian cell: "The Christian Cell, as a social unit of the redeeming Process of the Incarnation working in the world, must be conceived in biological and organic terms, rather than in terms which are mainly social and organizational." Citing Paul's doctrine of "the Christian Society as a true Body of Christ", Smyth argues that the concept of a cell can be

understood only in the context of "a genuinely vital, living and growing body" and of the relation of that body to the "still unabsorbed" environment.¹⁵ Smyth then goes into the text of the 1941 edition of The Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, changing all references to the S.C.C. to the "Malvern Cell". Again one notes that while in Manhood Into God the Incarnational process of absorption and transformation of the environment into the living body was seen as taking place generally in the church, here it is limited to the revolutionary Incarnational cell.

Both the 1941 edition of The Society of the Catholic Commonwealth and "A Theological Primer for Malvern Cells" end with a reference to Incarnational cells as "a fore-taste of the cultural pattern of the substantial human foundation of the Kingdom of God". While I have discussed extensively the Incarnational process that moves Christians closer to the reign of God, I have not yet discussed in any detail Smyth's concept of the reign or kingdom of God. Such a discussion is important, as Smyth's concept of the "Kingdom of God" shapes the structure and work of revolutionary Incarnational cells. Likewise, Smyth draws links between the reign of God and post-revolutionary Marxist society (such as the Soviet Union), further building the relationship between revolutionary Incarnational cells and secular revolutionary groups.

Smyth's fullest early discussion of the reign of God

(Smyth uses the term "Kingdom of God") is in the last two chapters of Manhood Into God, "Characteristics of a Redeemed Social Order". Smyth asserts that Christianity teaches that a redeemed social order on earth is achievable. It can be brought about by social, political and economic planning, guided by the Incarnation.

In Smyth's vision of the redeemed social order, people will not work for individual wealth or profit, but for the community's wealth, without expectation of individual return. Human beings' chief satisfaction will be in seeking and maintaining justice. Exploitation of the world's resources will result in a fair distribution of wealth. The system will operate best for individuals when they try to lose themselves in the corporate self-offering. (Smyth discusses the Soviet Union as a model, very optimistically.) People will also see the functional relationships between the individual and the community; people will see the social implications of their work. There will be a great freedom of choice of occupations and interests. Women and children will be economically independent of their husbands and fathers, leading to a more Christian family life; marriage will be based on love, not economic dependence. The division between work (regarded as a necessary evil) and the rest of life (family, friends, leisure, etc.) will be abolished; there will be unity of work and recreation. In the redeemed world

"there will be a maximum of free rational participation on the part of all individuals in the varied processes of corporate human living" -- that is, the redeemed social order will be a representative democracy, extended beyond government to every form of human endeavour. (MIG 457, Smyth's italics) In the end, God alone rules, but on this side, Jesus' humanity requires a democracy, to prepare for the kingdom on the other side.

Smyth's view of democracy in the redeemed social order is hierarchical. In the present capitalist economic system, advancement is only through increased wealth. The capitalist hierarchy is anti-artistic and anti-intellectual; the result is a levelling tendency. The personal qualities necessary for capitalism are those of "an untamed jungle". (MIG 471) But in the redeemed social order, the result of democracy is a "richly varied hierarchical structure" based on social utility and accessible to all. Smyth compares this structure favourably with the Soviet one-party state. (MIG 479)

The new order must be a rational one; it is not good enough just to socialize capital wealth and broaden democracy. It is the Incarnation which shapes the hierarchical order. At the top of the hierarchy is the Theologian-Philosopher; then the scientific thinkers; then the teachers of theology, philosophy and science; then those involved in the practical administration of living; then those involved

in the practical execution of administrative plans; and finally, those involved in actual manufacture. Smyth explains that this hierarchy is based in the Incarnation:

The chief point to be made here is that a redeemed social order will rest upon a rational basis and, in its ascending hierarchical levels, will correspond to the true order of a fully actualized human nature, an order which is that of the social extension of the perfect humanity which was the achievement of Our Lord Himself. (MIG 487)

The hierarchy Smyth puts forward is a ranking of values and social function, not human worth. The philosopher is not necessarily a better person than a street sweeper. People will not be evaluated by their place in the hierarchy but by their development of natural virtues. Smyth maintains that human virtue flourishes best in such an order. While in the capitalist order, hierarchy and democracy are in conflict with one another, in the redeemed social order they are perfectly compatible.

The most characteristic activity of men and women in the new order will be worship and sacrifice:

The substance of natural Wisdom is ever transubstantiated into the Substance of Divine Faith. . . . Our natural order will not only be redeemed, but will be made supernaturally glorious in the sight of men and God. (MIG 490-91)

It is, of course, through the Eucharist in the new social order that this offering and Transubstantiation takes place.

In the end, however, the redeemed earthly reign receives its full consumation only at the Last Day. Smyth

concludes Manhood Into God with only a short description of the heavenly consummation of the earthly reign. Transubstantiation finally leads the redeemed earthly reign forward out of time into its final end in eternity,

where we too, when Our Lord's earthly Kingdom shall be consummated, as fellow members of His Risen Body, the Catholic Church Triumphant, shall one day have our place among that Blessed Company. In that Last Day, creation having fulfilled its final purpose, God alone shall be all in all. (MIG 491-92)

Smyth is unwilling to say more about the "kingdom". Virtually his entire attention in Manhood Into God is given to the building of the earthly reign (the redeemed social order) as a divine process guided by the Incarnational process.

Numerous characteristics of the redeemed social order (or earthly "Kingdom of God") as described by Smyth in Manhood Into God appear in his concept of the revolutionary Incarnational cell. Among them are sharing of wealth, work for justice, corporate self-offering, development of individual gifts and skills, integration of work and leisure, democracy, hierarchy, rationality and worship. Insofar as Smyth draws links between the redeemed Incarnational social order and the model of the Soviet Union, one can say that the S.C.C. revolutionary cell is also shaped by the secular Marxist model of post-revolutionary society. The S.C.C. was very much a "one party" society, representing one highly developed theological point of view; there was no democracy in the S.C.C. on basic theological questions. This "one

party" perspective is consistent with and strengthened by Smyth's theology of the reign of God which is, in turn, supported by his positive evaluation of the one-party state in the Soviet Union.

Smyth is explicit in his comparison of Incarnational Christian cells and Communist Party cells in a letter to Reuel Howe in the spring of 1942. Smyth is complaining about the concept of Christian witness being planned as the theme for the annual Episcopal church Sweet Briar Conference on Christian education. Smyth argues that "witnesses" do not go out from Christian society into the world but rather "a new Social Organism growing out from and centered in Our Lord Himself . . . take[s] the world into it!" The S.C.C.'s witness, therefore, is recruitment of active members. Smyth makes the analogy with the Communist Party:

The best modern analogy for what Christians ought to be doing . . . is the method of the Communists. These people organize "cells". These cells are definitely revolutionary nuclei, they are tiny units of a new world which shall be made to embrace the whole world of tomorrow. Communists do not go out from their cell meetings to "witness" to Communism within the surrounding world. They go out to plan how they may overthrow this old world and establish a new one of which the already established cells shall be the initial units emerging to "take over" all the materials of human life as these become detached from their old patterns and available for incorporation into the patterns of an utterly new society. Christianity is like this, only infinitely more so, in that Christian Cells have a Divine life granted to them and maintained by Our Lord Himself.

Christian and Communist revolutionary cells share a common methodology -- the incorporation of the environment into

themselves through its revolutionary reordering.

