Dear Father Conrad,

The parable does not relate how long the man who fell among thieves lay by the roadside before someone noticed him. It could have been quite a while, and after a few hours, what with the dust and the heat and the flies, he must have looked—and smelt—disgusting. So it is not surprising that the more fastidious did not feel like touching such an object. They may have told each other that he had probably come by his deserts, a thief attacked by other thieves. It was necessary to dissociate oneself from such unpleasantness and go on to pressing and more constructive occupations at Jerusalem, rather than get involved with a case that might well be beyond cure.

Such a decision is extremely understandable, but we are not encouraged by the Lord to admire or emulate it. The natural reaction to corruption and general messiness is to draw back, and confine one's activities to people and organizations that conform better to the demands of a sensitive mind for realism and honesty. I have the greatest sympathy with such a reaction; it often seems the only honest thing to do. The trouble is, it simply isn't Christian. It is not hard to preach community and revolution and the rediscovery of the authentic Christian message when the proclamation is tacitly confined to a circle of bien-pensant radicals. But is the Church a group of right-thinking people? Did Christ die for the godly? Is it the healthy who need the physician? Was the call addressed to the just?

The Church is corrupt. It was already corrupt when Ananias and Saphira tried their little trick, and it always will be until Kingdom come. Should those who are aware of this corruption therefore withdraw into their enclaves (situated in a desirable spiritual neighbourhood) there to contemplate the purity of their own motives? This is what many Christians sects and movements have done, in the past, and it has always been a reaction to the same kinds of gross blindness, smugness, dishonesty and fear-impelled harshness that disgrace the Church now.

It makes little difference whether one's fastidiousness impels one to 'leave' the Church, or merely to become an *émigré à l'intérieur*. The result is the same: the man who falls among thieves—who are in his very nature—is left to his mess and corruption. The very people who are most acutely aware of what is wrong, and therefore

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presumably most able to do something about it, are the ones who are now delicately dissociating themselves from the mess.

I am writing this because I am beginning to feel that there is a worse kind of corruption than the all-too-evident stink of official fear and double-talk (even when it is well meant). This is the delusion that one can be saved in separation from the world, which is also the Church, in its unredeemed aspect. For the Church is always being redeemed, therefore always in need of redemption. To refuse to know that one is under the wrath of God is also to refuse salvation. The state of rejection is not just a private category of sinfulness but first of all an involvement in the general corruption. Salvation comes to us in the Church because the Church is corrupt, and knows it. So there always have to be people to make sure she does know it, but they can't do it from a position of separation.

The Church is not something over there, needing repentance. The Church is me, here, needing repentance. To protest and denounce the sins of the Church is to acknowledge my own sinfulness, my need of forgiveness. Otherwise it is a hypocrisy worse than that of the people who are busy planting sweet-peas round the rubbish heap.

Since there has been much public withdrawal of hems of garments from the disgraceful behaviour of the authorities over Fr Herbert McCabe, it doesn't seem possible to remain silent without appearing to signify assent to this gesture of dissociation. Therefore, having thought over the ideas I have just outlined, here is my position in the matter, for what it's worth:

I agree with Fr Herbert McCabe (not always but often) and I deplore and condemn the shameful chicanery, the whole useless and degrading official face-saving operation that followed the ' McCabe affair'. But I cannot therefore refuse to be associated with people and organizations who are implicated in the business, whilst they are involved involuntarily or even voluntarily. I cannot, because I *am* associated with them. I am a Catholic. I am (I am told) a radical, but I am also a reactionary in that I am afraid of things, I am self-righteous. The roots of all the things I deplore are in me, too. I can't say 'I'll have none of it', because I have it, it is there, it is part of me, it is me. It can't be scraped off, but only, perhaps, transformed, and only in the Church and by the Church. And this because the Church is sinful, and as sinful can ask, even demand, a forgiveness which the individual cannot concieve, let alone ask for.

Therefore I shall continue to write for *New Blackfriars* if the Editor wants me to, whoever he may be. In fact I will write for anyone who is prepared to print what I write. And what I write will be what I think, which doesn't necessarily mean it's right, but does mean I'm trying to find out if it is. I shall denounce what I think needs denouncing, in any terms that seem appropriate. I shall also praise and admire what seems to me praiseworthy and admirable, whether it occurs in China or Washington (or even, conceivably, in England).

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New Blackfriars seems to me an excellent place to do both these things, if I am allowed to. (Perhaps I shall not be allowed to. But to be slung out is a very different matter from choosing to go.) To do so does not seem to be any kind of 'politic makeshift or compromise' provided I say what I really think, after due consideration. *New Blackfriars* is a Dominican work. The Order, like the Church, is a mixture of sin, silliness, sense and sanctity. If I refuse to have anything to do with the first two I can hardly expect to share in the last two, and I need to.

There are things going on in the Church, as a matter of normal practice, that are so disgustingly unchristian that even to think of them makes one feel sick. There is also, as a matter of normal practice, the kind of heroic love that shouts the message of resurrection so that it echoes for miles around. Both of these are the behaviour of the Church; we can't have one without the other. A writer's job, then, is to reflect both, and try to show both for what they are by the light of the gospel. To withdraw from the corruption is to withdraw from the glory. That thoroughly suspect character, the Samaritan, embraced the corruption not because he approved of it but precisely because he didn't. Perhaps he realized the presence of a glory that the more fastidious failed to discern. Perhaps, discussing the incident later, the Priest refered to the men who tried to do something about the evil as 'irresponsible', while the Levite disagreed and called him 'courageous'. But neither of them did anything to help the wounded man. It is the Samaritan we are expected to imitate, and I don't see how one can 'do likewise', however clumsily and inadequately, unless one is prepared to get dirty.

Yours, etc.,

Oswaldkirk,
25th May, 1967

ROSEMARY HAUGHTON

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continue to promote *New Blackfriars* need not be, for Dominicans or others, merely a matter for domestic loyalties in a pathetic effort to conceal obsolescence: it would be an acceptance of the real complexities of the human situation of the Church, and to contribute, by way of the 'theological analysis of contemporary experience' (to use Fr Provincial's phrase), to their salutary clarification. In that work of clarification, Mr Stein's and Mr Wicker's declarations of conscience surely find their place.

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