

The Free Man in the Free Church

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Just over a hundred years ago Count Cavour enunciated the *gran principio*: *Libera Chiesa in libero Stato*. Today, although there are still many places, not all of them professedly anti-Christian, where such a principle is not at work, theologians seem more eager to shew us that the freedom Christ has given us is not a freedom from opposition and contradiction but a freedom to live responsibly in the free Church. The emphasis on freedom is no rash and young intrusion, it is an emphasis encouraged by the first authority. The proper exercise of the rights of heirs in the kingdom has been a main concern of recent popes—not simply of Paul VI observing the conciliar debate, or of John XXIII speaking so often of ‘the freedom of the sons of God’, but even of Pius XII, remarking in 1950:

Whenever there is no manifest expression of public opinion, and above all wherever it has to be admitted that there is no public opinion at all, this lack must be regarded as a fault, a weakness and a disease in the life of that society . . . We wish to add a few words about public opinion within the pale of the Church . . . for after all she too is a living body, and there would be something lacking in her life if there were no public opinion in the Church—a lack for which the pastors as well as the faithful would be to blame.¹

It is a strangeness in the world that Christian authority must be alert to safeguard Christian liberty, to protect Christian from Christian. Yet we hear still the complaint from exegetes, historians and theologians, that they are denied the right to be tentative, to speculate, to discuss. Fr John L. McKenzie in his collection of studies, *Myths and Realities*, says of Catholic biblical scholars:

When they count their blessings they are inclined to thank the *magisterium* each day for the liberty they enjoy; if their intellectual liberty were left to the enterprise of some individual members of the Church it would have disappeared some years ago. The gratitude of these scholars to the hierarchy for protecting them from extinction is another bond which strengthens their loyalty to the teaching authority of the Church.

¹*Osservatore Romano*, 18 February, 1950.

The paternalist tyranny of Dostoievski's Inquisitor is no longer with us, we have put aside the things of the child and become men. We have achieved that freedom which, as Dr Küng said in his Oxford lecture, comes through submission to Christ out of love in his Church.

Professor Rahner's second volume of *Theological Investigations*² is mainly concerned with the definition of membership of the Church, and what kind of freedom it is that the members of the Church enjoy. His first paper, which is a consideration of the theological dimensions of Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, stands (as Bridges said of another Jesuit opening piece) 'like a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance' and it might be best to 'circumvent him and attack him later in the rear' since a reader might be 'shamefully worsted in a brave frontal assault'. Once the stilts of obscuring language are discarded and his feet feel the ground and being, once arid definition has yielded to realist description, then Rahner presents a coherent and acceptable view of our freedom.

We have become used in recent years to the shift in terminology which has made popular play with the phrase 'the people of God' while casting a conservative cloud on 'the Church', so it comes somewhat surprisingly that Rahner makes a real distinction between the meanings of these two phrases. He has a living sense of the Adam that unites us with Christ and of the Christ that unites us with each other, so that humanity, consecrated by the Incarnation, is 'the people of God'; when a man is fully himself he is one of the people of God, and the foundation of the Church is in the fact of God becoming man. If we are to be members of the Church we must be human. And, for Rahner, to be human is to make a free decision accepting manhood:

When someone totally accepts his concrete human nature by his decision of free will and *thus* turns his concrete nature into an expression of every one of his free decisions for God, his free action gains an expression which is at the same time also an expression of the proper, supernatural salvific will of God.

From this it follows that precisely as a man acts in the physical world as a concrete human individual, so is he united or not to the Church. The man who is not baptised is not saved by a 'good-will' relation to the Church or an intention to do his best, but by the humanity of his actual performance, the way in which his acts are those of a member of the race to which Christ belongs. All right action is sacramental, all member-

²THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS, VOLUME II, MAN IN THE CHURCH, by Karl Rahner, translated by K-H Kruger; Darton, Longman and Todd, 55s.

ship of the Church is visible,³ or has at the very least a visible sign of relationship. The relation of flesh is expressed in free decision, in existential responsibility.