However, in the last sentence above, a common theme of Smyth's rapprochement with Marxism reappears. Because of their divine vocation, Christian cells are able to go beyond secular revolutionary cells. Smyth continues,

Christian cells not only meet (as the Communist ones do) for mutual edification, intellectual instruction and corporate inspiration for further work. They meet together with an "organic" corporateness which no other human assemblage can have--because the "corporateness" is God's gift, rather than man's achievement--and they have special life functions (like hearts and lungs and kidneys in an animal body), and these functional organs are the Sacraments, the Heart being the Mass.¹⁶

The weaknesses of purely human revolutionary cells are corrected by the divine grace given through Christian community life and the sacraments in revolutionary Incarnational cells.

Throughout the forties and even into the fifties one sees a continuing ambivalence in Smyth towards the usefulness of parish work for the development of S.C.C. cells. In the early forties Smyth thought the two could be combined. However, with the failure at St. Stephen's, Boston, and his inability to find any parish, Smyth became much more pessimistic. Not until several members secular of the S.C.C. became parish priests in the late forties did Smyth revive the notion of developing S.C.C. cells in parishes.

Sometimes Smyth seemed to suggest that a parish could be made into a revolutionary unit. In early 1942, he wrote William B. Spofford, "I have very definite ideas of

what I would like to do in a parish and how it could be made an actively liturgical centre (which to me means revolutionary, as you well know)".¹⁷ However, by the end of 1942, Smyth was careful to distinguish between parish work and the revolutionary cell. Shortly before his appointment to St. Stephen's, Smyth wrote Robert Martin:

I am convinced that we, as a Society, must be careful not to confuse our work, or what we are, with parish work. I do not believe that any parish, under present circumstances, can be developed as an organ of expres-
sion for all that we stand for. Thus we must keep up and cultivate our own nuclear work.

Smyth goes on to suggest that the parish would be useful as a means of contact with a larger number of people, as a means of "infiltration" of the "conventional and organized church" and as a "feeder" into the S.C.C.¹⁸ It is clear that for Smyth the small revolutionary Christian cell is central, not conventional parish life.

A similar view appears in a set of Smyth's notes for a lecture series on "The Basic Principles of Christian Social Action" dating from 1943 or 1944. Smyth urges his audience to start an oratory, arguing that they are not thereby creating a new group within the church for the "sacramental group", insofar as it functions, "is the whole church-- because of the Church's organic nature". Smyth is pessimistic about the rest of parish work. His notes read,

Parish work has to be carried on for the sake of Charity. Also because it gives access to a great company of somewhat sentimentally Christian people. The people are

baptized, but only technically really Christian. . . .
 But give up the idea of making a primary life-work of
 "bringing parishes along."

Rather, it is the "Sacramental cell" where God's will is
 being done:

Only within the Sacramental cell can the will of God be
 fulfilled. We are then, not just one more progressive
 and enthusiastic group among many others. We are the
 group. We are the only group which in the end must pre-
 vail, if God's will is to be done--and others who do not
 come along with us are fighting against God in the last
 analysis.¹⁹

This sense of the uniqueness of the S.C.C.'s vocation in-
 creases in the late forties. It is clear that even where
 S.C.C. priests remain in parishes, their primary obligation
 is to the work of the revolutionary Incarnational cell.

In Chapter IX ("Character of the Secular Order Now
 Demanded By the Liturgy") of Discerning the Lord's Body,
 Smyth discusses the role of what he variously calls "Sakra-
 mental Christians", "Sacramental Christian groups", "Incar-
 national group[s]" and sometimes simply "Christian groups".
 This book was intended partly to popularize Smyth's Incarna-
 tional theology and the broadness of these terms suggests
 that Smyth is still not prepared to exclude the possibility
 of such groups developing in parishes. However, Smyth has
 clearly moved away from the church-centred ecclesiology of
Manhood Into God to the need for intensive intentional
 groups committed to Metacosmic faith and action.

Smyth argues that it is both possible and necessary
 for "Sacramental Christians" to come to common agreement on

secular economic and political issues, and in particular, on the choice between a socialist reorganization of western financial and industrial structures and a violent reactive capitalism leading towards fascism. Christians as Christians must "have a clear concept of the kinds of environmental social relationships required by a true human nature as redeemed within Our Lord's social humanity, while at the same time they see how these required relationships are denied by our present social situation." (DTLB 132) Smyth argues that Sacramental Christians are required both by the Incarnation and by the accuracy of Marxist analysis to choose the socialist option.

Smyth suggests that meetings of Sacramental Christians around the Eucharist provide a forum for the discussion of secular issues:

[It is] highly important that all such practical questions be discussed within the social circle of the Sacramental group. The celebration of Our Lord's Memorial ought habitually to be followed by a group social gathering, preferably a gathering for a common meal such as was customary in the early Church and was known as the Agape. Here let the future plans for practical action, plans which are to be applied to the further reconciliation of the bread and wine for future Memorials, be thrashed out. (DTLB 133)

This pattern, which had already been established at the oratory, became the standard practice of S.C.C. cells. The cell becomes the source of strategy for revolutionary action upon the disordered world.

Smyth goes on to make some suggestions about how

sacramental groups might come to common agreement on strategy for approaching the secular world. He suggests that everyone should be familiar with "the Marxian method of economic diagnosis and the Marxian theories of economic change which will lead to a future socialized secular order". (DTLB 133) Christians should also be able to detach themselves from their own economic self-interest. In the end, the Christian sacramental group enables unity to emerge. "By the grace of God it is possible to achieve an adequate unity in practical analysis and planning for an organized Christian attack upon the secular disorders of our time." (DTLB 135)

Once an Incarnational group is organized and ready to act on the secular environment, it will discover that it has little power -- "spiritual" Christians will not give support and the world no longer expects decisive action from Christian groups. Sacramental Christians should realize that they cannot act alone but must look to secular revolutionary forces for allies:

Since [Sacramental Christians] cannot now expect to establish anything even approaching a mass movement, either political or economic, upon their own basis of analysis, or upon the basis of those actions and objections which are peculiar to Christianity, they must look about themselves in the secular world to discover what mass movements are available on some other basis, but whose immediate trends can be seen as moving in the Christian direction. (DTLB 137)

Smyth cites organized labour, the Communist left and civil

liberties organizations as groups Sacramental Christians should be prepared to work with. He also urges Sacramental Christians to work "as a single unit in its own corporate right" (that is, not just as individuals) on "selected environmental movements", even if these be very local ones.

(DTLB 140) All such work must be for basic structural change since it is "those disorders in the secular sources of their bread and wine" at the offertory that Christians are trying to change; palliative work which simply maintains the status quo is unacceptable. (DTLB 141) Smyth warns that the Sacramental group must not be purist but must be willing to accept that God is working through groups that are at times anti-Christian. In this context, Smyth discusses revolutionary violence, arguing that Christians must affirm a revolutionary rather than evolutionary approach to the elimination of capitalism. (DTLB 142-44)

In the end, it is the "logic of the Offertory [that] directs the reconciling attention of every Incarnational group to the deep disorders of that system whereby the environing unredeemed world exploits its material resources, and whereby it produces and distributes its manufactured goods." (DTLB 148) Humanity now realizes that any kind of Christian reconciliation is impossible without first dealing with the "material basis" of the world's disorder. Hence, Christians go forth from their "Incarnational centers" not as idealists seeking to change people's attitudes but as "primarily bent

upon a very practical and material quest". "They work by intelligently organized political and economic action, to obtain more tolerable and increasingly fitting portions of natural bread and wine." (DTLB 149)

Two important characteristics of the "Sacramental Christian group" in Discerning the Lord's Body should be noted. The first I have already discussed extensively. At the centre of the group is the Eucharist. It is through the Eucharist that the Metacosmic process operates. In particular, it is the need to perfect the human social offering of bread and wine in the Eucharistic offertory that directs sacramental Christians to work for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist modes of material production (and the economic structures that support them) that mar the offertory gift.

