

# He was what I am

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Perhaps the most attractive quality of Hopkins' poetry is the total commitment to the seriousness of man in the world of God. Hopkins is never content to accept things as they seem, he is always seeing them anew as they are. In the working out of his Christian vocation as priest and Jesuit he found the deep-down truth of things in their enjoyment of Christ:

I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal  
diamond,

Is immortal diamond.

A similar Ignatian response with the fulness of man, in every sense, to the oneness of Christ, is manifest in the work of Professor Karl Rahner. Rahner too has the feel of all things working together for good, even when we and they appear most eunuch-like. This is evident in the group of papers issued in English as *Mission and Grace*.<sup>1</sup>

When we talk of God shewing his creative mark in the world, and his caring for the world, it is usual to stress the orderliness that we find about us. Whether this is a proper thing to do or no certainly it helps for clarity in discussion if the words are ordered. Whatever may be the case with the German original, the French translation would have been a good model for the English publishers. In Canon Muller's version the papers move in organised fashion<sup>2</sup> through various aspects of the vocation of modern man in the world, but in the English translation the book falls unhappily into two parts, the first being concerned with the apostolate and the second with the eucharist. It would have been better to have completed the first section and left the papers on the mass for the next volume. The first section is my main subject in this review.

Rahner begins one of the papers collected in this book with the earnest words: We are here to take counsel together in serious matters. This dictum epitomises his theological enterprise. He is concerned with discussion, with free talk, with taking counsel and advice, with co-

<sup>1</sup>MISSION AND GRACE, volume I, by Karl Rahner; Sheed and Ward, 15s. (paper-back).

<sup>2</sup>There are excellent short introductions to the papers, placing them in the context of current theological debate.

operation. He is concerned with matters which are of importance to all men. And, most obviously perhaps, he is concerned with 'being here', with the actual. That is, he is incarnational. Such a proposal of community, of counsel and of seriousness demands that the Church reflect upon her nature and the new age:

reflection on her own nature, in all its fulness and splendour, will not yield any imperative course of concrete action in the pastoral field unless we confront such reflection, boldly and uninhibitedly, with the special character of the new age.

We must have courage enough to be men in this world at this time, aware of the difference that living here and today makes actual, not simply escape into a romantic landscape of the 'cloud-cuckoo-land of abstract theology'. We must be prepared to think and then to act, to think in order to act aright. We must not suppose, of course, that thinking is an easy business. There can be no slick answer to real questions, but the difficulties involved are to be seen as enlarging our responsibility, not diminishing our vigour. We must at least attempt as cogently and deeply thought an answer as is possible to us, and not be content with questions merely. Rahner's work is evidence of a thoroughly committed enthusiasm for the theological task, not as a technical exercise or scholastic game but as the most vital activity and experience that this world affords. Theology gives meaning, it is essentially existential. It helps us to understand who we are.

The forceful simplicity of Rahner's experience within theology is in itself a 'holy teaching'. We learn from his activity what it means for such a man to be a Christian. There is nothing easy about his work, nothing that can be paraphrased into catch-word or pious waffle, it is totally adult, totally the work of a highly intelligent and complex person. It is individual and real. It is the work of a man, not of a machine computing indices and notes, going through the motions of thought and producing the right answers—and knowing they are right because they have been given before. And because it is so wholly human and individual, it is Christian. In its very metaphysical character it is Christian. We are often warned that the simplicity of children is presented by the gospel as the proper envy of men of God, as if children were quaintly unknowing persons. If we consider any dialogue of adult and small child, who is then the Socrates? Who presents the inescapable, irreducible 'Why?', who is the metaphysician through and through? In asking so many unexpected, direct questions, Rahner is becoming as a Christian child.

Having asked 'Why is it a cow?' the child makes shift with whatever

answer it may be given and passes on to 'What does it do?'. Having probed the being Rahner discusses the becoming. How are knowledge and understanding to be put to use? It is his priestly conviction that the pastoral care is one of theological response and responsibility, response to the love of God and responsibility to shew the presence of this love to men. Too often in the present conditions theology is studied as a prelude to the parish and the busy priest must make do with the knowledge he has from his seminarian youth for the mature problems he everyday confronts. Rahner shews that we must be ever re-thinking in order to be living. In an essay on Mary (significantly entitled *Mary and the Apostolate*) he emphasises Mary's exemplary Christianity as a Christianity of action in love, she is active in contemplation and contemplative in action:

when we look at Mary, we need have no fear that we shall lose our souls if we allow ourselves to be consumed by our work.