There are two uses of 'freedom' which must not be confused in this context. The psychological freedom which is expressed in choice is a presupposition of responsibility and scripture evidently takes it for granted that man is always free in this sense, even in his relationships with God. It is impossible to have Christianity unless one has also the conviction that men dispose of themselves for good or ill, and can be rewarded or punished without absurdity. This is not a peculiarly Christian freedom, it is a general human freedom:

the Scriptures, and especially St Paul, speak of the freedom which the Christian message does not regard as its obvious presupposition in man but as something which Christianity brings with it for the first time . . . in so far as God freely gives himself in Christ in a tangible and irrevocable manner . . . our freedom is really established and present in this world in the historical, tangible reality of the flesh of Christ.

So in Christ, the Word of the Father in the flesh of Adam, the risen Lord, we find our freedom. If we seek freedom elsewhere we are presented only with finite limited choice, we can choose only the finite things about us and in the end we are confronted with the edges of the world and our own uncreative weariness. Hell is not other people but oneself. A man must find a way out of his own finite choices. We are built insufficient to ourselves. We have to realise this. God alone is free, and he alone is free to give himself, and by giving himself he makes us free to give ourselves to him.

When God first offered himself to man as liberating and sanctifying, man refused the infinite freedom. So far as we are dependent upon the first generation so far we are slaves. And like slaves we rebel. The story of the Tower of Babel is presented to us as a description of what happens when men try to grab what can only be given, when men would climb their own way to the freedom of the sons of God. And like slaves we daydream and hope for ways of escape other than the free gift of freedom from our Lord, and our daydreams are temptations of finite choices. We can see from the narrative of the temptations of Christ in the wilder-

³Among many other difficulties engendered by this view is the problem of those who die as babies. On this matter Rahner is ambiguous. Does he revive the dubious theory of Daniel Feuling that they have a moment of free decision for faith?

ness that he was shewn false ways to freedom in various finite choices, and he triumphed with a divine and infinite freedom. Thus we find our freedom only in being one with Christ, the Church is the community of the free, the sacramental sign of freedom in so far as she lives the love of God and neighbour in her sanctified members.

This does not mean that the freedom of the Christian in the decisions of his life consists simply in the fact that he has made a free decision to obey the authority of the Church and that he has only to carry out orders in order to be a proper Christian man. The authority of the Church may well come into the personal responsible judgement of the individual but generally it will do so in a negative manner, ruling certain possibilities out of court for a Christian, rather than legislating that this here and now (for legislation cannot actually take note of the uniqueness of the here and now) shall be done. The Church recognises the zone of freedom where the individual Christian must consider his conscience, his understanding of the will of the Spirit, under the impulse of the charisma given him by the Spirit:

The Church is made up of individuals who can never hide themselves under the anonymity and irresponsibility of an ecclesiastical mass.

All this does not, however, lead to an advocacy of 'situation ethics'. The warnings of *Humani Generis*, and the denunciation of the famous *Allocutio* by Pius XII to the Congress of the *Fédération mondiale des Jeunesses Féminines Catholiques* on 18 April, 1952, are carefully respected. As Rahner says, some kinds of situation ethics come very near to a massive nominalism that denies the possibility of any universal knowledge truly applicable to concrete reality, and such a proposition is not compatible with the material relation of one thing to another and the revelation of God in scripture. But he does not think there is any easy refuge from the concrete realities with which situation ethics are meant to grapple. We have first to establish answers to such questions as:

- (a) How do we determine the eternal, universal, unchanging nature of man?
- (b) Is what we have until now been able to find always and everywhere a sure and sufficient criterion for present judgement?
- (c) What freedom has a man within the condition of men so discovered?
- (d) What sort of relationship is there basically between law, faith, grace and freedom according to St Paul?

