## THE TWO CITIES

By G. H. EARLE

EVENTEEN YEARS ago I was making boys learn the catechism by heart. Eleven years ago I was hearing the confessions of all the local primary school children who were marched down by their teachers to the church every friday and then obliged to attend the children's mass on sundays. Eight years ago I was imposing silence on the whole school during the three-day annual retreat. Six years ago I was compelling all the boys in the school to go to mass every day. Many catholics over the age of twenty-five will recognize these familiar features of their religious upbringing. What on earth has happened to make a middle-aged schoolmaster question so many well-tried methods, and so lay himself open to the charge that he does not know his own mind and that he has no right to teach others?

## The city set on a hill

The Church of which I was a representative was a medieval, rural Church, which had been battered century after century by barbarians, nation-building kings, protestants, english oppressors, sceptical philosophers, democrats, anti-clericals, freemasons, historians, scientists, modernists, communists. The only thing to do was to retire into the fortress and to defend the gateway to heaven. The priorities were obvious. We had to keep our heads down and hang on like grim death to the treasure we possessed. Firm leadership was essential; and so we revered our officers and valued unquestioning loyalty and obedience. We had to be clear about what it was we were defending and what the enemies were attacking. No time to ask awkward and possibly demoralizing questions; and thus we tended to identify perfection with the Church as it was. There was a best way of saying mass, a best philosophy and theology, a best way of designing a Church, a best language, a best way of training priests, a best set of laws. Minor alterations were possible, but the main outlines of the great fortress could not possibly be changed.

We had to be clear too about where we stood: on the threshold of eternity, as near as possible to heaven, as solicitous as possible about our souls, as far removed as possible from the contaminating world, ever ready for death. Here was the priest, well ahead of his people, celebrating unfamiliar mysteries, alone with God, leading his flock towards their heavenly home, warning them against the dangers on which he had courageously turned his back. Many seminarians and some boys and girls were trained in remote rural or foreign seminaries, formed by other-worldly seventeenth-century french spirituality. Here the enemies referred to as *adversarii* were often mentioned, seldom read and never seen or heard. How many priests or laymen over thirty ever met in their seminary or school-days a protestant minister, a humanist philosopher or a communist trades unionist?

This is where a catholic education as we have known it began: with the priest at the altar and the priest training in the seminary. I have on my mantelpiece two books. The first is The History of Stockport Grammar School by B. Varley,1 who argues that 'the schoolmaster kept his school where he sung his mass' by, listing 'the many schools that used a Lady Chapel for this purpose'. The second book is The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.2 In the tenth part of the Constitutions, St Ignatius says (No 815) that the students in jesuit colleges 'will be a seed-bed (seminarium) for the professed Society and its coadjutors'. As the editor points out (p 171, note 1) the first drafts of the Constitutions 'envisaged almost exclusively the scholastics of the Society'. Jesuit education was education by jesuit priests. When jesuits began to train future laymen they taught them much as they taught future priests. There are signs that we are still living in this world. On page 26 of the 1973 Catholic Directory we are told that the members of various commissions may be clergy, religious or laymen. The standing committee on education is composed of two archbishops and four bishops. All the chairmen of the diocesan schools commissions are bishops or priests. Most of the secretaries are priests. There are still innumerable priests as chairmen or governors, and, though far fewer than in the past, a number of priest-headmasters.

It was understandable that when he was looking for 'a discrete man and connyng in Gramer', Sir Edmund Shaa should have instructed his executors to choose an 'honest Preest'. As the educated men in the community, priests were the natural people to educate others. The training of other priests in minor and major seminaries cautiously and uncritically followed the traditional lines laid down

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Varley, B.: The History of Stockport Grammar School (Manchester University Press, second edition, 1957), pp 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ganss, George E.: The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus (St Louis, 1970).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Varley, B., op.cit., p 23.

by roman congregations and the legislation of various religious orders. Such customs as compulsory mass, strict silence at certain times in the day and during retreats, segregation from the other sex and the evils of the world, showed the tendency to think of schools as seminaries or noviceships. The priestly-officer class shepherded their flocks into catholic schools by proclaiming and enforcing Canons 1372–1383 of the Code. Once there, docility and passivity were virtues that were highly prized. I can picture a Good Friday service only eleven years ago in which the congregation was totally silent, most of them without books, while the clergy faithfully executed the rubrics as laid down by the Church, in the distance and in latin.

