

A MAN OF THE CHURCH

By ROBERT MURRAY

WHAT is the personal ideal for a Catholic today, in the light of the teaching of Vatican II? The first answer is, of course, as it always was, to accept Christ's cross and die to our old unregenerate selves, so as to be filled with his new life and to live by his Spirit as children of the Father, having access to the Father's heart through Christ his Son. But this ideal is to be sought in and through the Church which Christ founded, and our formulation of the ideal should have reference to the Church. It is not accidental that the fundamental document of the Council, on which all its work of renewal and reform is based, is a study of the Church's nature and the functions of all its members in their different grades. We can express the personal ideal for a Catholic again, more simply, by saying it is to be a man of the Church. (The term man is, of course, meant not the in masculine but in the general human sense).

'A man of the Church' – what does it mean? Père de Lubac has a moving delineation of the ideal, written at a time when he was suffering for his view of it, and the Council was still ten years ahead.¹ He refers first to what the early Fathers meant by the adjective *ekklesiastikos*. Not merely ecclesiastical, though the word applied to church property and institutions: primarily it designated faithful Catholics, in contrast with open or concealed heretics. Thus the *Apostolic Constitutions* speaks of asking people 'if they are faithful, if they are men of the Church, *ekklesiastikoi*, if they are not defiled by any heresy'.² Origen, to whom de Lubac refers, often used the adjective in this sense; but once he seems to use it in a fuller and more pregnant sense, to express the christian ideal as a whole. Writing against the marcionites, who dismembered God's revelation by rejecting the Old Testament, and presented a dangerous and fanatical half-gospel of their own choosing, Origen says:

But I, who desire to be a man of the Church and not a follower of any heretical leader, but to take my name from

¹ *The Splendour of the Church* (London, 1955), esp. pp 177–203.

² *Ap. Const.* II, 58; cf Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 15 (Harvey II, p 79).

Christ and to bear his name which is blessed on earth, wishing both to be and to be called a christian in deed as well as thought – I look for truth equally in the old and in the new law.¹

To be a man of the Church, then, is a matter of loyalty to Christ, and involves appropriate thinking and action. It is an ideal for all christians, from the pope to a child just capable of moral life, or from a university professor to a peasant woman in Peru. The working-out will vary according to the person's position, education or maturity, but the ideal is a general and overall one. If the presentation below seems more suitable for intellectuals, it is hoped that the essentials will be found applicable to all: they will need to be re-expressed and simplified, but not changed. How are we to express this ideal in the light of Vatican II?

We may look back to the period of that earlier great council of renewal and reform, Trent, and consider the principles which St Ignatius proposed for 'right thinking in the Church'. Though composed before the council met, they show many of the same preoccupations – to defend Catholic sacraments, rites and customs which are under attack, to be prudent in discussion of difficult disputed points, and above all to be loyal and obedient to the Church's authority. St Ignatius' 'rules' have served well as a practical guide to a loyal Catholic mentality; they still have their use as a check on excesses of critical zeal. But they do not say enough for us today. The purpose of Trent was to defend and correct: the purpose of Vatican II is to express ideals more fully and positively than ever before. Trent aimed as far as possible to save and rebuild a ruined christian Europe: Vatican II aims to open windows on a now secularized world and to meet the world on a basis of sound human ideals. The man of the Church according to the ideal implicit in the documents of Vatican II cannot be the model member of an enclosed religious society. A man of the Church today, while it includes being a faithful christian and a loyal, active member of the Church, one whom the Church will acknowledge as a good member and representative, must mean one who comes before the world as a good human person, exemplifying the best ideals the world knows, in maturity and balance of character, and saying to the world: 'I am this because I am a Catholic, and I am this *for you* because I am a Catholic'.