This is true of the theologian in study and lecture room and having coffee with the students. He is not ever to be thinking of a practical purpose, in the sense of direct parochial applicability, for his work. He is to shew by his example the way for all men to deepen their understanding of the creative and redemptive act of God. What he is all priests must be: committed to seeing Christ as he is, transfigured and transfiguring. He is not simply doing the work for other men to use 'in the world', though he is doing something of this; he is a witness to God, a witness who prompts other men to witness in their turn. And their work of witness must consume them as his does him:

if a man is unselfish in service, humble in perseverance, compassionate, never disillusioned by all the disillusionments of his pastoral work, never bitter and sceptical, always ready to be used to the utmost, silently and continuously consuming himself in the work of his office [he] will receive the Spirit of grace and strength and holiness.

He will be working in a spirit 'which has the courage to submit to flesh, to concrete precisions' and he will not distrust action. To wonder whether it might not be better to give up the work and make our souls 'may be Docetism in the pastoral field, a denial that the Word of God has truly entered into our flesh', it may even be 'disguised laziness'.

If we are to be truly incarnational in our lives we must notice the differences between our situation and any other. We are in the midst of the 'breaking-up of things' and we must see our world 'as modern', as different from that of any earlier generation of Christians. To this modern age we must react as modern men, that is, as men who explore, who consider new ways and means, who are less ready than those who

went before us to accept either the Whig view of history, that whatever succeeds is right, or the traditionalist concept that whatever succeeded once must be right now:

all we can do is think about dogma (which also has a history, to the progress of which all such discussions make their own contribution) and about our own pastoral experience and our own intimate knowledge of ourselves and our times in concrete historical terms (for in these factors too the guidance of the Church's Spirit makes itself felt), and consider what is best to be done.

And at the least our consideration will teach us that there is no single solution attainable, *a priori*, to such questions as trouble men in real situations. The Christian, because he accepts God as one who is always greater than all else 'has never been a person for having just one idea, one method, one absolute way' of putting across the Christian experience. Perhaps we put too much emphasis on techniques of liturgy and pedagogy and catechetics, are too concerned with methods of communication and too little realising the wonder of what we would communicate:

What is needed is an awakening, activating and deepening of understanding for the inconceivable majesty of that mystery which reigns over and in our lives and which we call God.

To achieve this communication of conviction and charity we must make ourselves sensitive to those points in the actual, concrete, existence of the men around us, in which something of this nature really and spontaneously arises, we must shew men the true value of all that they value:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

and we must realise that nature is never spent, is always witnessing to God:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him.

In the ordinary things God manifests himself, and in the ordinary thoughts of men there is theology. God is at our centre and we miss ourselves in the dark if we do not seek him there but rest content with peripheral contacts. Such a conviction explains something of Rahner's guarded remarks about the work of the liturgical movement. He is concerned with what the liturgy is concerned with, rather than with liturgy:

If we organise something splendid in the way of liturgy because

otherwise the young folk will get bored with Mass and won't know what to do with themselves, we are only dodging the difficulty and our real task; which is to introduce them so deeply into the mysteries which take place within man—prayer, awe in the presence of God—that they simply will not be bored at Mass, even if it be a silent Mass with 'nothing happening'.

Rahner is making a proper protest against the notion that 'once we get a pastoral liturgy' all our pastoral problems will evaporate. A pastoral liturgy even such as the Council promises us, is but a pre-requisite, a condition favourable to the central work of the Christian mission. It would be a mistake also to suppose that Rahner is unconcerned with liturgy—his various snick remarks on 'the Roman liturgy as it actually is' preclude such a judgment; he is simply considering further things:

The basic achievement of the liturgical movement seems to me to consist not in the forms of popular participation in the Liturgy as such which it has produced so far but in having begun to establish the conviction that *the Liturgy in its hitherto-prevailing official form is not something unalterable* [his italics] but can and must be completely adapted to the pastoral needs of modern humanity.

If we are to shew Christ to the young people of this day, we must say to them 'What you experience and endure and venerate, without knowing it, we preach to you'. For with the young we have both time and hope. They have not yet grown into a frivolous maturity which does not take life seriously, they are not yet convinced by the world, they may be convinced by the witness of the Spirit. They will understand divine prophecy as 'an illumination of the meaning of the future which still leaves it dark, not history written in advance', and they will be ready to accept God's view of man's responsibility:

The only reason why we take man so absolutely seriously, the only reason why we *can*, and the reason why (whether we like it or not) we *must*, is that God, in the Word who became man, has taken man so absolutely seriously.