The laity, it was assumed, had to accept that in the official mind of the Church they were camp followers. The code of Canon Law as revised in 1917 devoted 573 canons to the clergy and religious; to the laity only forty-one, many of which were about third orders and confraternities. Did a council of the Church ever pay the laity direct attention before Vatican II? Was there ever a serious work of theology written about them before Congar's Jalons pour une Théologie du Laicat, published in 1954? How many lay people have been canonized and revered as saints? Even much of the progressive writing about worker priests, in spite of real pastoral concern, assumed that, for the Church to be present in the factory or on the docks, the priest had to be there. Though the priest was a long way away on the altar, the laity were not likely to forget their place: they could be reminded of the power of the keys, denied absolution, excommunicated, refused the last sacraments and a christian burial.

A religious education promoted by priests for a laity whose role in the Church was a subordinate one, was bound to be lopsided. In the first place, the time given to religious instruction was often slight and the attention given by teachers and pupils desultory compared with other subjects. Earnest priests said they found these classes difficult, and devout boys regarded them as unenlightening. The approach was negative and fearful: to beware of losing the true faith and sound morals in a hostile world (quod catholicae religioni morumque honestati adversetur). Dangerous teachers and books must be removed. Much of the teaching was narrowly orthodox and unthinkingly conformist. The content of catechisms and text-books was simply handed on from one generation to the next without much concern

<sup>4</sup> Canon 1372.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Canon 1381, 3.

for coherence, a sense of proportion or personal understanding. It was more important for pupils to repeat exact words or to attend mass than to know what they were saying or doing. As a result perspective could be distorted. I was struck by those old boys (alumni) who valued the custom of sending the whole school to Tenebrae in latin for three days running during Holy Week, as a kind of religious assault course, when the inner truth of Christ's death and resurrection did not seem to mean much to them. Minor matters like ringing bells at the right moment in the mass, posture while serving benediction, what priests wore, whether to eat fish or meat, seemed to loom large in our pupils' minds. About prayer, the bible, the holy Spirit, charity, to take only a few examples, they were vague. A doubtful sin against the sixth commandment could worry them more than barefaced lies or persistent lack of forgiveness.

We accepted this strange situation because we thought that the laity were to have a limited place in the life of the Church. Holiness, perfection, the counsels were not for most of them. It was enough if they kept the faith, practised their religion, did not lapse. The tests were simple. Did they go to mass on sundays and holy days of obligation? Did they make their easter duties? Were they regular communicants? Did they fast and abstain? Did they send their children to catholic schools? Did they refrain from contraception and divorce? Did they contribute to the support of their pastors? With satisfactory answers to these questions we could rest assured that catholic schools were doing a good job.

The fortress Church, then, and its educational system was defensive with occasional aggressive forays: conservative, static, looking inwards towards the sanctuary and the altar and upwards towards heaven. It had a keen sense of rank, stressed the authority of the hierarchy and the obedience and loyalty which were their due, thought that much could be accomplished by the promulgation of laws and their enforcement, regarded the mass of the faithful as docile sheep who should know and keep their place in the established order of things.

