

THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH AFTER THE SYNOD

(Continuation of an after-dinner discussion with Cardinal Danielou on the above topic)

II

The Church and Public Opinion

The relatively recent attention given to religious questions has highlighted the problems of relations between the Church and public opinion. We had the impression that certain individuals wished to use public opinion in order to exert pressure on the deliberations of the Bishops, either on a national level or on the level of the Universal Church. We also ascertained that, on the eve of the Synod, the press tended to dramatize the situation in the Church. During the Synod, the press reported the discussions of the Bishops and stressed the serene atmosphere that reigned in the Synod. And when the Synod ended, the press finally gave the impression that the atmosphere that reigned in the Synod had been one of general well-being.

Do you think that this reflects the reality? From a more general point of view, what is your opinion on the problems of relations between the Church and public opinion?

Cardinal Danielou: — The problem you pose is very important, for public opinion as expressed in the Press and by means of audio-visual aids exerts considerable influence.

The analysis you give seems to be correct. Before the Synod, there was a rather disturbing atmosphere, and the Press did acknowledge certain oppositions. I think we have to congratulate the Press for having given an altogether correct idea of what proved a serene and objective atmosphere in the Synod.

But the problem you pose goes much further. We can say that it is a question of pressures wielded by public opinion.

It is evident that public opinion can either stimulate or paralyze the "powers" whatever these may be and, in any case, render the exercise of responsibility and authority more difficult.

I take an example right away. Every decision the Church makes, which involves a criticism against a person, can no longer be made without provoking a general protestation, and those who approved these decisions are considered as "inquisitors".

This is an extremely serious matter, for it is evident that, if we paralyze completely the exercise of authority in matters of Faith, where authority has precisely the absolute duty to exercise itself, then we run the risk of hampering the exercise of legitimate responsibilities.

Such phenomena can be observed only in the domain of the Church. Thus, for example, it is impossible for a government of any kind to censure a film without immediately causing a general protestation by a certain public opinion, seeing in this an abuse of authority.

This appears to me to be — I am forced to say it — one of the defects of a consumer society. This is one of the cases where the defence of liberty can finally lead to the exaltation of libertinism; that is to say, that if liberty is considered as having no limits, and if no one any longer has the right to set limits to liberty, then we enter in a world of confusion, disorder, and anarchy.

I realize the courage the Sovereign Pontiff needs today to take a decision with regard to certain matters which appear as manifestly dangerous for the Christian people, knowing that his decision will immediately stir up against him a general opinion which no longer admits that liberty should have limits. *But the Church is a society, and it is indispensable for the health of this society that we prevent poisons seeping into it.*

This problem is so important it must absolutely be discussed between public opinion and the authorities, that is, in dialogues between journalists and responsible people, so that there be no basic misunderstanding; and that those who are responsible explain to public opinion

why they have the absolute duty to act in a certain number of cases and why, in such cases, they have the right to expect not contradiction but collaboration on the part of those who "make" public opinion.

To be sure, public opinion has the duty to protest against abuses. It is to the grandeur of our free society to have a free press, and that this press has the right to protest against the abuses of power. *But the abuse of power must not be confused with the exercise of power.*

The Church and the Principle of Subsidiarity

It seems that the organization of relations between the local churches and the Universal Church questions the exercise of the principle of subsidiarity with which the social doctrine of the Church has familiarized us with regard to civil society. *To what extent can we apply the principle of subsidiarity in the Church at the levels of organization and doctrine?* Cardinal Danielou: — I believe that the problem you bring up is entirely fundamental. The principle of subsidiarity is very dear to the Church, and is so at all levels. By this we understand that subordinate communities should not be crushed by superior communities.

It is from this point of view that the Church has always defended the rights of the family and of professions against the pretensions of the State which would wish at times to substitute for the family and for professions.

There is always the danger to minimize matters, either on a superior level — then the supreme authority does everything — or on an inferior level — then everything begins from the base.

In all domains, it is fundamental to respect the different levels of responsibility, and to act in such a manner that the superior powers do not prevent the inferior powers from exercising their responsibilities in their turn. Actually, the authority and the new competency given to the Episcopal Conferences are an application of this principle of subsidiarity. Too many problems were centered in Rome.

I am thinking especially of the case of annulment of marriage and of the particular problems concerning such or such a member of the

clergy when only the local context could allow us to "understand" and to find solutions.

