

The Conscience of the Church

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It is a reasonably fair statement to say that much of the suspicion with which the laity are regarded by many of the clergy is a hangover from the Catholic suspicion of Protestantism with its emphasis upon lay participation and its origins in lay protest. The Catholic student who wishes to understand the place of the laity in the Roman Church is faced with no easy task; he finds himself on the frontiers of Catholic theology in which even theologians as eminent as Congar and Rahner are unable to provide him with a clear and unambiguous analysis.

The Layman in Christian History,¹ is, therefore, to be welcomed as an ecumenical source-book of considerable value to all who wish to supplement the undiluted theological wine of Congar and Rahner with the bread of history. And it is, as one might expect, in the historical chapters that this book is most successful. The contributions on the Ancient Church (Professor Williams of Harvard), the Church of the Roman Empire (Dr Friend of Cambridge), the Dark Ages (R. W. Southern) and the Reformation (Gordon Rupp) provide essential historical information about such topics as the *seniores laici* (laity elected to be consultants to the bishop), the power of the laity to elect their bishops and clergy, and to withdraw from those who were unworthy; the diminution of true lay authority when kings became recognised as protectors of the Church; and the gradual erosion of lay participation in the Church by the clerical emphasis of the counter-reformation.

After the Reformation, as F. C. Mather shows in his article on *The British Layman in modern times*, the Protestant layman is best understood in terms of his growing understanding of the Church as the body of Christ and of the layman as that member whose calling is bring the whole secular world into conformity with Christ's will. Here is produced that laity—thoroughly Pauline in its formation—whose activity in this country ranged from the agitation that produced the social reforms of the nineteenth century, abolished slavery and formed those religious societies out of which the Labour party evolved, to those who established in such schools as Rugby and Wellington (under Benson) a rule of

¹THE LAYMAN IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY, edited by Stephen Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber; S.C.M., 40s.

'godliness and good learning' and formed the men who gave stability and humanity to a society riven by rapid industrialisation into two nations—the rich and the poor.

As with all books of multiple authorship, there is the likelihood of unevenness; and the latter part of the book tends to immerse itself too uncritically in the details of modern ecumenical discussion and attach the kind of significance to what Mr Oldham said at Oxford which provoked Matthew Arnold to his celebrated definition of 'provinciality' in *Culture and Anarchy*.

But if we move back to Stephen Neill's introduction we can find much common ground. He does not favour the simple distinction between cleric and layman (in which many Catholics still sleep securely); and he emphasises the need for the laity to be, not expert theologians, but at least theologically literate.

Catholics, however, are still faced with the fundamental question—how is the position of the layman in the Church to be defined? The following notes are based upon a study of Congar's *Lay People in the Church* and Rahner's *Notes on the lay apostolate* (*Theological investigations* vol. ii); and although the conclusions are stated deliberately (but not dogmatically) their intention is to provide the basis for further correction, criticism, and comment.

Note I: *Distinctions of Function*

Today, the distinction between clergy and laity made, for example, by Newman may appear to be theologically too rigid, to be derived from a particular set of cultural distinctions appropriate only to the time in which he was writing, and to conceal a further distinction between ordained and unordained members of the clergy. On closer inspection, such distinctions seem to suffer the death from a thousand qualifications, especially when we see that 'priest' is not synonymous with 'monk' or celibate religious, who has withdrawn from the world and chosen a way of life in order more surely to unite himself with God.

A further difficulty, even in modern writing such as that by Congar in his book *Lay People in the Church*, pp. 16, 17, is with the distinction between the cleric as the man primarily and thus directly given to God, and the layman as primarily given to things in themselves and thus only indirectly to God, since such distinctions seem to derive more from a certain kind of neo-aristotelian epistemology than from the scriptures. We do best to start with the whole people of God who are called (Mt. 28. 19) to preach to all nations. They are called to be whole men, that is

fully human, but they achieve their holiness by the exercise of differing functions. The firmest distinction is that between the bishop and the layman, between the father of the family and those whose contact with the family is least direct, because their work and function is to live outside it. They are still members of the family, re-united by their common celebration of the liturgy; but their function differs from those who are called to remain within the family circle and are, in the strict sense, 'institutionalised' Christians.