Jesus Christ prayed: 'They are in the world...just as I do not belong to the world they do not belong the world... I sent them into the world just as you sent me into the world'. Each individual and each generation has repeatedly to feel the tension between not belonging to the world and being in the world. The Church has to send out her sons to have children, to learn, to trade, to colonize, sometimes to be persecuted and crucified by the world, sometimes

to conquer. The Church's schools were caught up in this tension. Because the Church was so other-worldly and so frightened of the world, relations with the world were bound to cause some anomalies. The first of these was the failure to reconcile what can loosely be labelled augustinianism and pelagianism: God-does-everything-man-does-nothing versus man-does-everything-God-does-nothing.

When at home in the church, where God was present on his altar and powerful, it was the great words and deeds of God that mattered. Man's thoughts and feelings and choices were of little importance. Parents bringing their children for baptism or to a catholic school were rarely questioned about their faith. At school, doctrines had to be accepted, mass had to be attended, sacraments to be received, laws to be obeyed. The absence of mortal sin or of impediments was all that was required in the way of dispositions. Parents, teachers and priests may wonder whether they prepared their children for confirmation – this introduction to an adult christian life – with the thorough gathering of information and serious pondering that went into the choice of a career. Even with couples about to get married, when we knew the importance of the free consent of the lay ministers, we rarely managed to fit in a period of prolonged instruction and reflection.

When preparing their children to cross the broad moat into the godless world, the Church and the schools realized that their old boys would be on their own. In contrast to God-does-everything, which was the rule inside the fortress, the assumption now was God-does-nothing-man-does-everything. What boys and girls studied depended not on any notion of a christian culture but rather on what the world thought desirable for success in life. Our children were sent onto the treadmills of School Certificate, Higher School Certificate, scottish Lowers and Highers, much as they had been sent into the factories and the mines.

How we taught followed the fashions: from the neat rows of passive pupils repeating back what we said, we were persuaded to turn to more active, pupil-centred, discovery methods. The selection of our pupils was determined by national and local political patterns. We were the faithful servants of the 1944 Education Act, and became equally faithful in implementing comprehensive schemes. When other schools played soccer we played soccer; when they changed to rugby we changed to rugby; when they stopped boxing we stopped boxing. They had Company Cadet Forces; so had we. Our hair was short and our uniforms were drab.

Motivation was provided by emphatic exhortation and heavy punishment, intended to produce men and women who could meet adversity with strengthened muscle power. A catholic teacher who wrote in reports about prayer, grace, the weakness and folly of Christ and his followers, the power of the Spirit, would have been suspected of treason to the world he served. Careers guidance when it was given followed such worldly norms as safety or social and economic advancement. Those who wanted to serve their fellow men were thought to have vocations and were directed towards seminaries and noviceships. There was no idea that everyman should be the slave of all, or that he should show it by becoming a male nurse, a policeman or a social worker. Ask a grammar-school headmaster whether he has ever sent a talented boy to a college of education in recent years. Priests and religious, who administered schools considered primarily as elongated bridgeheads into the alien world, could feel themselves uncomfortably far from home. Lost in the business of admissions, appointments of staff, time-tables, exams, finance, committees, reorganization, revision of curricula and teaching methods, their own religious life could diminish to hurriedly performed duties, while the religious life or specifically christian character of the school could absorb less and less of their time and thought.

The old boys and old girls of the Church's schools took with them a strong but tenuous link with the old school and the old Church; for this we used the word 'association', which may have suggested affection or repulsion. Their cultural baggage was light: whether by this we mean the arts or an integrating set of values. Few would ever read and re-read a gospel, let alone an epistle, Old Testament books, or one of the great christian writers like Augustine, Francis de Sales or Newman. When they sang and danced they were unlikely to be giving expression to their feelings about God and the world that he had made. They were to this extent more culturally impoverished than nineteenth-century protestants, african villagers or even some modern hippies. Their moral code, passively received by way of a long line of moral theologians, consisted of an inflexible and rudimentary set of do's and don'ts.