Few of us, I suppose, have ever been given quite exact enough instruction

on these matters. The *turba magna* of minor theologians ought to be more ready than they are to defend the thesis that the concrete moral action is merely a case of the universal moral good:

At least in his actions, a man is really *individuum ineffabile*, whom God has called by his name, a name which is and can only be unique, so that it really is worthwhile for this unique being as such to exist for all eternity.

Each man knows that he has to make up his own mind before God. He is a responsible person. Despite all that can be said against situation ethics, there is an imperative ethical singularity, a uniqueness of the demands of situation and person which must not be avoided. We know that there is a real personal shame when we have gone against our conscience. Rahner's existential-ethics enables a man to see clearly that sin, over and above its character as an offence against the law of God, is an offence against the totally individual call of God to this man in this place. Sin is shewn clearly as a failure of personal response, a failure to love.

The essential dignity of man is that he is created in order to love God freely, to open himself to the love that God extends to man. The essential responsibility of man is that he must actualise himself as a loving creature, and that he has the capacity to deny himself and become a guilty creature. If he does sin he must accept his responsibility and not hope to live as if he were not guilty. If we are free then all our actions are accountable:

A man must not accuse his tempting surroundings or the woman or nature (real temptations all) of being the cause of his state; he must see that cause in himself and in his own inalienable act of freedom—he himself in his free act is the one whom he must accuse.

The world is the world of God and when a man upturns the world, setting himself or some other dependent reality in an absolute position, mistaking it for God, he works against the grain of things. The world refuses to disown its Lord and its own creatureliness, it has to be forced; the structure of reality fights against the sinner, and hence there is suffering: *Les choses sont contre nous*. Our deflection of things affects not only us, however, other men suffer because of our disorderliness. Not every suffering is a sign of personal guilt:

Master, was this man guilty of sin, or was it his parents, that he should have been born blind? Neither he nor his parents were guilty, Jesus answered.

What then are we to answer in the face of such suffering? It is no use being angry, or denying our other experience of a loving Father. The problem of pain is not easy of solution. The realisation and acceptance

of 'not being absolutely clear about oneself', of accepting suffering as a share in the passion of Christ, is the only Christian surrender to God.⁴ The realisation and acceptance of 'not being absolutely clear about other men' of refusing to judge them, is the only Christian way of charity to men. We must be patient waiting for the coming of Christ to make all things plain and to judge. To the *Tibi soli peccavi* corresponds Christ's *Ego te absolvo* and this is all we know and all we need to know.

The Christian confession and absolution come into being within the Church and Rahner's paper on penance has the great virtue of considering sin as a disruption of the community of God. This is especially brought out in his discussion of the meaning of 'binding and loosing'. The priest, he suggests, binds the sinner when he puts him under a ban, declares him to be, by his own sinful act, outside the sharing of the one bread. He hands him over to the loneliness of Satan. The binding is not, however, to be thought of as directed towards perdition, it is to make the state of things manifest and therefore to prepare the way for putting them right. We cannot deal with things as they are unless we see them as they are:

in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ hand over the man to Satan for the overthrow of his corrupt nature, so that his spirit may find salvation in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The binding is towards salvation, just as the suffering of the blind man was towards the declaration of 'God's action in him'. The man who has opted out of the community, who has misused his freedom and made an irresponsible choice of limit and sin and denial, must realise what he has done, must see that the community is unsympathetic towards his action. Once this is acknowledged then he can be loosed from his guilt before the Church 'on earth'. The Church, before the eucharistic celebration and in the confessional, speaks to the penitent in order that he may be freed for participation in the community sacrifice and meal: *Misereatur* and *Indulgentiam*. The Church never ceases to pray for us and when the work of reconciliation is accomplished by the authority of Christ it has been made possible because it had been begun long ago in the Church's prayer. As the binding is a declaration of withdrawal from the community so the loosing is the grant of full Christian life. The Church

