ARE ALL PROPHETS?

By HUGH KAY

IF THE CHURCH is the germ-cell of the kingdom charged with establishing the kingdom's roots in temporal society, her prophetic mission is highly relevant to the current search for new concepts of social order. It is here that, without impinging on the prerogatives of secular sovereignty, she can make one of her most distinctive contributions to a concrete historical situation that is meant to be conditioned in the here and now by the promised 'revealing of the sons of God'.[1] She is not to build the secular city, but she is to influence its character by engendering a theological climate spontaneously productive of constructive 'revolution' through the practical commitment of her members to the service of the world. She has, as teacher, to proclaim the moral truths that go to the heart of the nature of society, and, as a living fellowship, to pioneer social experiments, identifying herself with secular endeavour in the spirit of a search for justice and human fulfilment. The layman, as we shall see, has a powerful contribution to make to speculative theology, but it is especially in the practical task of humanizing society that he must be engaged as a prophet by word and dynamic witness.

First, to establish his prophetic credentials. The layman in the church shares in Christ's prophetic role as a powerful herald of 'a faith in things to be hoped for' and as one who announces Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word. The power of the gospel is to shine forth in his social and family life, and this evangelization assumes a specific quality and special force by operating within the secular context.[2] Not all men are prophets, for prophecy belongs to the christian who as a member of the church is endowed by Christ with charismatic gifts of wisdom and understanding.[3] Some of these he derives from the sacraments, in the first instance, baptism and confirmation; others may come to him in other ways but they proceed from Christ and through the church, and they are essentially linked with apostolic tradition.[4] He is a

[1] Rom 8, 19–21.
[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 35; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2; Acts 2, 17–18; Apoc 19, 10; Heb 11, 1.
[3] *Lumen Gentium*, 11–12. [4] 1 Cor 12, 3; Gal 1, 8; 1 John 4, 2–6.

man who has received a shock, an experience of Christ within the Church and in his lay world. His charismata enable him to participate in the unfolding of the deposit of faith within the church and to present it to the wider world by way of the ecclesial community which conditions the impact of his presence upon the world and what he has to say to it. The faithful are established in light and are themselves a light. They all know the things of faith, drink of one spirit and have received gifts of understanding and wisdom which they are bound to use.[1] Through their anointing the Spirit is active within them, but their activity is enlightened by knowledge received from the apostolic word and set in order by the apostolic authority. They receive it, not directly and independently, but in and through the community of the faithful, the aggregate of Christ's members living by fulness of grace.

The layman's contribution to the unfolding of revelation within the church is not, of course, to be confused with the operation of the *magisterium*, for this would be to confuse the church as an institution and means of grace with the church as a living fellowship. The episcopal hierarchy enjoys the charism of apostolicity which secures the doctrine of the faith as given to us by Christ and the apostles. The cooperation of the faithful in Christ's teaching function belongs to the church's organic life and to the corporate exercise of the apostolic powers entrusted to the bishops. The *consensus fidelium*, as involved in the definition of the church's faith, is a function of the church loving and believing. Unlike the *magisterium*, it cannot be infallible in particular acts or judgments, but it is infallible in its living possession of the faith and in function of the infallibility of the total organism.[2] It operates authentically only when the loving and believing church listens to the teaching church, yet is it in no sense merely passive, for the church is very much more than a framework of mediation. An infallible hierarchical pastorate teaches with authority and the whole church transmits the message. The faith having been given, as it were, in a lump, the whole body of the church, through the interaction of faith and varying degrees of competence in the members, construes and develops it. The faithful, says Fr Congar, are not mere loudspeakers, but through their amplification of the message they enrich and corroborate it; and, while the laity do not teach with apostolic authority, they none the less teach authentically by faith.

[1] 1 John 2, 20–27; 1 Cor 1, 4–5; 12, 13.

[2] Congar, Yves, O. P.; *Lay People in the Church* (London, 1965), p 289.