Religion was after all the business of the priests; it was they who had to declare unequivocally what was right and what was wrong. These good layfolk were unaccustomed to applying the new com-

<sup>6</sup> Mt 20, 26–27.

mandment to the concrete situations of their family, professional, political or economic lives. Thus good german catholics could cooperate with the nazis, and good english catholics could bomb Dresden, just as the conquistadores had pillaged Mexico and Peru. There were few opportunities for the laity to serve the Church on the inside. Where were the church musicians in parishes, colleges, schools? Where were the lay missionaries working for a number of years alongside priests and religious? Where were the accountants, getting the clergy out of the muddle into which their lack of interest and training had got them? Where the philosophers. theologians, poets, artists, playwrights, stating in new ways the interaction of God and man? No one was saying to them: All of you are Christ's body. Each one of you is given some proof of the Spirit's presence for the good of all. What special gift have you received? Are you a prophet? Do you speak in strange tongues?7 As a result, their lives developed unevenly and separately. Christian life was an underfed version of childhood. Adult virtues of initiative, reflection. the use of talents, directed energy and organized time, decisionmaking and responsibility were devoted to the alien world and too often obeyed the canons of the world. So was the light hidden; so the salt lost its savour; so the leaven failed to raise the dough of daily life.

Another puzzling anomaly was that the Church and her schools, while using the powerful language of the group – the body, the vine, the flock, the temple, the people, the brotherhood, the fellowship, the communion, while encouraging much huddling together in catholic families, catholic schools, catholic clubs and societies, nevertheless managed to foster so much individualism and isolation. 'You are to love one another as I have loved you . . . this is how all men will know you for my disciples'. The foundation and cohesive force of the christian community, as we meet it in Acts, Paul's epistles, John's gospel and epistles, was Christ's perfect love: 'You are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect', with its intimacy and depth, its universality, embracing all mankind, even enemies, its total self-giving made present and active in us by the power of the holy Spirit.

The Church never lost this central truth, but in a series of crises shifted her concentration heavenwards and inwards, and abdicated her power over the activities of her children out there in the world.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> 1 Cor 12, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Jn 13, 34-35; cf Eph 5, 1-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Mt 5, 43–48.

Community building was left to the hammer of various secular forces: the family, the village, the town, the nation, the race. When these social bonds broke down, the community broke down. Men and women from irish or breton villages, lost in London or Paris, began to feel themselves less irish and less catholic. The Church was obliged to minister to and the schools to prepare for emigration: from country to town, from one country to another, from working class to middle class, from city centre to suburb. Individualism came to be accepted as the norm. Catholics were more influenced by fellow members of their class, profession, trades union, locality, social set or political organisation than they were by fellow catholics. The catholic gentry were at home with the gentry, doctors with doctors, musicians with musicians, lawvers with lawyers, workers with workers. Priests lived alone in presbyteries. Lay people prayed alone and made their decisions alone. Even the mass, which should have been the centre, the source and the expression of unity came to be referred to as 'my mass', and the people of God arrived and departed as strangers. They rarely, it seemed, heard about how Christ had 'broken down the wall and created a single new people and one single body'; 10 or, 'there is no difference between jews and gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one with Christ Iesus'.11

Strangest of all, the Church, when she had to build up social organisms of her own, followed the methods and often the aims of the secular societies. Hence the hierarchies, hence the rules and regulations and procedures and the machinery for enforcing them. Popes, bishops, vicars general, priests, were paralleled by presidents, chairmen, secretaries, treasurers, abbots, rectors, superiors, headmasters, deputy headmasters, senior masters, heads of departments, prefects. I noticed that when old boys got together it was usually to dwell on the past, to play games, to arrange dances, to eat dinners, to review accounts, to elect officers: rarely to pray and never to discuss how Christ's message could be better lived and taught. What a far cry from the gospel! You know that, among the gentiles, those who bear rule lord it over them, and great men vaunt their power over them; with you it must be otherwise'. 12 No wonder christians had to take lessons in group dynamics and observe hippy communes!

<sup>10</sup> Eph 2, 14-16.