Second, following from the above, Smyth continues to see the Metacosmic process and the work of the "Sacramental Christian group" as sequential, starting first with the secular socio-economic structure, moving on to fulfillment in the Incarnation. Smyth is open to God's presence in secular revolutionary groups: "Fortunately indeed for all humanity, God's goodness and mercy are not bound within the strict confines of His Incarnational group." (DTLB 141)

Incarnational Christians can work wholeheartedly on practical socio-economic issues with secular revolutionaries since

such work contributes to the Incarnational process through perfecting the bread and wine of the offertory. Incarnational Christians believe that in the end Marxist revolutionary activity can find its fulfillment only in the Incarnation (entailing the need for the future conversion of Marxists to the Incarnation) but for the moment cooperation with secular revolutionaries is sufficient as the first part of a movement toward the Incarnation. Smyth's hope is that through working with Incarnational Christians, secular Marxists will see that their revolutionary activity needs the Incarnation to have ultimate meaning.

Because of his rejection of "extricationalist" and idealist religion, Smyth distrusted any theology of the reign or kingdom of God that was vague and general in its objectives or saw the chosen group as withdrawing from the world to become the kingdom. In a list of possible articles drawn up in 1945 for the proposed Catholic Commonwealth quarterly and sent to Sam Bernstein, Smyth suggested one on the "Necessity of organizing for achieving social objectives -- inadequacy of mere exhortation, 'inspiration', or even of mere intellectual education" and noted the need to pick a right basis of social organization. The note continues,

Take a crack at the danger and absurdity of the "Kingdom of God" as an immediate organizational objective -- and illustrate copiously with historical utopian failures and the economic reasons for these failures. In other words, the folly of "enclavism."²⁰

At this point, Smyth does not see the Society of the Catho-

lic Commonwealth as a "foretaste of the Kingdom of God" apart from its active cooperation with secular revolutionary groups in attacking the social disorder of individualistic capitalism. The results of such work are essential to the movement towards the reign of God. The necessity of this work is also certainly the theme of the closing pages of Discerning the Lord's Body discussed previously.

Discerning the Lord's Body and the 1945 edition of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth (which reprinted without change the 1941 edition's description of S.C.C. cells) were the two discussions of Incarnational cells that most shaped the development of S.C.C. cells in the immediate post-war period. Smyth's intensive study of Marxist dialectical analysis which followed Discerning the Lord's Body also shaped the direction of S.C.C. cells. Commitment to Marxist dialectical analysis became a sine qua non of membership in the S.C.C. in the post-war years. The first published discussion of antithetical Anglo-Catholicism appears in a S.C.C. Bulletin article, "Western Church History Interpreted: Christianity's Dialectic Whence and Whither", in the spring of 1946, although Smyth does not immediately begin using dialectical terminology in describing the vocation of the S.C.C.²¹

Post-war developments were also shaped by Smyth's discussions and conflicts with other Christian socialist

groups, particularly the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action. The A.F.S.A. conflict helped confirm the S.C.C.'s vocation as a revolutionary Incarnational cell and contributed to Smyth's movement towards a dialectical analysis of that vocation. Smyth was initially impressed by a corporate sense in Canadian Anglicanism absent in the Episcopal church in the U.S. However, as I have indicated above, when A.F.S.A. began to function, Smyth became alarmed at the social democratic tendencies of some of its members. In July 1945 he asked an A.F.S.A. member, John Peacock, to withdraw a flyer because it included the assertion that "Fascism and Communism both bring war".²³ He complained to Frank Carthy in October 1946 that some of the members were anti-Communist and knew nothing of Marxism.²⁴ He complained to Sam Pollard in January 1947 of A.F.S.A.'s relations with the "red-baiting" Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Despite the annoyance of the Communists' tactics, Smyth continued, "one cannot escape the objective truth that the Marxian basis of social change is scientifically sound, and that reformists are the stooges. . . of the worst kind of social reaction". If A.F.S.A. forbids its members to work with Marxian groups, "its usefulness as a spearhead organization is finished".²⁵

The internal conflicts within A.F.S.A. continued throughout 1947. In April Smyth complained to an A.F.S.A. member, Ray Corbett, of the Montreal group's lack of understanding of dialectical analysis. Such an understanding is

essential to any Incarnational group:

For myself I am convinced of the general validity of the dialectic analysis of all history. And I think that any Incarnational group, if it is to sustain its inner unity and is to act effectively within its environment, must come to agreement in this matter of basic scientific belief.

An Incarnational group cannot sustain the denial of dialectical analysis and the resulting split between revolutionaries and reformists. Sacramental unity cannot heal this split. "Sacramental Unity is the crown, not the cause, of practical unity within any Sacramental group." The Offertory of such a divided group "will be gravely compromised because of practical contradictions and work at cross purposes".²⁶

In a letter written to John Peacock at the same time, Smyth repeats that a "Sacramental group" cannot remain satisfied with merely "spiritual" or "mystical" unity. "I must repeat that I think you have to adopt certain intellectual requirements based on an acceptance of the historical dialectic." This does not mean that everyone must make a detailed study of dialectics but those who do not "must obediently accept the dialectic principles as laid down by members competent to do so".²⁷ For Smyth, acceptance of Marxist dialectic analysis was a sine qua non of the revolutionary Incarnational cell.

After his 1947 Arundel conference lectures on dialectics, Smyth decided that A.F.S.A. had the potential for becoming a liberal "front" for the revolutionary S.C.C.

Shortly after the conference, Smyth proposed such an arrangement to Sam Pollard:

I think AFSA ought to be based broadly and ought to serve as a kind of "front" organization, just as Fr. [K.H.] Ting said. But there must be an inner group which is all-out and knows the score, and also understands Marxism and will work with the Communists---no matter how "distressing" these may be found. . . . It occurs to me that this inner group ought to belong to the S.C.C.²⁸

Needless to say, the concept of a "front" group was not unfamiliar to Smyth from his experience working with the Communist Party in the previous ten years. Here one sees him, in effect, regarding the S.C.C. as the religious analogue of the Communist Party. However, as I discussed in an earlier chapter, the plan did not work.

What stands out in the A.F.S.A. conflict is Smyth's insistence that an Incarnational cell must have a commitment to Marxist dialectical analysis and therefore to revolutionary rather than evolutionary social change. Smyth argued that such a commitment was not a matter of personal opinion or preference but the result of the scientific truth of dialectical analysis. Nor was he willing to let reformist and revolutionary elements co-exist in a single unit unless the revolutionary elements were in control. A commitment both to revolution and to working with secular revolutionary groups was, at this point in Smyth's thought, essential to the revolutionary Incarnational vocation of the S.C.C.

Although Smyth made mention of antithetical Anglo-

Catholicism in the preliminary version of Western Christianity's Whence and Whither which appeared in the S.C.C. Bulletin at the end of 1946, it was not until early 1948 that he began to use dialectical terminology extensively in his discussion of the work of the S.C.C. In the November 9, 1947 Bulletin, Smyth published a very critical dialectical analysis of the Ecumenical Movement, characterizing it as a "united front" of protestant capitalism and Roman Catholic feudalism against the emerging socialist revolution.²⁹ Some of Smyth's progressive readers, including Vida Scudder and Mary van Kleeck, objected to the analysis and in February 1948 Smyth published a long rebuttal to readers' objections in four consecutive issues of the Bulletin. In the articles Smyth discusses the characteristics of the religious antithesis, including the S.C.C.