Some of the earliest theologians and fathers were or began as laymen (Justin, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Basil, Jerome, Augustine). When the barbarians overran the empire, necessity drove high religious culture into clerical preserves, and imperial politics tended to keep it there; but the lay tradition remained alive in the east. It returned to the west with the humanist movement, was nearly compromised by the jansenists and gallicans, but was saved by De Maistre and Louis Veuillot. Since Leo XIII there has been an increasing tendency for laymen to be important religious writers, if not professional theologians, and speculative theology today owes them a major debt; they have become a vital fact of the modern church's life and the trend should now be irreversible. It is essential, and its spread is essential, for continuing vitality. One has only to point to pre-conciliar names like Sheed, Dawson, Watkin and De La Bedoyere; to the new names arising during and after Vatican II, such as Michael Novak and Daniel Callaghan; to the british group which has come to be known as the New Catholic Left because of its deep involvement in the christian-marxist dialogue. In a moment we must speak of the persecution of the prophets, but first the point must be made that, in Fr. Congar's view for example, theology is pre-eminently a clerical and priestly learning. He is in no doubt about the importance of what the layman does in this field, but he does not want the laity turned *en masse* into doctors of divinity. As he sees it, the priest is essentially a professional here because of his realization that his words and actions have pastoral effects, which induces him to take nicer account of all the factors involved and to seek to establish a balance. Moreover, because of his priestly charisms and celebration of the mysteries, he is in greater living contact with tradition. For Augustine, ordination was a kind of conversion moving him from a philosophical adherence to the faith to a living participation in the realities of tradition and pastoral actuality.

So, while the layman has much to give to the church's thought and teaching, his primary job should lie in the quality and effectiveness of the impact he makes on the secular milieu. He is to cast

> the light of faith on the immense field that lies between the church's dogmatic tradition and man's most acute problems, a field wherein the cause of faith and the good of christian understanding alike require that mediations should be actively undertaken.[1]

[1] *Ibid.*, p 310.

The layman should be out to blaze new trails by applying 'the christian thing' to secular predicaments and by exercizing a new cultural creativeness rooted in christian faith and experience.

Before examining how this is to be realized in practice, a word must be said about the persecution of the prophets. There is no denying that the more adventurous prophet may be led by zeal to imprudence and excess. If all the facts were always known and the prophet's interior problems could be analyzed, the judgments in particular cases might become more complex. In most human clashes, there is something to say on both sides. Furthermore, the example of De Lubac, Congar and Rahner, not to say Teilhard de Chardin, suggests that heroic submission to superiors leads to ultimate vindication in almost apocalyptic terms. Yet two facts remain. One is that ecclesiastical authority has far too often stood convicted of a disregard for human rights that civil law would never tolerate. The other is that, if the truth is ever to be told, if new insights are to be assured, a certain element of tension is essential. For it is precisely these public dialectical clashes that explode into new vision, and, when the process is gummed up, there must at times be prophets ready and able to go right out on a limb, whatever the personal cost.

The choice between working within the establishment structures for a viable evolution and standing out in sharp contradistinction to officialdom is, in any given instance, ultimately one for the individual conscience simply because you could never devise a suitable general rule. There is nothing dishonest or weak about authentic prudence, but when prudence and charity stand in the scales against what may prove to be an overriding need to proclaim the truth of Christ, the prophet's dilemma may be appalling. It is all the more acute when, as so often happens, it is far from clear what the church's tradition is, or what it means even in its present state, or how it interacts with new circumstances, or where the right exercise of authority starts and ends. On the one hand, there is such a thing as the obedience of Christ; and the religious vow of obedience, though open to different interpretations, is rooted in ecclesial tradition. The individual who would prophesy must retain his links with apostolic tradition and acknowledge the teaching and governing rights accorded by Christ to the bishops. Pastoral implications and the fear of confusing the faithful may often be used as alibis, yet they have to be taken into account, as God will judge the bishop who does not defend the deposit. On the other hand, if authority is exercized in a manner ungrounded in law or morals,

the prophet may have to go to the rostrum alone and hope that he knows what Christ would have him do. He will not make his judgments lightly, but having made them, must stand by them. If no one had ever been ready to do this, the deposit of faith would still be there 'in the lump', and the glorious witness of pioneers who suffered for their convictions would never have thrown its ever-increasing light on 'things to be hoped for' with all they imply for the present.