No abiding city

A theologian who was a *peritus* to several bishops during Vatican II, once said to me that it would take thirty years for the Church to assimilate the truths announced by the Council. Men and women in authority in the Church were most of them trained before Vatican II. They have not had the time or the energy to spare in the last ten years to digest the conciliar texts, let alone the commentaries. What is more serious, the assumptions of the static, fortress Church made it difficult for them to change their points of view. The Church's organization, statements of the faith, the mass, moral teaching, were all thought to be perfect and so immutable. Now they were being challenged and changed. Behind the enraged letters in the catholic press there is surely much fear: fear that the enemies are now inside the fortress and that it is being utterly destroyed. Others are dutiful and serene, confident that the new ideas will pass. I have not noticed that the middle-aged clergy are the first to ask for renewal courses.

It may help to use two gospel symbols. The tiny seed becomes the great tree. The scene outside my room has been transformed in the last few hours by increasing light. Similarly the Church, while remaining essentially the same – the Body of Christ, the people of the New Covenant – can and must change. Mary's experience and reflections must have been very different at Nazareth, at the foot of the Cross, and in the upper room after the Ascension. The Church's experience and reflections are very different from the experience and reflections of a few years ago. 'The Church, like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes'. 13

The Church to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then will come the time of the restoration of all things. Then the human race, as well as the entire world which is intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.<sup>14</sup>

From a stationary Church to a Church on the move; from a Church that thought it had arrived to a Church that knew it still had a long way to go; from a Church which was fearfully defending to a Church that was boldly discovering; from a Church that was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Lumen Gentium, 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Lumen Gentium, 48.

stolidly affirming to a Church that was honestly questioning. Those are some of the bumps we feel as the pilgrim Church sets out. Lest we should think that we are just meandering in all directions at once, we have certain landmarks which we may have missed, not because they were not there, but because they were obscured by other landmarks or because they were not pointed out to us. First and foremost we see past the officials, the doctrines they teach, the laws they make, the sacraments they administer, to the persons who really matter. We see the Three Persons in One God who give the Church her life. 15 We see the men and women whose supreme dignity it is to share in God's triune life and love. 16 This dignity is individual and corporate. 'The Church shines forth as a people made one with unity of the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit'. 17 God's life and love is given to everyone: 'It is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fulness of the christian life and the perfection of charity'. 18 Similarly everyone is called to hand on the life which he himself has received.19 When we look from God to his people, we realize that priests, religious and laity have a common dignity and a common vocation. We have a sense of equality and mutual respect which rarely existed in the fortress Church.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the laity have a vastly more important role to play.21

Inside the Church, the laity can be 'called in various ways to a more direct form of co-operation with the hierarchy'. <sup>22</sup> As members of human society, they see that 'no human activity can be withdrawn from God's dominion'. <sup>23</sup> To play their part, the laity, clergy and religious must increase their knowledge, their power to make judgements and be able to decide matters for themselves. They should deepen their understanding of the sacred scriptures. <sup>24</sup> They should know what they are doing at mass when they exercise 'the common priesthood of the faithful'. <sup>25</sup> The world they are called to baptize and teach is the world of everyman and everyman's activities. 'Their very vocation' is 'to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God'. <sup>26</sup> To do the work given to them by Christ they must be able to

Ibid. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8.
Ibid. 4, 9-17, Gaudium et Spes, 12-22.
Lumen Gentium, 4, 9-17; Gaudium et Spes, 23-32.
Lumen Gentium, 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid. 12, 17. <sup>20</sup> Lumen Gentium, 37-38; Presbyterorum Ordinis, 9.

Lumen Gentium, 30–42. Elimen Gentium, 37 30, 1 1030 years of 30 and 30 a

<sup>24</sup> Dei Verbum, 21-25.

