

TAPE: Joyeux Lavier
(Doris & RHH) PREFACE

Somebody asked me the other day what's behind all the widespread publicity that has made allegations in one English newspaper a topic of brief conversation and uninformed comment around much of the world. He didn't mean just 'what are the facts?' but why has the affair been blown up so much, with such prominence, by so many newspapers. (And perhaps I shd. add that my friend is not a Catholic). For one thing seems obvious — there's precious little hard fact or detail in the whole series of allegations so far, which makes the anonymous attempts of a local paper to make a HK issue of it for their own purposes particularly disgusting, to say the least. The absence of relevant detail has now been camouflaged by the well-worn trick (wh. still works, it seems) of putting a pejorative, catchy label on the affair and proceeding to introduce various irrelevant information. Call it "rumour-mongering" (there's a sniff of excitement and scandal in that) and people will take it as fact, however little truth, if any, there may be in the generalised allegations in smaller print. Call it a controversy and people will think it's important and that there's a genuine argument going on. But where's the evidence? What are the facts being so pompously commended on? What is the truth of the matter? That last question shd. be the concern of every Christian: and if, in truth, there is injustice, deception, inhumanity involved in any of the cases that have been mentioned in the original press-story (wh. incidentally was not the first time queries on the situation were published), then this is cause for concern too. We cannot be afraid of truth: truth shd. be one of the human values that

Christians above all are concerned about a given witness to, for whatever is true is a reflection of Him who is Truth itself. I don't pretend to know all the complications or facts of the current talking-pt. about Anian near (and others) in Europe — I believe there have been causes for concern, and that enquiries have been and are being made. I also believe that in human affairs of any kind there are likely to be imperfect people, who do foolish things, act stupidly or even criminally, speak rashly; people in the Church, priests & nuns, too. This is not to make excuses: it's to stress the demands of charity, the need of truth and honesty and human understanding. It is an unfortunate fact that you cannot take as being true, necessarily, whatever newspaper choose to print and the interpretation they put on things in pursuit of less valuable, less human goals than truth and justice, harmony and understanding. All of us have our failings and weaknesses: but if we do try, as Christians, to follow Christ and be in love with God and our fellowmen, we will try to see to it that these faults & failings are not deliberately encouraged in ourselves. We shd. be so careful about truth that we're not easily taken in by sensationalism, by distortions of truth, whether deliberate or not. And especially shd. we be careful about judging the actions or motives of other people on any but the firmest ground of God's law — and even there, the secrets of men's hearts are only known to God himself. Many nuns, like the Carmelites here in HK for instance, devote the whole lives to prayer for the world — we never know, and seldom think, of the debt that we owe to their prayer for us. So, in our prayer today, let's join with them in spirit, praying for the weakness of mankind, for understanding, sympathy and

wisdom, and for ourselves that devotion to Him who is the Truth will make our lives sincere and truthful, a witness to Him and His love of all men.

MUSIC - PRAYERS

From another point of view, I suppose the current fuss about nuns is a kind of compliment, really: tho' if it is, it's a compliment that's indicative of a rather un-Christian view of mankind. There's a gt. fascination with nuns in the modern world which, despite itself, seems to surround them with a rosy halo of idealism, perfection or what-have-you — especially if they're dressed in some exotic habit. Films & tv. shows featuring nuns are innumerable — any book claiming to lift the veil ~~off~~ on the secrets of the convent will sell very well. There is, perhaps, a kind of love-hate relationship between the world & the convent: and the perfection expected of nuns is s'times rather ludicrous, as if they weren't human at all, can't make mistakes or be stupid. The very fact of their existence, their dedication to stll. the world doesn't understand, is always a reproach: their slightest deviation from the ideal standard the world, in its incomprehension, makes for them is then a subject for shocked head-shaking. Today let's rather think of their dedication and their difficulties ~~in~~ ^{in the modern} world, and pray for them, in gratitude for their prayer and their work, for the example of dedication to X^o wh. they give to all of us.

Sing a Song to the Lord (2*)