Smyth links the Ecumenical Movement (including rapprochement between protestantism and the Vatican) with the bourgeois capitalist thesis of his dialectical analysis of the present economic and political situation. ("All the official organizations of the Churches . . . are part and parcel of the Western capitalist structure.") They cannot be made the "organizational tools of capitalist overturn". True radicals -- whether in labour or the church -- must seek unity among themselves as part of the antithesis. Christians of integrity must, Smyth suggests, organize as a religious antithesis:

[Christians of exceptional insight and integrity must] while remaining within the Church Visible--just as class-conscious wage-workers remain within the capitalist structure visible--nevertheless draw together and organize consciously in antithetical corporate action to overturn the thesis of the Church Visible--just as exceptionally enlightened workers organize antithetically for the dialectic overturn of capitalism. Such Christians . . . must organize--within the contemporary revolution--as antithetical subgroups to overturn the thetical Church. . . .

Once organized, the religious antithesis must seek out and cooperate with the secular antithesis on the level of "'grass roots' organizations" so that together they can "coordinate themselves within a true antithesis of the present social dialectic."³⁰

After a long discussion of various antithetical movements in protestant churches and the difficulties of organizing the antithesis within Anglicanism on the basis of the Book of Common Prayer, Smyth returns to the question of parish cells and the antithetical character of the S.C.C. Smyth is now much more optimistic about what can be accomplished with parish cells and sees the S.C.C. as the most complete antithetical movement in the church.

In the discussion of parish cells, Smyth warns that little can be accomplished by an isolated priest in a parish, no matter how antithetical his views, without the organization of an antithetical cell within the parish. The priest will have to perform the pietistical and "consolation" duties expected by the thetical church but more is

necessary:

But the priest who understands the radical need for the dialectic overturn of the Church, as well as of the economic and political orders . . . had best seek to organize a relatively small (perhaps secret) group of as many people as he can cull out of his parish, into a converted and self-consciously antithetical nucleus.

Smyth likens the method to that of secular revolutionary groups:

He ought to organize a "cell" of antithetical Christians, much as certain left-wing political groups in the secular level have often organized cells of progressive wage-workers within the larger groups of conventionally-minded--and capitalist thinking--thetical labor union locals.³¹

Smyth argues that the method is also that of Jesus himself, organizing an antithetical group within Judaism.

Smyth moves on to the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth. He describes it as a Christian antithetical group with strong links to the secular antithesis:

This Society is organized consciously as a consistent and unmixed antithetical Christian group. In this sense, the Society is "in" the Episcopal Church, but not "of" it. It is an antithetical "spearhead" group, and finds its most congenial present secular associations in the equally "spearhead" groupings of the fully class-conscious elements of the secular antithetical proletariat of the capitalist structure.³²

Smyth goes on to discuss the theological position of the S.C.C., arguing that its corporate sacramental character better prepares it for the post-revolutionary synthesis than the idealism of other antithetical Christian groups. He likens the S.C.C. to the secular proletariat antithesis.

Smyth argues that in any revolutionary overthrow it

is the antithetical force that is the creative force. Thus, in the movement toward the impending religious revolution, the S.C.C. is a creative force, particularly in striving to be a "prophetically liturgical group". Because it is the antithesis, the S.C.C. is not yet the future synthesis; rather, it is the "fertilizing principle of the coming synthesis". Signs of the S.C.C.'s antithetical "creative quality" include its "distinctive liturgical forms and uses" and its "fresh doctrinal interpretations . . . with their practical applications". While the future Catholic synthesis "will certainly not be Anglican", the S.C.C. stays within the Anglican church because it is the easiest place to develop the sacramental antithetical movement.³³

Smyth ends the series of articles with a strong rejection of the thetical church and a strong affirmation of the S.C.C.'s antithetical character:

But when one enters this Society, he is not invited to support organized Christianity in any of its current thetical manifestations, either Catholic or Protestant. He enters this Society to help in the overturn of the present Church structure in radical dialectic change; and to initiate the emergence of that Christian social organism--that Christian synthesis--which will eventually subsume in living integration the equally revolutionized secular structure of the now dawning socialist age.³⁴

From this point onward, Smyth and the S.C.C. see their vocation in overtly dialectical terms. The publication of Western Christianity's Whence and Whither in 1948 further strengthened this movement towards the use of dialectical

terminology to describe the S.C.C.

The Bulletin series in February 1948 marks Smyth's increasing attention to the nature of the revolutionary Incarnational cell. Smyth's faith in the potential of the S.C.C. to alter radically the future of Christianity grew. The appropriation of dialectical terminology encouraged the process. At the same time as the Bulletin articles appeared, Smyth was writing in even stronger language to John Rowe in Montreal, whom he was trying to recruit into the S.C.C.:

. . . it has been given to us to see that Christianity in this critical hour is to be dialectically refounded. This is a truth almost appalling in its impact. It is, in a sense, frightening. Yet the mere fact that you have had so much as a fragmentary glimpse of this truth lays an obligation upon you which you may not flee; but which you must accept in complete humility.

Smyth goes on to tell Rowe that "upon such as you . . . the very future of Christianity itself may, in the mysterious providence of God, depend". Smyth continues,

You must not think of yourself as just entering "another Society," in the Church. You are taking up your work anew in THE SOCIETY. It is all or nothing.³⁵

Smyth's conviction that the S.C.C. offered the only way for the future was deepening.

It was in this context (three months after the February Bulletin articles) that Smyth decided to reprint the Laski lectures on "The Webbs and Soviet Communism" and his own commentary on Laski, "Materialist Dogma as a Creedal Test". As I have discussed in previous chapters, these articles can be seen as a nodal point in Smyth's relations with

Marxism. Smyth turned away from a rapprochement with dialectical materialism based on the metaphysics of either materialism or dialectics; he became much more critical of the Soviet Union for its dogmatic "religious" attachment to dialectical materialism and the Communist Party in the U.S. for its slavish adherence to the Moscow line; he began to assert strongly an empirically-based Marxist dialectics; and he moved from close cooperation with Communists in practical matters to putting his efforts into building up the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth. All of these developments can be seen in Smyth's letter to John Tunnickliffe of May 11, 1948 discussed above.

As the February Bulletin series and the above letter to John Rowe illustrate, Smyth was already moving towards increased emphasis on building up the S.C.C. when he decided to publish the Laski lectures and his commentary. The dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union and the Communist Party expressed in the Laski lectures and commentary strengthened this movement. This dissatisfaction, along with the failure of the rapprochement with U.S. Communists on the basis of empirically-based dialectics and the increasing Cold War climate in the U.S., forced Smyth back to the S.C.C. as the only revolutionary force that he could unhesitatingly commend. This increased emphasis on the S.C.C. resulted in important changes both in Smyth's concept of the revolution-

ary Incarnational cell and in the relation between that cell and the secular revolutionary movement.

Smyth announced his intention to concentrate on the growth of the S.C.C. to others besides Tunncliffe. To Gilbert Cope he wrote in June 1948,

. . . I am going to devote my chief energy during this coming year to the actual spread of the S.C.C. As I have often remarked lately, we have probably done enough talking, and we have laid a sufficient theoretical basis, now printed up for anyone to read. We must begin to grow in the flesh.³⁶

Smyth began to give increased attention to building up the New Jersey and Montreal cells. He also began to reflect more deeply theologically on the nature of the Christian revolutionary cell.