Our difficulties begin when we realise that there are varying degrees of remaining within that family circle, the *pleroma* of the bishop; and this is why Rahner's three-fold distinction between priests (or fathers *sic*), clergy and laity is better than the simpler two-fold distinction of clergy and laity. The bishop can give authority of various kinds—permanently, by ordination, but also temporarily or for a specific purpose by means of a direct commission to teach, as for example with a lay theologian. But in so far as a role is explicitly Christian and partakes of or expresses the *magisterium* of the Church it may cease to be specifically lay.

If the layman is defined in terms of his function, in that his way of life is determined by his trade or profession—tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor—he is, in this sense, the one who has stayed in the world, as distinct from bishops and their representatives, whose professional absorption within the institution of the Church has, to this extent, removed them from the world—'they live from the altar . . . they turn their mission into their profession'. (Rahner.) And when they return to that world, they return as specific images of Christ, and messengers or teachers by profession.

Conversely, the layman's testimony to his faith is implicit in his professional skill and competence, not explicitly or positively so, in the teaching sense; but this is not to relegate him, as Talbot claimed, to irresponsible passivity. His role may not be *explicitly* that of teacher, moraliser or dogmatiser, and may be considered to be an implicit testimony, in terms of his skill and competence as tradesman or professional man, as father and citizen; but it is still the fundamental Christian role of exemplar: here is the field of the lay apostolate. We discover (we are not told) that a good bricklayer or doctor is a Christian; and our discovery is first the skill, goodness or conscientiousness of the bricklayer or doctor, and then what has caused and encouraged it.

A more explicitly Christian stand is frequently a teaching or institutional stand, and for this reason it may cease to be purely lay. Thus the organisers of Catholic Action, active members of the Legion of Mary,

teachers in Catholic schools may be new forms of the clerical condition; and one of the results of the many contemporary studies of the role of the laity, and of the Church's need for greater activity on the part of its lay members may be a fuller understanding of a distinction between priest, religious and cleric, of the various roles of the clergy, and of the various kinds of authority which a bishop can delegate without ordination.

Thus when we say 'laymen ought to do this', we may sometimes mean that those who are not yet recognised as clerics should be authorised to discharge this clerical responsibility, 'whether one calls it that or not'; and this is an authority which can be and has been delegated to women.

The cleric, in the strict sense, is the institutionalised Christian; the layman is the man who has discovered how to live as a Christian within the demands of his occupation. But directly such implicit discoveries are made explicit, the layman is moving within the clerical condition: the layman's occupation is 'simultaneously the material of his being a Christian and its limit'. (Rahner).

Thus Congar's claim that the priest or cleric is closer to God than the layman could be grounded not on his withdrawal from the world, but on his standing as a more thoroughly institutionalised Christian; but such a claim would presuppose an ecclesiology of a specifically Roman Catholic character, since the closeness conceded depends upon the value placed upon the Church as a visible institution. A Quaker, alone before his God, could not be expected to see that a more thoroughly institutionalised Christian was closer still.

For Catholics, however, who see the institutional presence of the Church and its hierarchical organisation as the necessary condition of our full membership of the mystical body, and the bishop as at once the president of the local Christian assembly, and the Christ-like father of the family, the more fully we belong to the institution, the more fully do we belong to the mystical body of Christ. Thus the more intimately we move into the order and structure of the Church, and the more fully we discharge responsibilities delegated to us, the more directly we enter into relation with Christ, the founder of the institution, the author of its sacraments, and the sole source of the bishop's authority. It is in this sense that Congar's distinction is valid, but only for those who share his ecclesial presuppositions: that those who are called to share in the bishop's authority have, in the same way as those who frequent the sacraments of mass and of penance, a *closer* relationship to God, Christ, and to the authority which that relationship gives.

But God's grace cannot, of course, be restricted to his sacramental forms, and the layman may find—where the Church is slack or ill-adjusted—that God seems to reveal himself more fully by being more fully incarnated in the forms of daily occupation than in a fossilized liturgy or in a besieged diocese. But it is the Church's claim that the deepest insights into the nature of God are institutionalised within the forms of the sacraments, the forms of occupation which bring us closest to the institution, and to the living centre of the people of God—the *magisterium*.

