

# worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## THIS SWEET KINGDOM

In the course of his writings George Bernanos spoke of "this sweet kingdom of the Earth," this kingdom in which we must conduct our search for the Kingdom of God. This sweet kingdom! The phrase seems hardly to apply to the world that is ours. The terrors of Nazi Germany, which would seem to have set appalling standards for all time to come, grow increasingly vague and dim under the pressures of the immediate present. For Americans are dying in South Vietnam today, and today Germans kill other Germans who try to evade the wall of Berlin. It is today's headlines that tell us that France is being ground between the rightist forces in Algeria and the leftist forces at home, and that what exists of law and order is maintained only at some expense to justice.

Goa has only recently been absorbed by India under the leadership of a man who speaks from within a strong and effective moral tradition. The Congo seems quieter after prolonged convulsive periods, but its struggle has left visible marks on the U. N. The Soviet Union continues to prod and probe and suppress outside of its national borders and it makes use of anti-semitism as a political weapon at home. The misery which China's population suffers because of its forced "leap forward" is aggravated by natural disasters of famine and disease. And over all the globe hovers the spectre of nuclear warfare, of devastation on a scale previously undreamt of, with effects that would leave no man untouched. There is no corner of the globe that is free from suffering, oppression and injustice, from stultifying fear and anxiety. It would seem the course of honesty to reject the tempting phrase of Bernanos, to replace it with others, to accept the alternative description of this world as a vale of tears where life is nasty, brutish and short.

Yet Bernanos was a man of rage and power who lived through the recent terrible decades of modern history, a Christian who was deeply engaged in the political life of his time, a scourge

to what he regarded as soft, corrupt and self-serving. "This sweet kingdom of the earth" could not be for him an insipid, empty phrase, and it should not be for us. Properly regarded, it is a reminder of all that is best in humanism; it recalls to us that all the uniquely human joys and pleasures come to us through the materiality of this world. All that we know of love and honor and justice and freedom, of truth and beauty, we have learned in this world, the city of man, this sweet kingdom. We can have no faith in man if we have no faith in the goodness of this world.

This faith does not preclude a knowledge of the tragic dimension of life, nor should it obscure, for the believer, the search for the kingdom of God. For the religious person the two must be forever intimately related. And the relation has practical effects. François Mauriac has written, in this context, of contemporary France: "At the level of the drama which is now taking place in France, it is obvious that a politics inspired by Christian humanism would have spared us seas of blood, would have saved us from innumerable crises and would have preserved us from the shame under which we seem almost to falter."

It is easy to reject the goal Mauriac sets before us as a species of religious utopianism, to say that if, at this point in history, French politics are untouched by a religious humanism it must be that such humanism has little to offer. It is far more difficult to recognize that he has stated a proper goal and that we must search for the means to implement it, however painful and arduous the search may be. John Bennett's essay, which appears elsewhere in this issue, is an example of the kind of effort that must be made. If that effort is insufficient, or if it fails, we may one day be able to look back and say of our own national history what Mauriac says today of contemporary France.