The change of focus to the Christian revolutionary cell meant that the cell, rather than the world situation, was often the starting point for theological reflection after 1948. The increased emphasis on the Anamnesis and Christian sacrifice after 1948 was a part of this movement inward. It should be emphasized that Smyth did not see this movement as in any way compromising or fundamentally changing basic S.C.C. theology, including its revolutionary, dialectical and Marxist character, but that it was demanded by the circumstances of the secular situation, particularly in the U.S. Nor did this movement inhibit S.C.C. members (particularly those outside the U.S.) from continuing to work with secular Communists, insofar as there was no basic

change in S.C.C. theology as established in Manhood Into God and Discerning the Lord's Body. Smyth continued to support such cooperation, though cautiously.

An early example of the movement towards more emphasis on the Incarnational cell can be seen in a letter Smyth wrote to Tunncliffe in June 1948. Smyth complains that the S.C.C. is in danger of being "maneuvered" to "fit into" the Communist program at the risk of abandoning its witness; rather it should be seeking how Communists might "be fitted into our Lord's purpose". Smyth then comments very critically on the reply of a secular Marxist to "Materialist Dogma as a Creedal Test" and suggests that such discussion with materialists is increasingly pointless. Smyth continues,

So I think that when you say that our great task in the present confusion--sometimes it almost seems like a madhouse to me--is to present objective examples of Christian Sacramental Koinonia, you get to the root of the matter. We must put less faith in talk--or at any rate, be careful not to be all taken up with talk and argument. . . . We must more fully actualize the "etre" of our raison d'etre.

Smyth is arguing for a more self-conscious effort to build up the S.C.C. as the kind of fully Incarnational and revolutionary community unachievable through secular revolution.

The centre of the community of "Sacramental Koinonia" is the Anamnesis:

And this is why we are growing more and more insistent upon our corporate liturgical expression. . . . The more who work together in self-conscious expression of the metacosmic concept in Liturgical action, the sooner may

we hope to know the appropriate and exact forms in which this understanding will best clothe itself for the sake of the future.³⁷

With more attention given to building up the Incarnational community, more attention must also be given to the exact liturgical formulations of the central act of that community. Indeed, the Anamnesis itself comes to be seen as a revolutionary act.

The same shift to the S.C.C. cell as the starting point of theological reflection -- which then moves on to the world -- can be seen in a letter a few weeks later from Smyth to John Wagland in Montreal:

Qualitatively we witness to the command and calm control which inheres in the Incarnation itself. We do not work --along with others--for the redemption of the world. Instead we are the redeemed world. To say this as human beings is preposterous; but to assert this of the Incarnation within which we are elements by the grace of God, is purest realism.

The S.C.C. provides a model of a revolutionary community that is already redeemed. Indeed, it has reached a higher level of redemption than other secular or religious communities.

Again, the Anamnesis is at the centre of the redeemed community's witness. Smyth continues,

. . . I like to think of the calm and sure movement, set forth even in externals, of our Anamnesis, as showing forth the command and sureness of touch within the whole process of history which is a quality of our Lord's life in His Incarnation. It sets forth the calm command in which we are privileged to share.

In some sense, the Anamnesis orders the complexity of the

world:

The Anamnesis is not only complex in its intellectual content; but it also possesses a highly intricate aesthetic pattern of movement. But the reality of our world is also complex beyond man's full comprehension. Nevertheless, in the Anamnesis we show how this complexity flows together into graceful simplicity in the ordered movement of the world's redemption.³⁸

The Anamnesis has taken on a reality of its own in ordering and explaining both the S.C.C. cell and the world.

In this increased emphasis on the S.C.C. cell and the Anamnesis, Smyth begins with the internal "Incarnational" life of the cell (including the Anamnesis) which is then seen as an Incarnational witness to and ordering of the world. While this position is not fundamentally at odds with Smyth's earlier theology, there is a shift, to paraphrase Marx, away from changing the world towards explaining the world. As it becomes more difficult to work with secular revolutionaries to change the world, the only alternative is to perfect the S.C.C. as an already redeemed Incarnational community that can explain the world. Likewise, there is a shift towards the concept of "witness" that Smyth rejected in his letter to Reuel Howe in 1942 and a shift towards the "enclavism" that Smyth condemned in his Catholic Commonwealth notes in 1945.

There is, indeed, a revision of the Metacosmic process in the relation of the Incarnational cell and the secular revolution. Smyth explained his changing views in a letter to John Tunncliffe in December 1949. Smyth notes

that he has now come to realize the dangers which must underlie any purely humanist revolutionary process, given the reality of original sin. Smyth comments,

I must confess that I have all too often fallen into a sort of error in imagining that we, as Christians, could be content with a communist revolution first, supposing that this might in some way be "taken over" by the Incarnation in the course of time. But, as you have so often pointed out, any Incarnational Revolution must be informed by Caritas, and Caritas cannot for a moment be "postponed" to some vague future date. . . .

The nature of Love (caritas) makes it impossible to delay it:

Caritas must of necessity be always a thing of here and now, and this must always be our present witness as in some sense over against the "merely" communist revolution. In this sense Sacramentalism is antithetical to current communism.³⁹

Smyth comments that the vocation of the S.C.C. is much more difficult than he realized. In these comments one sees Smyth move from the sequential view of Metacosmesis (the view of Manhood Into God, Discerning the Lord's Body and the 1948 Bulletin article on the Ecumenical Movement) in which the secular revolutionary process is taken into the Incarnation only after it has autonomously (with the support of Incarnational Christians) brought forth the new social order to an autonomous view of Metacosmesis (the view of Smyth throughout the fifties), in which the Incarnational process operates independently of any contribution of the secular revolutionary movement.

The shift to the revolutionary liturgical role of

the Incarnational cell is a shift away from commitment to the secular revolutionary cause. In July 1950, Smyth writes John Wagland that the central liturgical vocation of the S.C.C. and the establishment of S.C.C. cells come before secular activity:

The re-opening, the widening, the dredging, the channels of Sacrifice of this world to God within the Liturgy is our work. And unless these channels are re-opened and deepened and, yes, multiplied, no amount of improvement or of socialist revolution of the world, or of the establishment of Communism in some foreseeable future, are one bit of good; for there will be no fulfilling END into which these accomplishments can be brought. The world, apart from its Liturgical Sacrifice, vanishes into the blackness and the oblivion of history.⁴⁰

Such a view does not exclude working with secular revolutionary groups but it has ceased to be the priority it once was.

The fullest discussion after 1948 on the nature of the S.C.C. as a revolutionary cell occurs in the 1950 Allocution, "Some Primary Problems of Our Society". I have already discussed in the previous chapter Smyth's dialectical treatment of Jewish and Christian sacrifice. That discussion leads into a treatment of the S.C.C. as a new sacrificial antithesis. The structure of the discussion is somewhat similar to the portion of the 1948 Bulletin series on the Ecumenical Movement that dealt with the S.C.C. as the "spearhead" of the religious antithesis. However, there are some important changes.