Note II: Way of Life

In what sense is the Church an 'institution'; and does our distinction in function between priest, cleric and lay imply separate ways of life and culture patterns appropriate to the functions exercised?

To exercise his function as successor of the apostles, the bishop requires to be the permanent centre of the local Christian fellowship (*koinonia*); and those whom he ordains are thereby empowered to exercise a similar permanent function and authority. But ordination is not a magic rite: it does not turn a man into another kind of man: what happens is that gradually and naturally in the exercise of their professional function, bishops and priests are as much marked and formed by their professions as are teachers, doctors and lawyers. In the intervals of exercising his calling a priest is as much a layman as any other professional man; and he is not necessarily committed to a special culture pattern or to a rigidly unchanging way of life.

This is borne out by the history of the Church which shows that the ways of life appropriate to the profession of bishop, priest or cleric have changed with differing times and needs. Their over-riding purpose has been to place bishops, priests and clerics most effectively at the centre of the people of God and to keep them there. This has involved sacrifice, but so does any profession; what it has always demanded has been a sacrifice of secular ends or worldly fulfilment in the interests of ecclesiastical, since the Church is the cleric's profession, as it is not the layman's.

Yet in an age of greater equilibrium between Church and society than our own, the cleric who is a priest may need to conform to the discipline of a religious in his way of life, in order that the distinctive and special nature of his priestly function is emphasised in a world that thinks itself to be satisfactorily Christian. At other times, however, and in an affluent, uncertain, shabby and murderous age like our own, a priest's function might be better discharged by his living a life which was out-

wardly identical with that of the mass of his flock, in order that he might show that his priestly function was a fitting but essential part of their ordinary life and its fulfilment. The pattern of the clerical way of life changes with the need which the clergy must serve: St Paul was a tent-maker (Acts 18. 3), his medieval successors in England lords of Parliament; there have been the Benedictine centuries and the Franciscan, worker priests and resident gentlemen, mandarin missionaries like Fr Ricci and silent witnesses like Charles de Foucauld: what has to be sought is always relevance: there is no royal road, although there are sure ones. All the institutional forms—liturgical or religious—have a certain incrustation which is removable and adaptable: they must not only be relevant to the times but seen to be so; and it is this which not only justifies but makes obligatory the existence of a perpetual party of reform within the Church. This poses the more fundamental question: what do we mean when we speak of the Church as instituted by Christ, and how far is this a bricks and mortar term?

The Church is the body of worshipping Christians at any moment—when two or three are gathered together in my name, I shall be among them—and the liturgical act institutes the Church. The Church is where the liturgy is: the institution is the liturgy. In pre-industrial days the Church could only exist as a visible embodiment or polity in terms of particular buildings, ways of life, and recognisable classes of men. Today with the break up of the separate national cultures and their merging into the one culture of a mass society, the Church needs no longer to depend upon static embodiments: it can and needs to be mobile. It can be *instituted* in the works canteen by bishops whose authority still derives from their presidency over the liturgical act, but who rule no longer in the manner of feudal overlords but as the new leaders of our mobile, highly trained and independent society—the chairmen of nationalised industries, the tutors of study groups—men who are also trained to recognise the workings of the spirit, or as they would put it ‘to take the sense of the meeting’; and whose ruling is admitted because free men must admit restraint to prevent their freedom from degenerating into licence. Although their judgments are not necessarily infallible, they are to be obeyed because they are essential to the continuing existence of the institution for which they are responsible.

Similarly bishops can exercise their authority in different ways, as the history of the Church shows. Much depends on the contemporary attitudes to management and education: in a feudal society management and education are imposed from above; but in our open society,

authority is elicited or led out (educated) by the manager or teacher, in order that all partake in the responsibility towards an authority which they have come to recognise and freely to impose upon themselves. And this is a view clearly compatible with the intention of exercising ecclesiastical authority as *servus servorum dei*.

To institute the Church in a particular place and at a particular time is to institute a family, to bring a heart into times and places, a fount of love and emulation, which is also the visible means by which God's grace is given through his sacraments to men who, if they were not thus regularly recalled by this liturgical act to their family centre, might think that they were justified by works rather than by faith.