The first qualification Rahner demands for a relevant theology is that it should have the quality of urgency. It should need doing, and need doing now. This does not mean that it should be shallowly opportune and fashionable. It is not easy to say the right thing and to say it in the right place, and one of the most important tasks a theologian can set himself is the discovery of just what needs to be looked at afresh. Relevant-ness is difficult to gauge:

It can happen that one judges more important and urgent matters

falsely through being unwilling to listen to something fundamental but less immediate and urgent.

It is proper then that the first paper in this collection should be concerned with 'the theological interpretation of the position of Christians in the modern world'. In this volume the stress is placed mainly on the interpretation of the meaning of 'the modern world'. How is our world modern? It is not modern because it is secular. There never has been, nor will there ever be, any period which can be called *the Christian age*, any culture which is *the Christian culture*. It is not possible to deduce from Christian principles any one single pattern of the world as it ought to be:

In principle there is neither in respect of the State nor of economics nor of culture nor of history, any one clear, concrete imperative which can be deduced from Christian teaching as the one and only possible right course.

We ought by now to have realised that simply because we have listened with faith to the Word of God, we have not therefore a complete recipe for the world's problems in our pockets. It is not the case that our only difficulty is to be accurate and faithful in putting the Christian recipe into practice:

It is useless to commend our Christian principles to the world as its salvation. What it wants is to hear concrete proposals. We have got to have the courage to act as human beings with a task in the world of history and so to come forward with such proposals. But we cannot propagate them in the name of Christianity.

The withdrawal of the Church from politics is a recognition that if politics means having a concrete programme, then there cannot be any one Christian political form.

Christianity exists everywhere and everywhere as a diaspora. From the nature of this situation many things follow:

- (a) Christianity will become a religion of choice, of personal achievement constantly renewed in unfavourable surroundings;
- (b) Christians will be forced to admit that disintegration and decay do not immediately follow where Church and clergy are not in control—the obvious success of secular society will make Christians think a little about the character of their Christianity;
- (c) The Church of the diaspora, if it is to remain alive at all, will be a Church of active members, a Church of the laity: a laity conscious of itself, as constituting the Church, as bearing the Church in itself;
- (d) The clergy will lose whatever secular status they have claimed before, and the Church will no longer possess political influence and power.

From the acceptance of this new situation other things follow:

(a) The Church must 'come to terms' with the reality about her. Throughout her history the Church has constantly come to terms with unavoidable situations, but too many times she has tried to go on fighting the inevitable, and so wasted her energies;

(b) Christians must see to it that the ghetto is not allowed to establish itself, that we no longer pretend that there is no such diaspora outside: 'it is the sheer grace of God if anyone ever manages to recognise the Church as the house of God, all cluttered up as she is with pseudo-Gothic decor and other kinds of reactionary petty-bourgeois stuff';

(c) Coming to terms will involve Christians in the world of telegrams and anger and football teams and the more convenient evening masses; it will pose new questions how to teach young people to read non-Christian books and magazines as well as how to read Catholic newspapers; how to respond to a Catholic who has married again after divorce and is happy now, and does not see (because of the Old Testament-like social conditions which harden his heart) that he is involved in immorality;

(d) The office-job pastor will be a thing of the past. If a man can find in us another man, a real Christian, with a heart, someone who cares about him and who cares about the revelation God has made of himself, then we can dispense with the impressive and unmistakable hum of bureaucratic machinery;

(e) We shall guard against the easy error of trying to convert men to a particular cultural style rather than to Christ. 'Think of the appearance of the inside of many religious houses; of the level of many of the products of repository religion; of the unctuous tones of our religious talk; the narrowness of our bourgeois horizons; our censorious attitude to a thousand and one things in everyday life (hair-styles and lipstick, for a start)—and you will understand what I mean by the equivalent in the home mission to Europeanism in the foreign missions.'

If we understand our modern world correctly we shall be able to see the patience of a mother, the bedside prayer of a child for his parents, the social responsibility shewn by an industrialist, the decision of a statesman in the political life he leads in the spirit of the gospel, as acts sustained by the grace of God, though they are not acts of the Church. They are Christian but not ecclesial. If we understand the brave new world that has such laymen in it we shall avoid the clash that too often arises between differing concepts of the apostolate of the laity, we shall distinguish carefully between that sharing in the bishop's apostolate

which the bishop directs, which is ecclesial, and that apostolate which is of Christian acts for the salvation of the Christian himself and of the world by action in the world of ordinary things. We shall understand that every ordinary thing exists for Christ, that everything is created gracewards, created for its place in the redeemed world:

When, for example, a concrete human being (and whether he is aware of it or not is, in the first instance, immaterial) experiences genuine personal love for another human being, it always has a validity, an eternal significance, and an inexpressible depth which it would not have but that such a love is so constituted as to be a way of actualising the love of God as a human activity springing from God's own act.