⁴Rahner's concern that our attempts to lessen physical and mental suffering should not be disguises for dodging the cross of Christ might well have been balanced by a reference to the contrary danger of indifference to other men's pain being masked by a pious refusal to thwart the just plan of God. Physician and priest, surgery and sacrament of penance are as much the gifts of God as suffering and guilt.

looses the man from his state of guilt before God, from his being 'bound in heaven' and he is once more recognised 'in heaven' as being a free member of Christ. No one lives for himself alone. And no one sins for himself alone. Rahner and Donne and Quarles agree:

No man is born unto himself alone;

Who lives unto himself, he lives to none.

We in the Church complain too much of indolence and lassitude, as if we bore no responsibility for such things ourselves. We refuse the freedom we have to acknowledge guilt: this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine. The Christian revolt against sin in the Church is the accusation of self and guilt that a Christian makes before the Church:

Since the time when the divine Logos himself became man and in his Holy Spirit permanently united himself with the congregation of the sanctified redeemed, the *tibi soli peccavi* of the psalm *Miserere* no longer has the sound of lonely individualism. It does not express the thought that my relationship to God, both in good and evil, concerns myself and God alone, and no one else. This does concern me and God. But therefore it concerns everybody 'I confess to God . . . to all the Saints and to you, brethren, that I have sinned'. We could not and would not need to confess to the brethren if we had not sinned against them also, by every sin we have to acknowledge.

The free man is a member of the people, he has corporate responsibilities and rights, he is always aware of other men, he finds his personal relationship with God in the context of the world of men, in the ordinary business of his day, so far as he is freely himself among men, so far he is the Church in time and place.

Rahner's work in this collection of papers is to prepare the ground for a thorough-going theological anthropology. Nothing human is alien to him and he constantly reiterates the truth that nothing human is alien to God:

The Word himself became flesh. He did not assume something unreal but something created. But whatever is created by God is never something merely negative, is never the veil of maya. Whatever has been created by God, assumed by Christ and transfigured by his Death and Resurrection, is also destined to finality and consummation in us.

Christ came unto his own in a specific time and country, and each Christian is to realise that his Christian life is within the total human frame of time and country, home and friends and other men in the bus queue. The Church is not a building, nor an inward-looking society,

but a universal manifestation of 'the humanity of God'. A Christian anthropology is inevitably a Christian ecclesiology. And neither is a static concept. Humanity demands human action based upon free human decision and Catholicism demands Catholic Action based upon a free human decision for Christ. The moral responsibility that is given to us by our birth into the 'people of God', the fleshly community of Adam, is not lessened by our obedience within the Church of Christ, but amplified in scope and given a freedom that no other receives. Just as our private devotions attain their proper climax in the sacramental life of the Church:

the unity and union with Christ, which takes place through love, appears and realises itself with the greatest intensity in the sacrament of the Body of Christ. The forgiving grace of God reaches its clearest and most efficacious expression in the sacrament of Penance; so our free action as men reaches its climax in our action as Christian men, 'in the world'.

When we rightly say 'the Christian layman remains in the world', this must not be taken to mean that the layman is a Christian and also a man, a member of a family, the father of a family, a tailor, politician, or art critic. Rather it must be seen to mean that his being-in-the-world is the structure of his being a Christian. The current canon law does not give a great deal of attention to the rights and duties of the layman which he possesses without ceasing to be a layman in the Church:

I venture to suggest that as long as this state of affairs persists we will never have the kind of lay Catholic Action desired by us. Real responsibility and duty will only be accepted and borne where the law grants a certain realm of freedom (even though merely *iure humano*) for autonomous fulfilment of such duties and responsibilities. And these responsibilities must be seen as existing wherever Christian men make their home, have their relations and their loves. Where a man has his house and home, where his life is lived, there he is directly a member of a people to which the Church must speak the word of God, there he is working outwards from the central altar of the parish church, making all things new in his proper social setting. Each Christian is to be an apostle sent out to his people, talking their language, speaking the Word to them as they can hear and understand. And to respond to this vocation a man must realise his dignity as a man made a son of God by adoption through the work of Christ, made free in the kingdom, in the Church which is the home of freedom.