The liturgy shapes the community, it is the paradigm, the rehearsal-community whose shape we seek to re-embodiment, identify and secure in the world community within which we move. It is the prayer of the liturgy that gives us at once the recognition of our calling, of our insufficiency, and of our opportunity to reflect upon the consequences. All the people of God penetrate that outer community and live within it at greater or lesser degrees of intensity: to do so principally and in its own terms is to exercise the lay calling; to do so in liturgical and explicitly teaching terms is to exercise a clerical calling. But these functions need not be exercised at all times or in such a way as to make a separate way of life or clerical class necessary—now that society is highly mobile. We might do better to talk not of priests, clerics and laymen, but of functions and duration of function; not of the Church as a building or a law-court, but as the liturgical act and the social function (*sic*).

Today, for example, when the layman has to exist as a member of a highly specialised and professionalised society, the role of the whole people of God might be conceived in terms of a counter-action to tendencies which by their extreme specialisation tend to de-humanise and de-personalise. The priest and cleric might especially adopt ways of living which enabled them to become more fully persons in a society of un-persons by withdrawing from the 'professionalism' of the world and forming environments which enabled them to show themselves as whole (or holy) men. In areas of social destitution—in the past they were the docklands, today they are the housing estates—where the sense of community is non-existent, the priest might establish his liturgical assembly—not in terms of a Church building, but in what were once called residential settlements—mixed communities of men and women, priests, clerics and laity, living and exemplifying the Christian family life in an area which required to be made fit for *human* habitation.

Note III: Conditions for a Positive Definition of the Laity

Although the analysis so far has attempted to show how confusion over the roles of priest, cleric and layman in the Church is the result either of historical accident or of mixing cultural and theological categories, the resulting definition of a layman is still negative. And to persist in such a negative definition is to persist in accepting a difference in status as between the thing defined and that in terms of which it needs to be defined. Thus if the only way to define a woman were in terms of a man, this would imply the dependence of women upon men and be taken, as it once was, as grounds for justifying their subjection. Similarly most works of theology which define the layman in terms of priests and clerics still imply (without meaning to do so) that the layman is a dependent, a second-class citizen of the *koinonia*—at least in this world.

This may be as far as we can go under present conditions, when we consider the embryonic nature of the existing teaching about the function of the laity within the Church. Newman's emphasis upon the need for partnership between clergy and laity would seem not only the most expedient course, but that which is most likely to encourage the right theological developments and distinctions. The notion of such a partnership arises where the work to be done cuts across the existing roles assigned to clergy and laity—the teaching of religion in schools and universities, the formation of lay societies to assist the Church, or the formation of groups to bring problems to the notice of the hierarchy, such as nuclear warfare or the just war. Where the roles of clergy and laity cannot readily be distinguished, the need is for a greater partnership rather than for less (otherwise clericalism and anti-clericalism are the result); and this need arises as the areas of de-Christianization widen, deepen and grow more impervious to the traditional methods of Christian teaching. In the last analysis, as Rahner points out, those who can best Christianize the world today are those who have made it in the form it is, and keep it so—the laity—this is the irrefutable basis for their claim to be taken into partnership. Yet it is also the basis for our wanting to have a definition of the laity which is positive, clear, and un-derivative. How else are we to settle the questions about the form their religious education ought to take and how far the Church requires them to be theologically literate? And how can the laity reconcile their membership of a religious polity, hierarchically ordered, with full political membership of open, democratic, pluralist societies: can they be fully members, or ought they to be holding a watching brief for the restoration of 'Christendom'?

Furthermore, a Church which is the prisoner of a one-sided theological explanation of itself—a clerical theology which defines the layman in terms of his relations to priest and cleric—is in no position to adapt itself convincingly to modern society. Historically such a clerical theology was produced as a reaction to the Reformation and can sometimes best be explained in terms of loss of nerve, since a clerical theology of the Church is not a Catholic theology, for it is not a full explanation. But before the Church can put forward an account of itself with a fullness sufficient to reconcile the separated brethren and make an impact upon a secular culture, this missing component in its theology must be supplied. Only then will the conditions for an effective work of osmosis be satisfied.