We shall understand the true Christian optimism. The decision of God is for the salvation of the world and so a man may be less suspicious, more trusting, in his approach to the world than his own experience would perhaps warrant, he will without illusions understand something of the meaning of the world:

each ultimate infinitesimal physical particle has something about it which differentiates it, even as to content, from every other one, so that there simply cannot (thank God?) be such a thing as an absolutely homogeneous mass, and hence nothing can ever be simply and adequately replaced by anything else that exists; and the meaning that he is himself:

it is of the highest importance to see that a Christian may receive a summons to his heavenly task precisely in that area and at that time in which he is devoting himself to the world and its tasks; and the meaning of the present Christian society in which he must work out salvation with diligence:

He works, he keeps on beginning again, he does not give up. He is sceptical about the permanence of his concrete Christian imperatives, and is always prepared, when taught by fresh experience, to revise them; yet he has the courage to apply them and propagate them, without supposing that they are the final solution of all problems of concrete living.

The individual, the society, the general culture of the time, the place and the responsibility, all add up and God becomes present, creating the place, redeeming the time.

M. Sartre once analysed life in the brief description:

The war exists only for God  
But God does not exist  
And yet the war exists



and he asks again on the last page of his most recent work: What can be the significance and intelligibility of the total movement of history if, at the end, there is no one to add it up? Rahner is as existential as any, he has asked similar questions and he has seen Christianity as the existential answer. The Christian's genuinely individual Christian acts are acts emanating from the centre of the person in real freedom and responsibility. And whenever a man freely and in all conscience believes; whenever a man without illusions has the courage to be glad and hope; whenever a man without thought of reward or advantage or comforting reassurance, loves—then there is the true individual, and there is the Church at her most real: the true man

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—

Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Rahner, like Hopkins, has the incarnational sense of the living Christ in all things that is the especial glory of Jesuit prayer. For Rahner, again like Hopkins, the world is a sacramental sign of Christ; like again Teilhard de Chardin, Rahner sees Christ as the heart of matter. Our religion begins with the creation of the physical universe and ends with the resurrection of the body, pivoting in the middle, B.C. and A.D., on the Word becoming Flesh. It is flesh, the common stock of Adam, that we share with Christ, and our community with him is a community with all men in the flesh, in the matter of the world, in the ground, so that the Church must always be a people's Church, must always appeal, as Christ appealed in Galilee and Judaea, to the people. We are a people who make up the living body of Christ together, a people who take counsel together in theology, and who share a meal together in the eucharist, and who know that there is no gnosis now but a Word understandable of the people.

This popular religion is not however always expressed in popular terms and the grand struggle engaged in by successive translators does not make Rahner an easy man to read and understand. His vocabulary makes what he might call extra-dictionary claims and his syntax, even in translation, involutes and veils. It would be easy to select, or even fall upon at random, instances of profound obscurities, but this would be unfair since Rahner is not merely obscure, he is also truly profound. And he himself struggles to bring into a clearer light, into the common light of day, the wonder of Christ among us, and even in the struggle we see ourselves, see that all men, Rahner and Hopkins, have the same

struggle with words when there is anything worthwhile to say:  
 O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
 Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap  
 May who ne'er hung there.

## The Mass of the People<sup>1</sup>

DUNCAN CAMPBELL, O.P.

As a priest, with the small authority of a priest that can be humbly accepted by higher authority, or quietly ignored, I should like to submit proposals for the form our celebrating mass might now take. To suggest changes at all, without offence, is difficult. All likely readers of this page will know the mass as an important, cherished and familiar ceremony in its present form, with roots deep in feelings and imagination, the sense of history and art, one's Catholic upbringing and loyalty. A whole tissue of potent, unrealised emotion attaches to the tiniest details and circumstances, making us shudder to think of change for the sake of change, or of any 'playing about'. Brother Choleric's tense, aristocratic, intellectual nun, hands up in revulsion at the mention of dialogue mass, is so funny because so true—of us all. Even innovators, who have merely managed to transfer their feelings from the actual forms to other imagined forms, become notoriously angry with other innovators, for the very same reason. I expect few supporters indeed.

There are, however, principles involved that we can all try to understand and agree upon. There is a mood in contemporary thought; a gaunt honesty and grim respect for people, and places, and materials, and things, just as they are, and confront us. The symbol of our day is the lens. As it affects religious thought, it becomes a principle that I think underlies all present movements in theology—our social teaching,

<sup>1</sup>This article was written before the promulgation of the Council's constitution on the liturgy, which in many ways is more radical; but we hope it will stimulate the necessary discussion of that constitution, which should be taking place at every level—EDITOR.