One thing which may surprise English readers of this volume, and

indeed of much of Rahner's work so now bountifully marketed by English publishers, is the general absence of biblical categories and the paucity of cited texts. The article in the first volume of the *Investigations* on 'Theos in the New Testament', which massed biblical witness in formal array, is untypical of Rahner's methodology. He prefers to argue by definition rather than description, and the biblical images do not directly serve his purpose. Since the great movement of renewal in the Church is a scriptural movement primarily this lack of exegesis gives his work an oddly old-fashioned and even scholastic look. It is certainly easier to read Rahner if one has some prior knowledge of German existentialist thought, or even if one has read a novel or two by M. Sartre. In some sense at any rate Rahner is a philosopher's theologian. But one must not too easily reckon Rahner 'merely philosophical' because he has a command of technical language. Not every suit of solemn black is a sign of sincere mourning, and not every catena of scriptural texts is really biblical theology. Judgement must not be made so quickly. Rahner's concerns are rooted in the ground of life, they are those of the biblical writers themselves. It is not words that matter here. Similarity of words may disguise a lack of sympathy. One of the difficulties we must now face in making a new vernacular liturgy is that a translation of the Bible is not necessarily understandable of the people by the fact of its faithfulness to the original text. We have to put across the meaning today of other modes of thinking, other 'world-views'. In preparing a scriptural translation of the liturgy a limit is set to adaptation by the duty to pass on 'what we have received'. No such boundary exists for theological discussion, and Rahner has thought out anew the way in which the things which have been said can be meaningfully said today.

That this volume does not strike so brilliant as its predecessor is due in large measure to the enfranchising effect that Rahner's work has had in a very short time. His translators, wrestling with a prose that coils and shifts as subtly as the serpents from Tenedos, have won for us a new demesne. And having at first gawped in wonder and clapped in happiness, we now set about marking out plots for our own cultivation. Rahner has made us adult in theological thinking and now we can summon enough confidence to question him, to work out our theology with diffidence certainly, but to work it out ourselves. This is all to the good. Rahner suffered from a reputation not totally square to the truth. He was thought a 'left-wing' or '*avant garde*' theologian (whatever those racy terms imply), whereas he is really a man working patiently in the

great tradition. He is not a private figure but a teacher of theology in the Church, read and congratulated by the Pope, listened to with respect by Bishops at the Council. If, like the French King, we say to him 'Astonish me', he may well do so but that would be by accident not design; his is a restorative not a pyrotechnic or destructive gift. He is a wise man not a prophet. He is not the less valuable for that. He is a man who can tell us the place of a free man in the free Church.

The Vocation of Celibacy among Laywomen

ALEX ALEXANDER

While the third session of the Vatican Council has many problems of the highest importance to consider, for the benefit of the whole Church and also for particular sections of it, there seems to be extant today a situation of comparatively recent origin which has never been thoroughly examined, discussed, or pronounced upon in any authoritative discourse, and yet it is one of which more people are becoming increasingly conscious: it is the problem of celibate women and the part they play in the mystical body.

It is indeed a problem of which certain authorities, notably in France, are to some extent aware; but apart from an occasional document published there and elsewhere that acknowledges the existence of these people in considerable numbers, no attempt appears to have been made seriously to consider the situation, to appraise it and to suggest lines of approach to be followed when it is dealt with.

The origins of this situation would seem to be twofold. They lie in the emancipation of women consequent upon their work in the first world war, and suffragette campaigning at the same period, and their infiltration as working members of a society which, as a result of two world wars, had lost a considerable proportion of its male population. This state of affairs created conditions in which many women—suited