Newman's case that the whole body of the faithful is one of the organs of the Church's infallibility is the best starting point, especially when we realise that there is an impressive array of theological testimony to the truth of this contention. In its desire to define the Pope's infallibility, the first Vatican Council tended to push the other characteristics of the Church's infallibility into the background, and to such an extent that many Protestants came to think that Catholics believe the Pope to be the sole repository of that infallibility. But, as Dr Thils shows us,² even the schema *De Ecclesia* of 1870 testified to the infallibility of the faithful *in credendo* and cited a celebrated passage from Bellarmine.

In the light of the way Newman was treated for saying that the laity could and should be consulted, it is ironical to read Thils' varied testimony and to note that in the sixteenth century a Spanish theologian, Gregory of Valencia, was prepared to go even further than Newman in speaking of the need for the Pope in matters of controversy '*fidelium omnium sententiam inquirere*' (my italics.) Perhaps Newman was right; and the nineteenth century was the least theological of all ages of the Church precisely because it tended in practice to deny this function of the laity which is to be, in Newman's words, 'an instinct or *phronema* deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ, a direction of the Holy Ghost', and 'a something in the *pastorum* and *fidelium conspiratio*, which is not in the pastors alone'.

Testimony to this role comes also from history. In the rehabilitation process of St Joan the judge speaks of her right to testify and to follow her conscience as being derived from the commands of scripture that the spirit must be allowed to blow where it listeth, that we must beware of holding prophecy in low esteem, and that if we are led by the spirit we

²Gustave Thils *L'infaillibilité du peuple Chrétien 'in credendo'*; Louvain 1963.

are no longer under law. (v. Acts 2. 17 ff and I Cor. 2. 10-16.)

The first layman to be invited to the present Council, M. Guitton, in a recent book has quoted Newman for his authority in saying that the positive theological function of the laity is to prophesy; and he sees in our Lady 'l'archétype du laïc' when 'she kept all these things to herself'. What does this amount to? What could be the function of prophecy in an urban society?

We have already seen that the layman finds himself willy-nilly at those frontier positions where Church and world meet and are most sensitive to each other's demands. The layman witnesses to the Church but at the same time has the duty and the privilege of offering consultation to the *magisterium* on matters which affect this work of adjustment and reconciliation. To be an effective consultant the layman must have that insight into the way things will or ought to go which can, on occasions, amount to prophecy. Newman himself showed this quality to a marked degree, for example, in *A form of infidelity of the Day*; and this may account for his being able to perceive the importance of the laity to the Church at a time when his insistence was not merely resisted but resented. But to be an effective consultant pre-supposes that you understand both sides of the question and can understand the problem from the standpoint of the person with whom you are consulting. Thus the layman, to fulfil his role, has to be sufficiently theologically literate to be able to anticipate the criteria which a bishop, for example, has to see satisfied in discussing questions of religious education, the just war, family limitation, etc.

It will not do for the layman to be so theologically naïve as to fail to distinguish the pope from the papal curia, otherwise he will make Acton's mistake and see the papacy as 'the fiend skulking behind the crucifix'. He will need to be educated in the various modalities of the infallibility of the Church, otherwise he may, at a crucial instance, fail to trust to his conscience and prefer the settled opinion of his neighbours to the sovereign voice within; or he may fail to see that in certain cases the papal authority is established as a protection for the laity and that an appeal to Rome can be that supreme liberty of appeal to the mind of the whole Church.

Conversely, a full education in the theological implications of Church history will show that a layman who seeks to fulfil his function as the pleroma of the bishop is helping thereby to resist that sterilising centralization of the Church's powers into the papal curia which was so marked a limitation of the Church in the late nineteenth century. The most

progressive bishops are powerless when confronted by an indifferent and superstitious laity who have reduced themselves by their own inertia to the level of a theological proletariat: a proletariat gets the bishops it deserves.

Thus in order to fulfil their positive role as, in the ordinary course of events, consultants and in special cases (e.g., St Joan or St Thomas More) prophets, the laity must themselves take the initiative in devising ways of educating themselves theologically in order that they may help and not hinder the work of the pastors.