Lumen Gentium 10; cf 34; and Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14-19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Lumen Gentium, 31; cf Gaudium et Spes.

discover 'whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and culture of diverse peoples'.27 They must appreciate the distinction between religious and temporal affairs; and, while knowing that temporal affairs are governed by their own principles, make sure that even in temporal matters they are guided by a christian conscience.28 Freedom is essential,29 freedom to enquire,30 freedom to criticize,31 freedom to advise and to take the initiative,32 freedom to be themselves and to grow.33 And to all these add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.34

These are some of the landmarks of the pilgrim Church, to which we are adjusting our eyes in the unaccustomed light. Catholic education is formed by and, in turn, forms the Church's understanding of herself. The multiple organisms of catholic education the family, the parish, schools, seminaries, colleges of education, chaplaincies - must respond in a twofold way to their task. Firstly they must absorb into their lives the true nature of the Church of which they are cells. 'The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church'.35 The same could be said analogously of schools and other educational extensions of the family. A renewed understanding should be lived by all the partners in the educational enterprise, and then applied to their work: organization, activities, rules, punishments, aims, attitudes, priorities. Are we making sure that a young person can 'daily grow more conscious of the gift of faith which he has received'?36 Are we aiming 'to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity'?37 What about prayer, the scriptures, liturgy, true brotherhood among all christians, a loving, respectful, courageous, responsible approach to the world and its problems?

The second aspect of the educator's task is to look to the future, especially to 'young people who are the hope of the Church'.38 Here our concern is the 'upbuilding of the Mystical Body'. 39 What sort of adults, men and women, laity, priests and religious do we want? Surely people who are charitable, well-informed, free, open-minded, committed to living and increasing Christ's love inside the Church

<sup>27</sup> Lumen Gentium, 17; and large tracts of Vatican II on atheism, ecumenism etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Lumen Gentium, 36. Gaudium et Spes, 17. Gaudium et Spes, 62. <sup>31</sup> Lumen Gentium, 37. Presbyterorum Ordinis 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Col 3, 14; Lumen Gentium, 42.

Ibid., 11. Gravissimum Educationis, 2. Ibid., 8. 38 Ibid., 2. Ibid.

and to the ends of the earth. In short, we want the Incarnation to take place in them: through them we want God to take flesh, to come to his own people and the world he has made; through them we want man and all that he possesses and does, to give glory to the Father, so that God may be everything to everyone.<sup>40</sup>

In an article that is already too long it is not possible to suggest how these aims can be realized. I therefore conclude with a few bald statements which may promote further debate:

- (1) The concept of catholic education is wider than the concept of the catholic school. We recognize with Vatican II that parents have a fundamental educational role.<sup>41</sup> Other influences, such as parishes, clubs, retreats, press, TV, could perhaps communicate powerfully the message of Christ.
- (2) The concept of catholic education extends beyond the concept of youth. We are asked 'to see that *all* the faithful enjoy a christian education'.<sup>42</sup> Young people may be less responsive than adults, who, in short intensive courses, can often learn more than children throughout their school careers.
- (3) The time is long past in this country when the Church was the only provider of education and no church education meant no education at all. When we fail to realize this fact we are in danger of providing a predominantly secular education with a light top-dressing of religion.
- (4) Schools which reflect, in the way pupils are directed to them, the motives parents have for choosing them, in their organization, methods and aims the assumptions of the autocratic fortress Church, may be doing more harm than good.
- (5) In many parts of Britain we are unlikely to have enough catholic schools to provide places for all the catholic children. To the large number whose parents cannot get them into catholic schools will be added those whose parents will be freely choosing a non-catholic school. To these children the Church 'needs to be present with her special affection and helpfulness'.<sup>43</sup>
- (6) In some places it may be possible for the parents, teachers, pupils and governors to come together to study and implement the programme set out in the Declaration on Christian Education<sup>44</sup>, and elsewhere in Vatican II. When they do, I suspect the problem will not be: Do we want to give up catholic schools? But rather: Do we want to start catholic schools?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> 1 Cor, 15, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Gravissimum Educationis, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.. 8.