If the reconciliation of all these conflicting thoughts is difficult, it is equally true that a lot of the crises they cause need never have happened. To begin with, much of the trouble would disappear if decisions were taken and acted upon in a spirit of love. Half the time we become perturbed more about the way things are said than about the content. Moreover there is no more room for the would-be prophet who, by shrill intemperance or intellectual arrogance, pollutes the marriage of tradition and discovery than there is for legalistic clerics detached from human needs and reluctant to let the layman grow up and share in the shaping of the church's mind and policy. The second point is that most of the dilemmas would be totally unnecessary if the church would only have done with groundless terrors and let the prophet push the boat out. Many of them, after all, only want to float an idea to see how far it can go, for this is the only way to test it. Confident and outspoken questioning in dialogue with the *magisterium*, determined to integrate the life of faith with all that secular knowledge has to give it, can never do harm if it arises within the body of the Church and is marked by honesty, competence and clarity. There is at the end of the day a divine guarantee and the voice of the Lord above the tempest: 'Fear not, little flock'. All one asks for is a genuinely open church, unafraid of self-reappraisal, unafraid to re-examine its own understanding of the faith with a certain redemptive scepticism, unafraid to tell the mind of Christ to the privileged and powerful within and beyond the church.

The best way for priests to save their people from confusion is not to wage war on speculation but to engage in it and take it to their hearts; to commend and interpret it to their parishes, to point to its strengths and weaknesses, to offer it as an adventure richer by far than an ingrowing security rooted in half-understanding. It must surely be clear by now that our faith is going to be deepened, not destroyed, by current discussion about the eucharist, original sin and the church's moral system. If authority disagrees

with an argument, all it has to do is to say so and enter into conversation with it. This will shed light. Suppression will not. Such confusion as there is comes from a lack of communication within the church itself. It is here that the reformer must start.

The groundless fears to which we refer account no doubt for one of the gravest scandals of history, namely the church's failure to prophesy at all in so many concrete situations crying aloud for her contribution. Which brings us back to the layman's primary task of exercizing 'the christian thing' in secular predicaments. A simple example will set the stage. A book has just been published by a brilliant team of three Cambridge dons on labour relations in the british motor car industry. It shows that the post-war series of strikes was rooted, not in subversion or automation or the psychological pressures of mass production, but basically in problems of personal status and security. It discusses the concept of 'property rights in the job', the worker's substitute for a property share in the capital employing him. It indicts the social failure of bargaining institutions out of touch with the workers' needs and expectations in a rapidly changing economy. It points to the plight of men dismissed the moment their presence becomes an expense, denied the consultation due to them when decisions affecting their 'property' have to be made. Now to those who are in touch this is all familiar ground. It is the problem of wage and employment instability, not in the teeth of mass unemployment, but in the new tensions of fluctuating affluence (Britain has now accepted a jobless rate of two-and-a-half per cent as a norm to secure the balance of payments!). Such topics should be the meat of pastoral letters, yet pastorals here have rarely come to grips with them since Cardinal Manning; and, when they do, you can always rely on bishops' advisers to see the employer's point of view. If bishops are out of touch, it is partly the layman's fault for failing to put them wise. Yet, if truth be told, the sort of layman the bishop ought to see would rarely get past the tradesman's entrance of some episcopal palaces.