Perhaps the most fundamental working of the prophetic function in laymen is to be witnessed in the authority exercised over us by poets and artists; since, by accepting their witness 'to things in their depth and presentness', we are placing ourselves and our stock notions (theological and cultural) under the judgment of such insights: we wait for Godot; we are taken to 'the very heart of loss' by Cleopatra; and we learn what it is to see that 'ripeness is all'.³

Note IV: Definition

It is only when we have a laity which is theologically at the same level as it is technologically and politically (i.e., theologically literate) that we can reach the area where a *positive* definition of the layman's function in the Church can be developed. We do so by turning to the second of the two questions: that which deals with the relation between the layman as member of the Church and as a full political member of a pluralist society.

Is the relationship organic, or is the layman condemned to revert to pre-Constantine days and to become in modern terms a political schizophrenic? Certainly he has to live in divided and distinguished worlds; but he is already having to do this when he is sometimes called to discharge a clerical function under the direct authority of the bishop. And it is this which gives us the clue: the collapse of the middle ages turned the layman into an amphibious creature, and he must be educated to adapt himself positively and joyfully to this role. It is a position not of weakness but of strength, but it calls for education, intelligence and flexibility. In other words it calls for those same qualities that are prized and developed in modern society. The function of the layman is to face outwards and to find his salvation by and through the world. Thus his relationship to the institutional sacraments and forms of the Church is

³For a fuller discussion see *Theology and the University* Section IV, especially the note by David Jenkins on Literature and the Theologian.

of one who uses them as *means* to prepare him to exercise his function better. They are not, whilst he is truly lay—and this is where he differs from the cleric—*ends* in themselves. The institutionalised Christian (priest and cleric) lives from the altar; and his focus is the bishop. The layman turns to the altar in order to live within the world in which God is revealed in the mysterious and indirect forms of art, politics and society. These, not the bishop, are his focus; that collection of occupations which is both the common good of the community and, in its juridical aspect, the power of the State. Here is the larger separation—Church and State—separate, because as starting points they remain separate; but overlapping, because although one starts from Christ, and the other from where we are, here and now, in this particular situation at a particular time—this is also Christ, but Christ *incognito*. And it may be wrong to break these *incognitos* down, even blasphemous, since we can lose the sense of the sacredness of life, the understanding why ‘Everything that lives is holy’. There is, therefore, always the danger that we shall assimilate the short term needs of the Church to the short term needs of the State, or vice-versa; of which the consequences are a lack of respect and reverence for the world as it is given to us, a false supernaturalism on the one hand; and on the other the belief that particular sociological forms of Church structure (often developed as a by-product of a successful concordat between Church and State) are of the essence of the Church—cf. the belief that the vicar ought to be the resident gentleman of his parish, or that the *Index* fulfils a necessary function in the education of the laity.

Thus the religious education of the layman should fit him not for the clerical but for the secular life; and to emphasise the nothingness of this world to the exclusion of his duties towards it is not to make him more spiritual but less so, since he will merely keep his ‘spirituality’ in one water tight compartment and his professional criteria in another. In theory he will regard the world as an unpleasant, inexplicable interval between the R.I. class and salvation: the world and its demands will be merely a mirage on the way to his destination—heaven; not a means of gaining his end.

In practice he will become what is called a Sunday Christian, an iceberg smoothly inaccessible in its depths to the real assents of religious commitment.

In a state of complete equilibrium between Church and world such as may have existed at certain times during the middle ages, an identity of clerical and secular purposes might permit an identity of clerical and

secular educations. But at present the layman has to translate the truths of his religion into terms of a world which accepts only what can be shown to be verified by results: his case for the sanctity of marriage must be based upon the harm done to the children of broken homes, for the consistent practice of charity to the fact that it is the one quality which keeps human institutions from inevitable disintegration.

Similarly Catholic societies and journals, where they are not directly concerned to nourish the internal life of the Church, should have as their aim their absorption by the world: they should desire to wither away as the criteria for which they stand are adopted by their society. Thus a Catholic university college in Africa has succeeded when it has been the means of establishing a free university; a Catholic paper when its contributors and readers are drawn increasingly from society at large. The function of the Church is to preach to all nations, not to sleep amidst internal pre-occupations (Mark 13. 10).

I am not minimising the eschatological end of the layman, as of all Christians. Certainly he must live in this world as if he used it not (1 Cor. 7. 31; James 1. 27). Under one aspect the people of God are the leaven, the salt of the earth, the light, the people who by means of their liturgy are wedded into a community whose fulfilment is never to be in this world but in the next. But this is not to deny that there are fulfilments in this world, or that they should be striven for. Quietism is an insidious temptation when there is no satisfactory definition of the layman's function.