In the 1950 Allocution, the S.C.C.'s antithetical

character is put in terms of sacrifice; the S.C.C. has "an antithetical dissatisfaction with the traditional thetical concept of our Lord's sacrifice as expiatory and substitutional". Positively, the S.C.C. has "a fresh and antithetical realization of the relevance of the Christian liturgical Offertory to the Christian liturgical Sacrifice".⁴¹ After a discussion of dialectical theory, Smyth goes on to emphasize two points. First, the S.C.C. antithesis arises out of the thetical church and is therefore an heir of its rich tradition; it is not trying to inject something "alien" into the church. Second, an antithesis "is not established or organized in order to overturn the thesis", rather it simply comes into being because of the forces in operation in the thesis. In extending this dialectical truth to the S.C.C., Smyth argues that the S.C.C. is not an antithetical group because of any conscious planning; rather, the S.C.C. is an antithesis "'thrown up' or brought into being by the historical movement of the thetical Church which antecedes us". Nor is the S.C.C. the whole of the "religious antithesis" now forming in the church.⁴²

Smyth goes on to liken the relation of the S.C.C. to the whole religious antithesis with the relation of the Communist Party to the working proletariat as a whole. The antithetical proletariat as a whole is "largely unconscious of its historic dialectic vocation" to participate in the

overthrow of capitalism. The few who understand this vocation -- the Communist Party -- draw together as a "'spearhead' to further the objective revolutionary cause". The party's task is to teach the proletariat their antithetical vocation and lead them into revolutionary action.⁴³

Smyth likens the S.C.C. to the Communist Party and the broader religious antithesis to the uncomprehending proletariat. "Likewise, we draw together as a kind of 'spearhead' antithetical group, gathered out of a much larger actually existing number of antithetical people within the thetical Church of our day." The broad religious antithesis consists of Christians who are committed to making Christianity relevant in the world but are dissatisfied with the thetical church. The S.C.C. has been organized out of this group. The S.C.C. has drawn together "as a spearhead group analogous in our religious context to the function of the Communist Party in its secular context".⁴⁴ The work of the S.C.C. is to bring the rest of the religious antithesis to its dialectical and Incarnational vocation:

It is our function to reach these other religious people, to clarify for them in scientific analysis the nature of their real position, and to lead them little by little to take up their historical vocation in order that the decadent thetical Church of the present may be overturned and eventually be guided successfully into a new Catholic synthesis.⁴⁵

Smyth goes on to list groups of people in the church that make up the religious antithesis (the Student Christian Movement, A.F.S.A., Canterbury clubs at universities, parish

youth groups, adult religious study groups, etc.).

Smyth suggests another way in which the S.C.C. can emulate the Communist Party. Communists realize the need to become a part of organizations of uninstructed proletariat for "it is only by leading and sometimes by even 'manipulating' these proletarian masses that a small 'leadership' group can achieve a significant power within the historical movement". Likewise, wherever possible, S.C.C. members should be "organizationally integrated with" the religious antithesis and be willing to embark on "careful, patient, and intensive work within the framework of the contemporary thetical Church" in order that the antithetical elements there may be brought to understand their true revolutionary vocation.⁴⁶

Smyth then moves on to the Anamnesis. "As a self-conscious spearhead society it is granted to us of course to establish among ourselves a kind of foretaste of the future religious synthesis towards which we ourselves press."⁴⁷ That foretaste is the Society's Eucharistic liturgy. It represents "something of the peculiar beauty and even glory which we envisage as proper to a sacrificial and sacramental society of the future". In it "the future Christian synthesis somehow dips backward into the present". Again, Smyth likens this experience to that of the Communist Party cell. In the ethos of a Communist cell meeting one experiences "a

kind of 'foretaste' of a Communist secular order to be achieved in the future". Yet the experience of the Incarnational cell is "infinitely richer, more real, and more inspiring" than that of the Communist cell. "This is because of our liturgical sacrificial character". Yet this life is not totally inward-looking. "This new Incarnational world of ours, this Society, will remain in being only as we use it as a center out of which we work . . . to instruct and to lead and if possible to organize" the larger Christian antithesis.⁴⁸

Smyth also discusses another antithetical group, secular progressives (including Communists) who have grown dissatisfied with atheism and seek to move towards religious faith. This group has also contributed members to the S.C.C. Smyth is happy to receive such people into the S.C.C. and is happy with their contribution. However, he comments, ". . . this is not our religious antithesis and is not the antithesis with which this Society is called primarily to work".⁴⁹

Smyth moves on to strategy to promote the spread of the S.C.C. Again, the S.C.C. must follow the pattern set by the Communist Party in its work with the secular antithesis. As in the 1948 Bulletin series, Smyth advocates the formation of parish cells: ". . . we must set about the spread of our own Society and the founding of sacrificing cells within the parishes of the contemporary Church".⁵⁰ Smyth goes on to say that what is especially needed are more S.C.C. priests,

trained in "explaining the theological foundations of the Offertory and Consecration and the Holy Communion in the Anamnesis" and how "the Offertory itself is to be integrated with both the theory and the practice of the contemporary Marxian revolution".⁵¹ Smyth again reiterates that its own growth is the S.C.C.'s priority. Work with secular progressive movements is also important but "our primary reason for being active in the secular movement is that here we will be able to gain access to possible converts".⁵²

Smyth concludes the discussion of the S.C.C. with "A Call to Antithetical Being". Smyth goes back to his earlier discussion of dialectical theory in which he argued that the the antithesis "is" a part of the thesis rather than "acts" to overthrow the thesis. Antithetical action follows from antithetical being. Smyth argues that the S.C.C. is still in a very early period of its development and that at this point emphasis should be on antithetical "being" rather than action. Smyth still realizes that the offertory requires activity in the world and the church to perfect and enrich its content. Yet he argues that such activity should now be work in building up the S.C.C. -- promoting its spread, making converts and, above all, "the actual regular offering of the Anamnesis itself". "It is the Anamnesis itself, carrying us within it, which in a sense, is the contemporary Christian antithesis". Smyth concludes, "Thus above all it

is both the establishment and the offering of the Anamnesis which is our primary work".⁵³

I have outlined this discussion of the revolutionary Christian cell in some detail because it illustrates how far Smyth has moved from his pre-1948 understanding of the Incarnational cell while at the same time managing to hang on to the basic Metacosmic theology (including the revolutionary nature of the cell and even a fundamental respect for Marxism) which undergirded the previous vision. In continuity with the earlier vision, Smyth still sees the S.C.C. cell as a revolutionary spearhead, much like the Communist "spearhead" (or Leninist "vanguard" although he does not explicitly make the connection) among the proletariat. He still sees it as contributing to the dialectical overturn of the capitalist thesis and its religious counterpart, bourgeois protestantism. He still sees the reordered world brought into the Metacosmic process through the Anamnesis and the offertory. He still sees the Incarnational cell as completing and fulfilling the inadequacies of other secular and religious antithetical groups.

Yet there are major changes. There is a shift away from support of and work with the secular antithetical movement. Instead, the S.C.C. and the thetical church become the focus of action. The S.C.C. cell and the Anamnesis take on a life of their own, only partly dependent on S.C.C. members' relations with the secular world. The offertory gift no

longer consists of work to overturn the secular order but work to build up the S.C.C. Antithetical "being" minimizes action. (There are also peculiarities in Smyth's dialectical theory here. He is using a dialectical theory which he is in the process of discarding in his critique of Soviet dialectics.) The Anamnesis becomes an end in itself, albeit a dialectical and revolutionary one. The emphasis on the theoretical roots of the antithesis (antithetical "being") minimizes secular (including Marxist) contributions to the life of the antithetical cell. There is also a movement away from genuine Marxist class analysis. In comparing the role of the S.C.C. among the religious antithesis with that of the Communist Party among the proletariat, there is no genuine class analysis of either the religious antithesis or the S.C.C. The comparison is an analogy rather than a genuine dialectical class analysis. Earlier attempts to develop a working class ethos for the S.C.C. are now no longer necessary. Finally, compared with Smyth's view of the Incarnational cell in the early forties, there is a movement from a lay movement to a clerical one.

