

RESPONSIBILITY AGAIN III

Responsibility implies in the responsible person a nature to be served: our own human nature and that of our fellow men in all its kinship with other creatures and all its dependence on God. The service of nature in this sense involves service in and with our bodies: and it involves the service of bodily nature in others—not only in other persons but in all the bodily creation. For bodily nature, although indeed it is fashioned in accordance with the divine intellect, is answerable to God in man and not elsewhere. And this service of bodily nature is not any kind of task imposed from without, but is implied in the norm of our humanity and thus in the law of our understanding of ourselves and of the world we live in.

Thus the norm of our bodily life implies no bondage to material nature although it implies service in and of the body. Such service is responsible precisely to the extent that it is in obedience to our understanding, free to the extent the understanding we obey is our own. A distinction is noted here between the precise bearing of freedom and of responsibility, although in the integrity of human nature they inseparably imply each other.

'Outside' the integrity of human nature is the domain of sin, considered—precisely from the point of view we have adopted—as *contra naturam*. Thus, in the shattered and scattered consciousness which belongs to sin, freedom—obedience to the law of our own understanding so far as it is ours—may be held as a political or quasi-ethical ideal, even though the understanding be false and its law, absolutely speaking, no law. Freedom in this sense makes the act of choice a law above nature and therefore, in the created will, *because the created will is intrinsically natured*, a law above truth. So to exalt created freedom is sin of the most desperate irresponsibility, in which is felt the irony of the serpent's promise 'You shall be as gods.'

Yet it is precisely this promise that St. Paul repeats, not now ironically but incomprehensibly: '*Dico vobis dii estis.*' In effect the crisis of human freedom is in this very matter of a law-above-nature which is either *caritas* or pride: the healing absolute in which God restores man and in man all nature to himself, or the absolute of revolt, the auto-responsibility of the damned. From the response of *caritas* follows the mode of man's service, though the character and terms of it are those of his created nature. These man may ratify but not invent. At the opposite pole of pride 'all the kingdoms of the earth' lie open to man. It is the 'infinite' field of blind-alley choices, all alike in their refusal of the divine dimension.

In the bond of love man freely subsumes the 'bond' of nature and of 'necessity.' Yet as love takes up this necessity, so feared by pagan antiquity, the bondage falls from it. It is no longer the feared goddess imposing her terrible sequences of restraint upon human hope and action. It is the gracious connectedness of that field of nature which has become for those who have accepted in a meek heart the bond of love—their *inheritance*. For those who move forward in love, the more complete is their acceptance of nature, even where—in the soaring abstract perspectives of our human parody of 'pure' intellect—nature is limitation: even though in these perspectives 'nature' is identified with limitation itself.

Human responsibility understood in its integrity—the integrity of those who are the children 'and heirs also' in Christ of God—is contrasted with the false auto-responsibility of pride to which nature is limitation and limitation bondage. The bond of love is indeed a law above nature in which nature is subsumed and transformed, as in Christ's obedience. But where the law above nature is affirmed in the human spirit itself, then nature is set against nature, and man's humble yet exalted lordship over all bodily creatures in the obedience of Christ is travestied in the banality of a 'mastery over nature' in which man can only subjugate for fear of himself being enslaved. In this field, as Berdyaev has shown, master and slave are the related poles of one and the same spiritual bondage.

It is of the utmost importance to note that the conception of freedom native to the 'classical' period in Europe of pagan antiquity, the freedom, typically, of the leisured slave owner, has nothing unambiguously in common with the freedom integral to human responsibility. Answerable to God in the Divine Image, inheriting nature in the bond of love, that integral responsibility lacks also any common terms with the frenzy of domination which governs now man's attitude to material nature and also, reflexively, to those of his fellow men in company with whom he would call himself free.

The freedom of the slave owner and that of the machine owner are fundamentally the same type of freedom: a freedom as *against* the whole bodily side of man's nature: a freedom exalted and expressed in civilised leisure and intellectual play: a freedom of development for the human spirit liberated from the bonds of matter: a freedom in contrast to which the laws of material nature are a bondage to be thrown off. Such an aspiration of human freedom ultimately and implicitly voids the spiritual life of content. At the same time it delivers over the bodily life to be governed by random force and by the detached and random intellectuality of the blue-print. In this

sphere its corresponding 'responsibility' is that of the highly-placed official.