A proper and theologically sophisticated understanding of temporal limitations is, paradoxically as it sounds, the best means by which the people of God can influence that world: disinterestedness, charity, a willingness to suffer for principles irrespective of worldly advantage can only be maintained consistently by men who have their main hopes elsewhere. This is the role of the elect, of 'God's *chosen people*' (my italics)—(Col. 3. 12-17). But many are called, few chosen; and a man may try, but there is no guarantee that he will succeed. Like Newman he may have to testify to the truth not by doing it but by suffering for it under persecution from those who should be his fellow-workers.

Others may not have the grace; others may not have the guts: as Mr Valiant for Truth said as he prepared to pass over to the other side: 'My sword I give to him who shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it'.

But since the most positive definition of priests and cleric is arrived at by a deduction from the function of the bishop, so the most positive

definition of a layman will come as a deduction from the function of those who are both called *and* chosen—those who succeed in living at a level of great and successful intensity. We can then see whether this admits of more general application to the lay condition as already defined. With these provisos it is possible to show in what sense the people of God, the laity, have the obligation to form part of the directing element of their society, since they are literally the *elect*, called by their creator to read aright the signs of the times and to assist the Church to adapt itself.

The much misused term *élite* belongs by derivation originally to theology rather than to sociology; and it is still not to be identified with a privileged group or a ruling class, since it cannot be thus applied without logical difficulties and contradictions: 'who *calls* the rulers to rule; why is a boy born to one class *called* to be inferior or superior by reason of his birth to boys in other classes'? These are pseudo-questions: they cannot be answered, because they cannot be put, since the *élite* by definition is never self-chosen and thus never self-perpetuating: many are called but few are chosen. It was for this reason that Coleridge called it the clerisy—the Church under its national aspect, and 'the nation dynamically considered'.

The *élite* is a minority group who, having verified their value-judgments by successful social application, claim the right and obey the obligation to apply these to society as a whole. They are always a minority because only a minority is ever sufficiently conscious of criteria to be able to verify them successfully in their application.

To identify *élite* and *elect* is dangerous, since it obscures the definition we are looking for, which derives from the specific function of the laity as part of the *élite* in so far as they become successfully human or whole (holy) men. The values remain constant; it is the social embodiment that changes. The magnanimous man of the Renaissance is re-embodied in Newman's 'gentleman' and, in the twentieth century, in the dedicated teacher or social-worker. Such men by providing the open society with the theological justification for its criteria give it that essential moral intensity which it cannot of itself command, and which it cannot live without.

Laymen are most themselves when they are at the creative centre of their culture because that is where the Church belongs; and it is their theological responsibility so to represent the Church in this respect, not in the technical and internal terms of the Church's witness to itself, but in the terms which their society itself has chosen and understands. It is

the difference between the training camp and the front line. The layman is no longer studying the manuals in the depot, or learning to fight the last war but one on the parade ground, he is in the front line—where necessity knows no law—fighting with anyone who will fight with him against those who would exploit youth and innocence for commercial gain, against those who have no reverence for life and carelessly corrupt the consciousness of free men. And in seeking common ground with fellow fighters in this cause—with men like Schweitzer, Leavis, Hoggart, Knights and Bertrand Russell—the layman is learning about the irreversible and inevitable nature of things and of values. He becomes the conscience of the Church; and this is his value for the Church. He testifies, as with the authority of the prophet, to things as they inevitably are and as they are inevitably revealed to us within the natural order in terms of themselves. The layman is the Catholic who puts himself under the judgment of the natural order, whom the bishop consults as the expert witness to that order.

To require a priest to do this would be to require him to perform a lay function: he may do so, but it is not the function for which he was made a priest. Whom therefore should we blame for failing to denounce the mass murder of the Jews, the priest Pius XII or our fellow Catholic laity who constituted a majority of the greater German Reich? Who could have achieved most? The answer to that question tells us something about the layman's positive responsibility and of his authority as a member of the infallible people of God; and it does so by showing the limitation of papal authority in a context calling out for Christian action. Some Catholic criticism of Pius XII arises from a failure to understand the positive authority and obligation of the laity in situations of this kind: it testifies to how much we are prisoners of a clerical theology of the Church.