The prophetic layman, of course, is doing a job of work if he makes a contribution to the sort of enquiry launched by the Cambridge team and struggles for justice within his employers' association or trade union. But the field confronting him today is vastly wider than this, for the current search throughout the world today concerns the need for a wholly new sense of community, a new view of what society should be. Christians who glossed over *Mater et Magistra* can hardly evade the shock of Pope Paul's scandalized

rejection, in *Populorum Progressio*, of 'profit as the primary economic motive, competition as the overriding economic law, and private property as an absolute right without social obligations'. Many socialists, on the other hand, have become disenchanted with their own system, seeing it as one that certainly eases penury but fails to yield growth and abundance and that by its suppression of spontaneous competition, initiative and demand reduces creative man to the level of passivity. The cooperative, in which private ownership is preserved but exercized in community, seems to offer the best of both worlds, but the prospect of transplanting it from its success in backward economies to sophisticated industry must seem as yet remote. Such concepts as workers' participation in management, control and ownership of industry run into the problem of how you apply them in an age of experts and specialists when centralized planning by cyberneticians may seem to be indispensable for survival in competition. In such a situation the christian as prophet should be able to offer light and to integrate his faith with his experience in some original thinking geared to practical efforts to build something new and workable. But before he does so, he needs some prophetic fuel. What have we got to offer him?

The Catholic Church's thought on social questions is admittedly generalized and its expression in the old well-thumbed encyclicals does not carry the messianic thrust that has brought a third of the world under the influence of marxism, once described by Martin Buber as 'a socialized secularization of eschatology'.[1]

Marxism was the vision of a perfect society and it is not yet dead, even though communist countries in the west are steadily overturning the economic structures it prompted. But Catholics have somehow been at pains to obscure the fact that the church also possesses a vision for the corporate future of man and one that is a good deal more realistic and down to earth than the communist one, simply because it takes into account the way men are actually made. The meaning of the *parousia*, the establishment of the kingdom as a perfect society which finally separates good and evil, and its implications for the here and now have been dimmed. Catholics have courted an individualism concerned with heaven as a reward for personal fidelity – a mentality influenced precisely by the protestantism which the Council of Trent was at pains to reject. Yet the Father of the early church saw redemption as a social cosmic act in

[1] *Paths in Utopia* (London, 1949), p 10.

which man was incorporated into the body of the christian faithful and into Christ as 'the new man spread about all over the world'.[1]

Pope John XXIII, in *Mater et Magistra*, effected a radical revaluation of the church's teaching, not by saying something different, but by a massive change of stress. His concept of socialization was in no sense identical with the principal of nationalization. It was a practical recognition that man has an irresistible urge to 'combine spontaneously with his fellows for the attainment of aims and objectives which are beyond the means or capabilities of single individuals'. He saw that this urge had been growing, not as a politico-juridical process, but as a far more profound social and cultural change. He stressed the need for the individual to share responsibility in the community's life, but he set out to 'show', in socialization, the very material from which the free christian can and must fashion a society which assures the full development of the individual and the exercize of a truly personal charity'.[2] The encyclical 'breathes the firm conviction that in modern society the Catholic can not only reach his full development as a human person in accordance with God's laws, but also shape a genuine christian community in which modern man can find the solution to the deepest problems of the age'.[3]

If *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* had a good deal to say about the person and his rights, Pope John began to establish a dynamic community vision. In *Pacem in Terris* he made by implication overtures to the communist world by calling on men of all creeds and none to find common ground in their common human nature and work together for world justice and peace. He urged an immediate extension of the United Nations' scope, and even dreamed of world government. At this point the layman is left with the problem of how to strike a very fine balance. A society which refuses to consider the person in isolation from the community and the duties it owes him in his own right despoils him of the essential, separate and infinitely varied values which make his contribution to the community possible and substantial. But neither can there be a kind of polite anarchy in which personal rights are maintained at the expense of social obligation; indeed there must

[1] St Augustine: *Enarrationes in psalmos* 85, 22; Campbell-Johnston, Michael, S.J.: 'The Social Teaching of the Church': *Thought* (Fordham University, Autumn 1964), p 380.