This pagan freedom it is which has never been far from the heart of Europe. Never too far to return as soon as the prolonged exorcism of the ages of Faith should be relaxed a little. As if a certain alienation of the heart from the obedience of nature had been the besetting sin of the upstart West: so that Dante and the carvings of Chartres were possible only at the cost of a degree of penitence proportioned to the untamed conquerors of Rome.

But we should beware of a tameness which comes elsewhere than from the discipline of Christ. The slave is a tame man. The machine age has tamed men, yet has not sweetened the sources of violence.

A mentality estranged from the obedience of nature, anxious of its own despotism over matter, perplexed by the contradictions of its lust for power, sees in the development of machinery a promise of emancipation. It sees the freedom and the corresponding responsibility of the slave owner made available to all as collective owners of industrial machinery; and it makes the remarkable 20th century obeisance to Christianity as source of the hope of a freedom of which industrialism is the means.

Man, created in God's image, is steward of the things of earth and heir in Christ of created natures. This status of stewardship and of heirship has its corresponding faculty characterised theologically as a gift of the Holy Spirit. I mean the gift of wisdom. Ultimately the wise and no other is the responsible man: responsible because wisdom 'responds' as the developed germ of the supernatural image, to the life of the Holy Trinity. Responsible also in that the wise and the wise alone fulfils the role among creatures proper to one who responds to the uncreated Truth and Goodness.

This role among creatures! Wisdom is indeed lonely in the modern world. Man's legal conscience divides creatures into those having rights which may be weighed in the balance of justice with his own—his fellow men, and those having no rights. These he proceeds to exploit and to deface in the confidence that he can do no wrong in dealing as he likes with his own—and this goes for the whole sub-human creation. His unconfessed private conscience narrows the first category to those with whom he can feel a degree of kinship: those who share with him certain affinities of race or class or ways of behaviour: at its worst and narrowest, the prim and self-conscious coterie of 'decent chaps.' If the image shown to God and man by a private conscience so restricted is of a decency enjoying the limited respect of Edgbaston or of Kensington rather than a mirror of the eternal wisdom, that shown by the safeguarded legal

conscience, merely as such, is more universal at the cost of being utterly unilluminated. The man of law is the man of fear to whom the sanctions of society and of ethics are only the defences of an anxious ego. It is the man of law who would use one half of the universe to destroy the other—rather than admit that nothing, not even his own self, is absolutely his own.

All is stewardship: the rest is the malice of the unwise. We have no right to 'do as we like' with anything: we are stewards of all. But our stewardship has this motif: the praise of God through our understanding of the natures he has created. In us, through our work and our praise: through the work and praise of the whole human family, God perfects his work of creation by human collaborators; creating thus a radiance visible to men of that supernatural Image of himself visible to himself alone in the hearts of the children of grace.

BERNARD KELLY.

STRAY THOUGHTS ON THE LAY APOSTOLATE

'If we pass in review the long and sorrowful sequence of woes, that, as a sad heritage of sin, mark the stages of fallen man's earthly pilgrimage, from the flood on, it would be hard to find spiritual and material distress so deep, so universal, as that which we are now experiencing.' Those are words of Pope Pius XI, written in the Encyclical *Caritate Christi Compulsi* some twelve and a half years ago. If they were true then, they are more true than ever of to-day when the bloody shroud of war has enveloped nearly all mankind.

But one feels sometimes that too much ink is devoted to the description of what is obvious. Having, therefore, recalled these striking words of Christ's Vicar, let us not dwell here upon the depressing thought of the plight of modern humanity; rather we will turn to the remedy for such an unhappy state of affairs.

'As these evils crowd in upon us, what hope of remedy is left to us' asked Pope Pius XII in his Easter Homily in 1940, 'except that which comes from Christ, from his inspirations, and from his teaching, a healing stream flowing through every vein of our society? Only Christ's law, only Christ's grace, can renew and restore private and public life, redressing the true balance of rights and duties, check-