I have already discussed many of the factors that contributed to Smyth's shift to the S.C.C. cell as the focus of Christian revolutionary activity. At the beginning of the 1950 Allocution, Smyth recounts a myth from Plato of a man who journeys through a driving rainstorm to reach a distant

city. Eventually the storm becomes too strong and he must take refuge in a cave. In doing so, he in no way wavers in his resolve to reach the city. He simply exercises proper human prudence. Smyth remarks that in telling the story he is not counselling complete withdrawal from progressive secular activity but rather that the S.C.C. now has a time to look at its own vocation.⁵⁴ The strong Cold War hostility within the U.S. towards any group advocating or having any relationship with Marxism was weighing very heavily on Smyth and he feared for the future of the Society. The 1950 Allocution's description of the S.C.C.'s work was a re-contextualization of Metacosmesis for the U.S. Cold War situation.

Smyth made it clear that his new position was closely related to his disillusionment with the Soviet Union by attaching to the 1950 Allocution an addendum (labelled "Not for circulation outside the SCC") entitled "An Interpretation of Contemporary World Political Trends". This paper puts forward a very critical view of the Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated Communist parties, arguing that the S.C.C. should be much more cautious in its relations with Communists. Again, there were also personal factors in the movement to the S.C.C. cell as the focus of Christian revolutionary activity. Smyth was getting old; he also desired to develop a community life with Don Johnston and other potential members regular of the Society.

The theological view of the revolutionary Christian cell put forth in the 1950 Allocution continues through the last ten years of Smyth's life. The most significant movement in this period is the continued development of the Anamnesis as the centre of revolutionary action in the Incarnational cell, accompanied by a continued retreat from secular action.

Increasingly in the fifties Smyth sees the chief purpose of the revolutionary Christian cell as simply to take part in the revolutionary action of the Anamnesis. Smyth writes to John Tunncliffe in March 1951, ". . . our special task at this point [is] to present the 'doing' of the Anamnesis as the primary and unique activity in which Christians must engage".⁵⁵ This activity is more important than any secular activity.

A year later, Smyth enlarges on the significance of the Anamnesis as action in another letter to Tunncliffe:

Our antithesis must be implemented in action. And our organ of attack upon the Thetical Church - as equally upon Thetical society - is our Anamnesis, the re-establishment of material Sacrifice explicitly set forth in action as in word. Our action is the Action of the Altar.

Action shifts from the S.C.C. cell to the Anamnesis. The Anamnesis, as "a fully antithetical Mass", is a "'spearhead' of action". Indeed, the S.C.C.'s activity becomes centred on the Anamnesis: "I will go so far as to say that the establishment of the Anamnesis is the only really central voca-

tion of the SCC."⁵⁶

This theme appears again and again in the fifties. To John Wagland in 1952 Smyth writes that the S.C.C. is "primarily a liturgical society". "It is only secondarily activist, secondarily 'progressive' politically."⁵⁷ To an inquirer in 1955 Smyth writes that the S.C.C. "is a liturgical society, trying in theory (theology) and practice (prayer and sacrament) to relate the Sacrifice of the Altar to the actual human historical process".⁵⁸ To another inquirer in 1956 he writes, "What we are really trying to build is a Religious Society, liturgically and devotionally centered".⁵⁹ To yet another inquirer in 1957 Smyth suggests that the S.C.C. is now encouraging the development of the religious life in its midst for ". . . we fear that in the long run the S.C.C. may develop in a too activist direction; and our primary goal of Prayer and Liturgical Worship may suffer".⁶⁰

Smyth was quite clear that such a shift to the Anamnesis as action meant a less activist stance towards the secular world. Throughout the fifties Smyth complained of the "activist" tendencies of some of the S.C.C. members and the Montreal cell in particular.⁶¹ In 1953, Smyth reflected with John Rowe on his diminishing faith in secular action:

I think that ten or eleven years ago, the emphasis was too secular; we were pinning a lot of faith in a secular effort to transform the world and found that a well-ordered human society just wasn't the result.

The S.C.C.'s trust in the Communist Party was misplaced. But now, Smyth adds, "our thinking is more mature".⁶²

In the late fifties, Smyth continued to reiterate this position. Smyth wrote Peter Anson in 1957,

But what I believe God has taught us during these past years is that the "earthly foundation of the Kingdom of God" must primarily be laid not on social activism, but, rather, in Liturgical Action.

Thus, Smyth explains, he has concentrated on liturgical theology and prayer.⁶³ To John Wagland a year later Smyth writes,

Two decades of experience now show clearly, at least to me, that an overly great interest in, and even reliance upon, the processes of secular change can land people in the embarrassing position of being dated in their outlook.

Only Catholic truth is reliable:

Secular events, even when they seem promising, remain secular (i.e. bound up with time), while Catholic truth always enables us, at least to some extent, to grasp something of an eternal and transcendent outlook.⁶⁴

Given the unreliable nature of any analysis (including dialectical analysis, as I outlined in the previous chapter), Smyth has turned to a deeper commitment to (and theological reflection on) the central theological mystery of the Metacosmic cell, the Anamnesis.

Behind the shift to the Anamnesis as the central activity of the S.C.C. and the move away from secular activity is Smyth's revised view of the relation between secular and Christian revolution. He has his final word in the 1959

Allocution, "The S.C.C. Evangel". There he formally retracts the view of the last chapter (and particularly the last paragraph) of Discerning the Lord's Body and other early writings that the priority for Christians is to support those secular forces working for the new socialist order; that only when the new secular order is brought about, will Incarnational catholicism triumph. Smyth suggests that this sequential view of Metacosmesis is too optimistic:

I've been optimistic also in thinking that people would say, "Why of course we need something more!" But I've come to doubt -- radically doubt -- that the Catholic Revolution can take over any other revolution whatsoever.

Smyth continues,

I don't think, for instance, that secular humanist socialism and dogmatic Communism, as they are working out in history, can be in any simple way "baptized" into the Church, or into the Kingdom of God. . . . The Catholic Revolution is sui generis. It must be a Liturgical Revolution, and it must be a revolution followed out and carried out . . . by great liturgical groupings of Christians who know what they are about in offering up a Sacrifice to God.⁶⁵

At the end of his life, Smyth was convinced that the revolutionary Incarnational cell could not depend on secular humanist or revolutionary movements to do its work for it. Metacosmesis leads the cell not out into the world to search for allies but back to itself to perfect its own distinctive revolutionary Incarnational understanding and action, in relation to itself, the church and the world.

In the development of Smyth's concept of the revolutionary Incarnational cell from the late thirties through

the fifties, certain common elements continually predominate, despite any changing theological understanding of how the cell is to relate to the world. Smyth quickly gave up the view (implicit in Manhood into God) that somehow the whole church could be converted in a general sort of way to the revolutionary Incarnational process. With the formation of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, Smyth recognized the need for a small and disciplined group of Christians prophetically committed to the Incarnational process, leading the rest of the church through teaching and action into Christian revolution. Because of Smyth's integration of Marxist analysis and action into his theology and his practical work with Communists, it is not surprising that the Communist Party became one model for the revolutionary Incarnational cell. Smyth's dialectical analysis of church history placed the S.C.C. in a position in the church analogous to that of the Communist Party in the secular world. Not surprisingly, then, the S.C.C. shared many of the characteristics of a Communist Party cell: a sense of a prophetic mission as a revolutionary vanguard, a corporate sense transcending personal relationships, strong internal discipline and a deep non-negotiable commitment to Marxist dialectical analysis. For at least its first ten years, the S.C.C. was also deeply committed to working with Communist Party cells.