Note V: Élite and Class—the Dangers of Category Confusion

In the eschatological sense the social effectiveness of the laity as part of the élite is incidental: they succeed when they are most disinterested. In another sense they succeed only when they have managed to embody high ideals in great institutions, and in so doing have themselves become a vested interest in the state. It is here that the famous confusion of categories, elect and élite, élite and class, Church and State, takes its rise.

A successful group, however open in its ideals, tends to become a family; and in so doing to become a class; since class is a term for a complex of families with similar customs and attitudes. This process is

inevitable. On the one hand it enables a stability to be produced which makes it easy to hand on values as agreeable customs that makes a man's convictions his prejudices, and dye the young men in the laws; but on the other hand it must lead to fossilization and vested interest.

The lay apostles of today become the Catenians of tomorrow, but this is the inevitable condition of the laity in their role as the elect. It is not fatal as long as we guard against two errors.

The first is to identify the élite with a particular social class, since this derives from an identification of theological and social categories, of Church and State. You don't necessarily have either to be a good bourgeois or a committed member of the working class to be at the creative centre of your culture; nor does the layman have a theological duty to support certain social institutions because Christians formed them, but only if they are still effective for his purpose. T. S. Eliot, following Anglican theory in his *Idea of a Christian Society*, seems to imply that the Christian is committed to a particular form of society and to a particular cultural identification of Church and State, in which kindness to animals is part of the English religion and bishops are part of the English way of life. Such an identification can have its advantages—it was deliberately chosen by Arnold when he formed the philosophy of the first and the best of the public schools; and we should remember Mill's warning that in our desire to have a dynamic and progressive society we frequently overlook the necessity for ensuring that we know how to keep society permanent and stable. As criteria harden into customs, and the element of reflection and of minority standing is eroded, so religion passes over into culture, the élite becomes a self-perpetuating class, its institutions becomes clubs, and its authority is applied imperially, burking the challenge of verification. Its forms and institutions become ends in themselves, such as the public school monopoly of Oxbridge and the Oxbridge monopoly of university education. Minority culture has given way to mass culture of the Sunday newspapers; we are ruled no longer by criteria but by customs, and then by fashions. The battle must be fought all over again with each generation of the laity. Yet in terms of his function within the Church the layman is committed to the separation of élite and class, elect and élite, Church and State, since here below we can make no abiding home.

The second mistake is mutually to identify the elect and the élite, and to suppose that the layman has failed in his vocation if he is not a successful and highly self-conscious member of the élite: many are called, few chosen. And he cannot choose himself. This is akin to the extreme

policies of some of the first Protestants, such as the Calvinists of Geneva; but in so far as in his working life as carpenter or schoolmaster the layman shows that his faith produces a more human as well as a more conscientious carpenter or schoolmaster, he is not only participating in a common culture with those whose vocation it is to live at more self-conscious and pioneering levels of intensity—the St Joans and the President Kennedys—he is also helping to form that common culture, as did the humblest Methodists in the nineteenth century, whose efforts to be worthy of their obligations produced the institutions by which the silent social revolution was achieved in this country.

A positive definition of the layman as obeying a vocation to live within the culture of the élite shows to each layman how to find his role in that common vocation: he must seek for the growing points in his profession and try to live there as a Christian. By doing so he shows the clergy what is the contribution to the Church that only the layman can provide—or that something which is not in the pastors but only in the pastors and faithful in *conspiratio*. It is born at the meeting of the *ecclesia* and the world. It is the conscience of the Church.

Who is my Brother?

T. L. WESTOW

The Council of Trent condemned heresies, as Councils have done since the beginning until Vatican II. It arrested such corruption as had been denounced by the Christian people. It laid down businesslike rules for the re-organization of a rather lax ecclesiastical society, it set up seminaries and effective visitations, and it provided the material for a full-bodied Canon Law which for four hundred years prevented any further epidemic of scandals, thereby restoring the good name of the Church in the eyes of secular society. But as a social document it failed, and failed egregiously. The period which followed on the Council of Trent is known historically as the Counter-Reformation. The name is significant. It was a Council which had been pressed into action by movements