¹ *Homily on St Luke XVI, 6 (Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller p 109).*

The non-christian or uncommitted world is always looking at christians and measuring them against what is known and understood of the christian ideal and of human ideals. A christian, according to his own doctrines, is one whose nature is re-created, healed, rebuilt by a divine power given by the Author of that nature. What can the world think when it hears Catholics talking about supernatural ideals and behaviour, yet betraying a moral infantilism or even a lack of common truthfulness and integrity in their actions? The supernatural is an abstract theological concept deduced from meditation on the gratuitousness of grace. The misapplication of the concept to the spiritual life has been disastrous, leading too often almost to a cult of the *unnatural* and a systematic breaking-down of that very nature which grace labours to restore and perfect. In contrast, Vatican II has gone to meet the ideals of common humanity, making where necessary a public confession of failure and a public avowal of the desire to acknowledge those ideals and to show that, despite all failures, christianity transcends them.¹

The vision of the fathers of Vatican II is of the Church as nothing other than the human race (which God created out of love and for the same love of which Christ died) in so far as it has responded to Christ's call and has been effectively gathered by him and in him. The Church is the human race gathered in Christ: but it is also the power of Christ still working to redeem the human race, to heal and perfect human nature, to produce – both collectively and individually – ‘perfect manhood, that maturity which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ’.² To take one's part in this work is what it means to be a man of the Church – a mature, responsible, warm, truly human person, a ‘man for others’.

The burden of freedom

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man. And the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgement, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty.³

Thus begins the declaration on religious freedom, and the whole

¹ Eg *Dignitatis Humanae Personae* and *Gaudium et Spes*: especially the sympathetic review of ‘humanist’ ideals and criticisms in the introduction, sections 7–10.

² Eph 4, 13 (Knox).

³ *Dignitatis Humanae Personae*, 1

of this document, which marks such a turning-point in the history of the Catholic Church, aims to make a positive approach to this human ideal, while still asserting without apology the claims of the divine truth and the divine commands to which the Church must bear witness in this world. But the Church is well aware, as also the existentialist philosophers have emphasized, that the possession of free will and the power of self-determination is no open door to unlimited fun, but rather a challenge and a burden:

Man's dignity demands that he should act in accordance with a free and conscious choice, personally, inwardly persuaded, and not by either blind impulse from within or coercion from without. Man attains such dignity when he frees himself of the bondage of passion and pursues his purpose, freely choosing what is good and achieving it by appropriate means and his own persistent effort. Because of the legacy of sin, free human action will not be thus wholly and actively centred on God except by the help of his grace.¹

It is because of the weight of this burden, to be borne by the individual conscience which is responsible for its decisions, that the Catholic Church has been charged with taking away its members' freedom - whether from lust for spiritual domination or from a misguidedly compassionate pastoral concern - and making virtue consist essentially in observance of a code of law rather than in faithfulness to all the promptings of the holy Spirit, wherever he may lead. Thus, it is said, catholicism 'frees' its members from the burden of fully responsible human decision, and thereby keeps them in immaturity. This charge has never been made with such imaginative power and haunting persuasiveness as by Dostoyevsky in his 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor', where the inquisitor, a figure of great nobility and tragic stature, arrests Jesus, who has returned to earth, and in a long apologia accuses his silent prisoner of laying on men burdens which they neither can nor wish to bear; he defends himself and the leaders of the Church for having, out of compassion for men, freed them from the burden of freedom, taking responsibility themselves.² The fundamental error of Jesus, he says, was to reject those three infinitely wise proposals of the tempter - to feed men with easy bread, to give them miracles to adore, and to

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.

² *The Brothers Karamazov* (Penguin Classics, London, 1958), pp 288-308.

bow down before an authority which would remove the pain of freedom. We, says the inquisitor, have accepted these three proposals. 'We have corrected your great work and have based it on *miracle, mystery and authority*'.¹ It is true that Dostoyevsky was confused in his aim; he was equally attacking latin catholicism and state socialism, thinking that, both being expressions of the western european mentality, they were connected. The 'Legend' may be monstrously unjust; it may fail to respect a true aspect of pastoral concern, which cannot have a duty of making right action harder for people; but it remains one of the most impressive commentaries on christian freedom, and one of the keenest challenges to the Catholic idea of the Church's teaching authority and mission, ever penned. It may be unjust, but it cannot be refuted, except by Catholics living otherwise. A man of the Church must take seriously the charge that the Catholic Church denies true personal freedom and hinders personal growth to maturity. In recent years we have had such serious considerations from Mrs Rosemary Haughton² and Mr Daniel Callahan.³

A man of the Church must understand what is the growing human appreciation of and desire for true personal freedom. He must understand what is genuine freedom and what is specious but false: he must understand why man is endowed with free will and why he must not abdicate it. This is not to say every man must be a philosopher. Some of the most fundamental aspects of the matter can be understood in a very simple way.