[2] *Mater et Magistra*, 60; Calvez, Jean-Yves, S.J.: *La Socialisation dans la pensée de l'Eglise, (Revue de l'Action Populaire*, Sept-Oct 1961).

[3] Campbell-Johnston, *art. cit.*

be a new and positive search for a sense of universality, embracing the whole human family. Now Pope Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio*, takes matters a stage further. It is too early to attempt a critique of the new encyclical, but certain points are clear enough. It goes further than Pope John's plea for the rich to aid the poor. Pope Paul is more specific. He rejects totalitarian solutions reducing men to robots, but he demands that freedom of trade and private property rights should be exercized within the context of universal norms and institutions so that justice can be established as the primary economic motive for mankind. To this end, he says, the authorities have the right to prescribe the economy's ends and even the means of achieving them. For him, aid is at best an ambulance measure. The long-term prospect must be one of a society in which all men, rich and poor, work together to raise themselves and their living standard. Men are not to be pensioners receiving handouts from the rich man's table. A world fund should be set up as a shock measure to care for the destitute, but in the long term the poor are to be helped to find their own solutions for their own problems, and for those of others at the same time.

For the christian layman working in the political or trade union field these thoughts are of direct relevance to the present condition of society which, in rich countries, may be heading for a benevolent totalitarianism, an inhumanity without unkindness, because the demands of efficiency in an increasingly complex, computerized age spell more and more centralization. Professor Galbraith's vision of an economy run by the experts while most of us, having worked out our fifteen-hour week, follow sophisticated cultural pursuits will doubtless have its appeal. What the jesuit general, Fr Pedro Arrupe, has just been saying in his letter to the latin american superiors about the poor applies *mutatis mutandis* to the rich.[1] We cannot rest content, he says, with considering what a man has. We have also to ask what it has made him and what he now is. Unless the poor participate in the policy decisions that affect them and their lives, they can be made as rich as Croesus and still be less than men. This is precisely the kind of reasoning underlying the opposition in Britain to a state-imposed control of wages and other incomes as a means of correcting balance-of-payments deficits. In the first place it simply will not work once the trade unions withdraw their support from it; no matter how many laws you slap on, there are far

[1] *The Month* (May 1967), pp 266-270.

too many ways of jumping the gun. Moreover it is technically dubious. That essential dialogue between the specialist and the commonsense jack-of-all-trades is missing, and without it the most perfect blueprint will run into muddle. The rigid principles of law cannot apply effectively to essentially flexible and changing situations. Hence the reluctance of the rank-and-file in advanced countries to accept dictation from on high. To be effective the ideas must rise through varying levels of tension from below as natural products of a spontaneous but responsible creativity. Laws should be seals on discovery, not dictatorial prescriptions.

A prime source of communist revolutionary fervour is the doctrine of *praxis*, the unity of theory and practice. It is of similar importance to christianity. In this connection, lay prophecy in Britain has shown itself at its best in the creativity arising from those much misrepresented institutions, the trade unions, which for all their faults and outmoded structures have begun to look effectively for a viable reconciliation between personal rights and social duty. In all this striving christians, nonconformists and catholics in particular, have been prominent. One thinks of the productivity bargains; the anti-demarcation and anti-strike pacts; the system of voluntary wage restraint; the proposals for workers' control in nationalized industries; the concept of government, private and union investment in a single firm; the whole range of partnership between state and private enterprise in the economy at large – which anticipated by fifty years Pope John's understanding of socialization. This is but one example. Another should come now from the hungry world where two approaches are required: the massive regional development scheme and the local community project, that is, the multiplication of cooperatives and credit unions in areas dependent on subsistence agriculture. The lack here is neither top grade experts nor grass-roots labour but professionals and craftsmen, the vital middlemen. Christian prophecy in the sphere of the major projects will pressurize governments and western industry. In the latter it will inspire the missions and voluntary overseas service organizations to foster training centres where professionals and craftsmen can be trained to teach the poor to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. For prophecy is more than words. It is a search for a whole way of life, destined for ultimate absorption into the kingdom.