In the years before 1948, Smyth sought common grounds with Marxism by relating dialectical materialism and the Incarnational process, drawing out both the materialist and dialectical elements from the latter. This enterprise eventually faltered on Smyth's increasing conviction that the metaphysical presuppositions of classical Marxist dialectical materialism were incompatible with Christian faith and action. He argued that Christian materialism was properly Aristotelian philosophical realism and that Marxist dialectical analysis was properly based on empirical observation rather than metaphysical presuppositions. These insights, which came to a head in 1948 with the publication of the Laski lectures and "Materialist Dogma as a Creedal Test", left Smyth increasingly alienated from the Soviet Union and the Communist Party in the U.S. Eventually, even his faith in dialectical analysis as an empirical method of discovering scientific truth softened into an analogical way of understanding the world.

The revolutionary Incarnational cell, however, was not a casualty in Smyth's disillusionment with classical dialectical materialism in the late forties. Indeed, the Incarnational cell gained new prominence in Smyth's theology and, in a sense, came to bear the burden of his disillusionment with secular revolution. Smyth turned away from the secular revolutionary movement to the S.C.C. cell as the focus of Christian revolution. To use Smyth's own dialecti-

cal analysis, the post-1948 S.C.C. cell emerged as a synthesis out of the pre-1948 concept of the sacramental cell and Smyth's disillusionment with classical dialectical materialism.

While the post-1948 cell had less overtly Marxist content than the earlier cell, it retained a structure, discipline and methodology that still owed much to the model of the Communist Party cell. Smyth recognized this in the 1950 Allocution. While attacking the Soviet Union in the addendum to the Allocution, Smyth urged S.C.C. cells to emulate Communist Party methodology. Even after 1948, despite the inward move to the Anamnesis as revolutionary action, Smyth still saw the S.C.C. as occupying a place in the church analogous to that of Communist parties in the world social order. To the end, Smyth saw the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth as a revolutionary vanguard or spearhead movement in the church. For Smyth, Marxist theory (materialism and dialectics) eventually dimmed but at least one element of Marxist practice (the revolutionary cell) continued to offer a model. Not until the sixties, after Smyth's death, did this model fail.

Notes

¹SCC papers, G-17-C, FHS pocket diary, 1931; G-6-74, FHS to Mark Ford, April 23, 1957.

²SCC papers, J-13-1, "Suggested Principles for an Oratory within the Parish of Christ Church, Cambridge (Pro-

visional), mimeographed, p. 2.

³Christ Church archives, FHS file, Oratory report, Sept. 1938-Aug. 1939 (SCC papers, J-13-2); FHS to L. Leslie Glenn, [Aug. 1], 1939 (SCC papers, B-26-50).

⁴SCC papers, J-3-5, FHS talk for Oratory residents.

⁵SCC papers, J-3-11.

⁶SCC papers, J-3-13.

⁷SCC papers, A-2-1, FHS to William Chase, Jan. 17, 1940.

⁸[Smyth], Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, first edition, [1941], 9.

⁹Ibid., 10.

¹⁰Ibid., 10-11.

¹¹Ibid., 11.

¹²Ibid., 11-12.

¹³Ibid., 13.

¹⁴SCC papers, B-12-17, Malvern Declaration with FHS marginalia.

¹⁵SCC papers, I-4-1, FHS, "A Theological Primer for Malvern Cells".

¹⁶SCC papers, H-2-251, FHS to Reuel Howe, April 29, 1942.

¹⁷SCC papers, B-12-37, FHS to William B. Spofford, Mar. 18, 1942.

¹⁸SCC papers, E-3-3, FHS to Robert Nichols, Dec. 21, 1942.

¹⁹SCC papers, D-2-21. The original lectures were delivered at the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order summer conference at Gananoque, Ont. in 1943. However, the notes have been expanded for an Anglican audience. From the general tone of the expansion and Smyth's critique of the conference title in a page of "Preliminary considerations" attached to the end of the notes, it is likely that the

expanded version was given at the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action summer conference on "The Church as the Organ of Social Redemption" at Arundel, Que in 1944. All quotations here are from the expanded version of the lectures.

²⁰SCC papers, B-20-23, FHS to Sam Bernstein, Aug. 8, 1945.

²¹Bulletin, I, No. 14 (Corpus Christi, 1946).

²²SCC papers, F-12-3, FHS to Philip Bevan, Sept. 12, 1944.

²³SCC papers, F-20-60, FHS to [John Peacock], July 10, 1945.

²⁴Carthy papers, CY-1-41, FHS to Frank Carthy, Oct. 16, 1946.

²⁵SCC papers, B-13-3, FHS to Sam Pollard, Jan. 24, [1947]. (Dated 1946 by mistake.)

²⁶SCC papers, B-13-6, FHS to Ray Corbett, April 2, 1947.

²⁷SCC papers, B-13-7, FHS to John Peacock, April 2, 1947.

²⁸SCC papers, B-13-16, FHS to Sam Pollard, Sept. 2, 1947.

²⁹"The Ecumenical Movement: A Religious Reflection of World Reaction", Bulletin, III, No. 3 (Nov. 9, 1947).

³⁰"The Ecumenical Movement and the Concept of Unity", Bulletin, III, No. 16 (Feb. 8, 1948), [2-3].

³¹"The Ecumenical Movement and the Concept of Unity", Bulletin, III, No. 18 (Feb. 22, 1948), [2].

³²Ibid., [2-3].

³³Ibid., [4].

³⁴Ibid., [4].

³⁵SCC papers, B-27-10, FHS to John Rowe, Feb. 20, 1948.

³⁶SCC papers, B-24-25, FHS to Gilbert Cope, June 8, 1948.

³⁷SCC papers, B-24-26, FHS to John Tunnicliffe, June 12, 1948.

³⁸SCC papers, B-31-48, FHS to John Wagland, July 20, 1948.

³⁹SCC papers, B-24-57, FHS to John Tunnicliffe, Dec. 19, 1949.

⁴⁰Wagland papers, FHS to John Wagland, July 13, 1950.

⁴¹Smyth, "Some Primary Problems of our Society", 1950 Allocution, p. 12.

⁴²Ibid., 15.

⁴³Ibid., 15-16.

⁴⁴Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁶Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁸Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹Ibid., 19.

⁵⁰Ibid., 19.

⁵¹Ibid., 20-21.

⁵²Ibid., 21.

⁵³Ibid., 22.

⁵⁴Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵SCC papers, C-20-40, FHS to John Tunnicliffe, Mar. 29, 1951.

⁵⁶SCC papers, C-20-69, FHS to John Tunnicliffe, March 9, 1952; also mimeographed.

⁵⁷SCC papers, F-39-2, FHS to John Wagland, June 3, 1951.

⁵⁸ SCC papers, E-23-24, FHS to Philip Deemer, Dec. 15, 1955.

⁵⁹ SCC papers, E-24-35, FHS to Jim Swanson, Dec. 27, 1956.

⁶⁰ SCC papers, E-25-30, FHS to Donald Grayston, Sept. 11, 1957.

⁶¹ SCC papers, C-26-94, FHS to Frank Carthy, Oct. 27, 1951; F-41-42, FHS to Archie Malloch, July 7, 1952.

⁶² SCC papers, D-5-95, FHS to John Rowe, June 26, 1953.

⁶³ SCC papers, E-29-16, FHS to Peter Anson, April 30, 1957.

⁶⁴ Wagland papers, WA-1-20, FHS to [John Wagland], Jan. 5, 1958.

⁶⁵ Smyth, "The S.C.C. Evangel", 1959 Allocution, p. 9.