As man stands before God, he must 'gird up his loins like a man' and answer by a truly free act.⁴ Only God's grace can bring man's distracted and disordered nature to that proper harmony and self-possession which is necessary for a genuinely free human act: and the act of faith must be such. Prevenient grace makes such an act possible, and the gift of faith crowns it: but psychologically the process is and must be free. The declaration on religious freedom has re-expressed this age-old teaching of the Church and has taught clearly that any coercion, whether exterior or psychological, is totally alien to the act of faith or to religious existence in general. A man of the Church must see this and accept it whole-heartedly with all the difficulties it means. He must try, by faithfulness to

¹ *Ibid.*, p 301.

² 'Freedom and the Individual', in *Objections to Roman Catholicism* (London, 1965), pp 111-139.

³ *Honesty in the Church* (London, 1965).

⁴ Cf Job 38, 3.

grace, to make his response to God as personal, deliberate and free from social or family pressures as he can: and he must try to safeguard this same freedom for others, especially the young, and try to lead them to authentic personal action. Of course it costs more to take a fully responsible decision than to run on tramlines. But the grace which heals our nature leads us on into an ever more joyous freedom; 'for freedom Christ has set us free',¹ giving us his Spirit: 'and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom',² the freedom not of slaves but sons, who look for the ultimate transfiguration of the world in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'.³

This is the christian answer to the world's longing for personal development and freedom, a longing which all too often is restless, tormented, misguided – neither free nor capable of arriving at freedom. The man of the Church must show that the christian answer is better: and he must help others to find it.⁴ In the interaction of fallen nature and healing grace he must guide with love and patience, letting others do their best even when he can see better, and taking the risk of their going wrong; it is useless to put them on tramlines. He must question seriously what Catholic educators are about when they talk, for example, of developing 'habits' of frequenting the sacraments or of obedience to Church authority. Is such an educational theory best calculated to produce christians who will live in the spirit of the fifth chapter of Galatians?

It is only according to man's nature to long for personal fulfilment. But freedom is not given, or demanded, merely with a view to individual development. Freedom is given for the sake of love, and this connotes relationship and community. Human fulfilment is not to be attained except in community and through relationships which must be characterized by a personal opening-out towards others, by a gift of self, or at least readiness for it. This openness, and much more the active gift of self, must be free or else it will not be truly human. This is true of every relationship – of man before God (which is why the act of faith must be free, or it is not faith); of man and wife (which is why the marriage consent must be free, or it is not a true marriage), or of friend and friend. In the relationship of love, which is the proper context for the flowering of human personality, the aspiration for personal fulfilment goes hand in hand with the desire to help others to attain their fulfilment. A human rela-

¹ Gal 5, 1.

² 2 Cor 3, 17.

³ Rom 8, 14-21.

⁴ Cf *Dignitatis Humanae Personae*, 8; *Gaudium et Spes*, 21-23, 26; *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1-2.

tionship is most perfect when each is more concerned for the fulfilment and happiness of the other.¹ Human freedom will then be freely harnessed to love and the desire for self-fulfilment freely entrusted to others in human society. All this the man of the Church will seek to make his principle of life, both in his immediate relationships, in his life in the Church, and in his life in society.

Christian responsibility

As freedom connotes community, so it connotes responsibility. Responsibility means having to respond, to answer. We apply the word to the position in which one is responsible for others, or for something entrusted to oneself: and secondly to the character of one who accepts responsibility or acts worthily of it. A person who has not responsibility in the first sense is merely called not responsible: one who lacks it in the second sense is called irresponsible, and it is judged a moral defect, a lack of due maturity. As man must answer to God at the judgement, every man is responsible to God: as man is in society, each person a focal point in a complex of relationships, each has a number of responsibilities and must discharge them in a responsible manner: married people to each other and to their children; teachers to parents, pupils and society; employers and employed to each other; civil servants and all concerned in government to the public; motorists to everyone on the road, and so on. There is scarcely a limit to the responsibility one may rightly recognize oneself as having, as a member of the human race: I am involved in humanity. This is the message of the Good Samaritan. The christian in the Church has some special responsibilities, but they are not separate from, or exclusive of, his general human responsibilities. It is in fulfilling them that the man of the Church must excel.

The root of responsibility is our nature as free human persons. To act freely entails having to answer for one's action; and we hold people responsible to the extent that they are free, whether from external constraint or inner psychological pressures. A consideration of responsibility shows certain rules or patterns. If I fail or refuse to carry out that responsibility which I have in a certain position or merely as a human person, I show a lack of responsibility and thereby deteriorate as a person. Further, in a situation – eg an institution, a

¹ These principles are developed in the admirable treatment of marriage in *Gaudium et Spes*, 47–52.

school, the armed forces, or in the ordinary relationships of family life – where the exercise of responsibility should involve giving it to others, if I fail to do this, in due accord with their age, capacity and rightful place in the organization or in society, I not only fail in responsibility myself, but I keep my subordinates (children etc) in irresponsibility or drive them back into it. Thus irresponsibility breeds irresponsibility. Yet responsibility remains. If I fail in my responsibility to others, ‘above’ me or ‘below’ me, I must answer for what they become or fail to become. If I entrust a subordinate with responsibility and he fails, I remain responsible. This is the price of helping another person to maturity.

All this is true also when viewed from the other end of the same relationship. The subordinate who is being asked by his responsible superior to exercise responsibility but passes it back, not only remains or grows in irresponsibility but impairs the superior’s sense of responsibility as well. The reader is invited to apply these considerations to the relationship of parents to their children, teachers to their pupils, employers to employees and clergy to laity. The latter relationship has been well analysed in this respect by Daniel Callahan.¹ It is a recurrent theme of Vatican II: indeed, it may be said to be one of the key concepts of the *aggiornamento*. It underlies all that is said of the duties of bishops and priests. Because it is responsibility to Christ the great shepherd, exercised by his under-shepherds, it can only be spoken of, or exercised in, terms of humble service. But the fact that it is responsibility for the members of the flock must not lead to the paternalism of the Grand Inquisitor. There is great stress on giving responsibility and education in responsibility, both in the documents speaking of relations between clergy and laity² and in those speaking of formation of character.³

Though the traditional stress on obedience is by no means absent, the Council Fathers seem to have recognized that it is more effective today to stress responsibility; it will ensure true obedience, with less risk of the moral retardation and immaturity which may result from the concept of blind obedience, unless it is understood in a special way, which itself requires great maturity and responsibility. Christian obedience is best understood when it is seen in terms of reciprocal responsibility, which is also a shared responsibility to God.

¹ *Op. cit.*, chapters 5, ‘The Responsibility of the Church’ and 6, ‘The Responsibility of the Individual’.

² Eg *Lumen Gentium*, 37; *Pryshyterorum Ordinis*, 6, 9.

³ Eg *Dignitatis Humanae Personae*, 8; *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1–2.

What is true of obedience in action is also true of obedience to the Church's teaching: the mature attitude proper to the true man of the Church will be better developed by seeing this obedience also in terms of intellectual responsibility and integrity. Then the teacher in the Church will not merely fall back on his divine mandate, but will think of his responsibility to the God-given intellects of those he is teaching, and the christian will approach the 'obedience of faith' with the same sense of responsibility to the truth as he sees it, which is the ideal in all intellectual life. In this connection, the analysis of St Thomas Aquinas' virtue of 'docility' given by Père Jérôme Hamer is particularly important. He shows how docility, the intellectual virtue of a mature person in face of authoritative teaching, is distinguished both from obedience (which submits the will to a lawful superior) and from faith (which is a theological virtue, directed to God). Thus docility entails thought about what one is accepting, and may include the representation of contrary considerations.¹

Docility to the Church's teaching authority and responsibility to the truth as I see it may lead to painful tensions. The same may arise when others, especially those for whom I may be responsible, see truths differently from myself – even in ways which seem to me seriously wrong. Here the responsibility I have for another must be harmonized with respect for his responsibility to the truth as he sees it. These problems have been discussed perceptively by Fr Karl Rahner.²

To conclude, responsibility is part of the mature human situation and therefore of the mature christian's situation. Responsibility is entailed by freedom and is created and intensified by love. Failure to take responsibility, and failure to give it, are alike failures in love.

A man for others

We have seen how the human aspiration for personal freedom and maturity must be worked out in community. The ideal for a human person, and much more for a man of the Church, can therefore be expressed in the phrase Bishop Robinson borrowed from Bonhöffer, 'a man for others'. What better describes Jesus in all his life? What better describes the perfection at which christian charity aims? And it is good precisely because it is not 'churchy': it is the character of

¹ Hamer, Jérôme, O.P., *The Church is a Communion* (London, 1964), pp 25–26.

² Eg *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (Freiburg-London, 1964), esp. pp 69–83; cf *On Heresy* (Freiburg-London, 1964).

the Good Samaritan. To describe the activity of a 'man for others', both in the Church and in the world (for he will not make any difference, where he sees others needing his love), we may find helpful the pauline image of 'building up', *oikodome*. Not *edification* – what has gone wrong with that word is a mirror of what goes wrong when christians get merely 'churchy'. St Paul speaks of the *charismata* being given to build up the body of Christ,¹ and twice explains to the corinthians that he does not wish 'to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down'.² This language symbolized well what we do when we foster another person's self-realization, or when we frustrate it. Hebrew idiom uses the same image in the context of a woman's desire to have children; thus the barren Sarai asked Abram to beget children by her slave Hagar, which by the customary legal fiction might be regarded as her own; the hebrew says, literally, 'that I may be built up by her'. But Hagar, once she had achieved what Sarai could not, began to make life unbearable for the sensitive Sarai; we could say she was 'breaking her down'.³ 'Building up' is all that helps others to develop and fulfil themselves as persons; 'breaking down' is all the opposite. The man of the Church, the 'man for others', will be a true 'builder-up', helping others to grow as mature persons, free, responsible, able to love and trust in the love of others, well-adjusted both psychologically and socially. This figure describes well what man and wife do for each other in their married love and all their life; it describes what a mother does, patiently and for so long, for a baby until the signs of developing personality begin to respond to her care. What is all education but building children up as persons? 'Building up' is just what a good educator does as he tries to foster independence of character, not possessively and paternalistically, but seeing clearly that his charge is *another* human being, with his own life to live and his own responsibility for it. All that is true in individual relations is true in society likewise; the priest's relationship to his parish can be viewed fruitfully in these terms, and so can that of every individual member of the Church, for everyone has his own contribution to make in 'building up the body of Christ'. The true man of the Church will try to excel in this, serving the body yet always seeing and caring for the persons who make it up, thus checking institutionalization or merely statistical thinking: and he will try equally,

¹ Eph 4, 12.

² 2 Cor 13, 10; cf 10, 8.

³ Gen 16, 1-4.

precisely because he is a christian, to do the same in society as a whole, for the world which God loves and for which Christ died. It is true that charity begins at home, and that one finite human being's powers of attention are limited: concentration on a broad field of vision and large-scale works of charity can lead to institutionalized thinking and a neglect of true love nearer home. But in general it is true that a christian's charity must not be consciously restricted: to the extent that it is, it is less than Christ-like.

The remark made earlier in this article about the latin Catholic concept of the supernatural is also relevant to the present theme. The concept may have been of some service to the technical theology of grace, but it can do little but harm if we attempt to form our practice of charity by means of it. Much better to have a general human ideal such as that expressed in the phrase 'a man for others'. If a christian's charity is not recognized as human love, the concern to make it 'supernatural' may be a waste of time. Love that is not warm and human is not Christ's. The 'world' may often seem to cheapen the ideal, but it is not mistaken when it recognizes it in a Pope John XXIII, or fails to recognize it in a priest who has become, as all the world can see, an officious bureaucrat. The world-wide acclamation of *Pacem in Terris* and warm acceptance of its author was a true response by humanity which recognized the ideal it seeks for. The Council Fathers have tried to express the same spirit in the constitution on the Church in the modern world. This open attitude to the world, accepting its best ideals and trying to show that christianity crowns them, is the essence of what it means to be a man of the Church today. It is characteristic of Vatican II that to express the ideal attitude of the Catholic to the world today it draws on that fresh voice of early christian apologetic, sounding from the ages before 'clericalism, juridicism and triumphalism' could have meant anything, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, which describes christians as being ordinary citizens of every country, not peculiar in any way, yet shining out by their goodness; all is summed up in the phrase 'what the soul is in the body, that christians are in the world'.¹

¹ *Epistle to Diognetus*, 5-6 (translated in *THE WAY* January 1966), pp 74-5: cf *Lumen Gentium*, 38.