Likewise, from the doctrinal point of view, the Vatican would wish to see the Episcopal Conferences assume their responsibilities.

I believe that this is extremely fruitful and one of the ways to organize the Church well; that is, only the ultimate problems should be considered at the highest level. Moreover, this makes good sense, and those problems which cannot be solved at the lower level should be solved at the higher level.

And it is from this point of view that this principle of subsidiarity applied to the Church seems to me extremely valuable.

The Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" and the Stir it Provoked

When the Encyclical "Humanae vitae" appeared, it provoked many uproars. *Do you think that these uproars have abated today? Do you think that, after explanations were given by Rome and the Episcopal Conferences, this Encyclical is now well understood by the majority of the faithful?*

Cardinal Danielou: — It is difficult to answer you.

It is certain that all the Bishops accepted the Encyclical "Humanae vitae". But the manner in which it should be interpreted practically gave rise to diverse interpretations.

I believe there are two fundamental problems here:

1. First of all, the question is to know whether the Sovereign Pontiff had or did not have the right to intervene in a question of this type. For as you know, this right was contested.

But I believe this right cannot be contested. The Sovereign Pontiff has the right to intervene in a problem that concerns a basic point of morals, in the same way, moreover, as he intervened in fundamental problems of the social order.

To say that the Sovereign Pontiff can intervene only in matters of strict Faith, and to forbid him the entire domain of social doctrine,

of the family and of culture, would be to limit absolutely the scope of the responsibility of the Church, responsible not only for the values of Revelation properly so-called, but also for the fundamental moral and human values.

The Church has always vindicated this. She has always refused to allow herself to be confined to the sacristy, as all totalitarian regimes are trying to impose. You yourselves, leaders of Christian enterprises, you know very well your social doctrine rests on the principles of the Church, and you could not exist as a Movement if you did not acknowledge that the Church has something to say in social matters, not at the level of technical solutions, but at the level of fundamental principles that concern human nature and the rights of persons who must finally direct the life of the enterprise and, in a more general way, the economy. So it is, in a most eminent way, in the domain of marriage and the family. *It is intolerable that certain theologians have contested this right.*

2. Secondly, there are the problems which this Encyclical poses. In the first place, the Encyclical recalled the meaning of marriage and human love. In this respect, it was absolutely necessary that the Church speak out about human love in the radical disorder of the modern world.

It is remarkable that it is a journalist of the extreme left, Maurice Clavel, who in "Nouvel Observateur," specifically because he knew what a certain corruption of present-day love is, had the courage, more than many Catholics did, to thank Pope Paul VI for having had this breath of pure air pass through our atmosphere charged with poisonous germs.

Having said this, it is evident that, at the level of practical problems, there are extreme diversities of situations. From this view point, we ought to have an explanation that might perhaps specify better what the principles recalled in the Encyclical imply with respect to their practical applications.

I am thinking in particular that it would be absolutely dramatic were the Christian Church to be no longer open except for heroes. I have often said that, as far as I am concerned, the great Church was

the Church of the Christian people in all its vast expanse, and that I dreaded nothing more than to see a sort of emaciation of the Church — if I may use that expression — where the Church would no longer be but the Church of Saints. For me, the Church is the Church of all men.

The Church calls for heroism, but it knows perfectly well how to take into account — at all levels and in all categories of problems — those who can be led only gradually to a more perfect fidelity.

For my part, I must say that I have never understood — I excuse myself for this type of naivety — why such a stir was made about this Encyclical.

Concerning the topics treated, for the past twenty-five years that I have been a priest, I have always reacted exactly the same way: very rigorous in principles and very broad in the applications. It seems to me that it would be dramatic were the Church to abandon her firmness. But the Church must be both extremely demanding and extremely indulgent.

A demanding Church leads to Jansenism. An indulgent Church leads to carelessness. But to exact demands from one who is capable of accepting demands, and to be indulgent towards those who cannot accept demands, this is what pastoral activity is! . . . *And furthermore, it is common sense.*

Concerning the Election of the Pope

Certain members of the Synod brought up the possibility of enlarging the college that elects the Pope. What do you think of this suggestion? Does it raise problems of doctrinal principles?

Cardinal Danielou: — It seems to me that the enlargement of the college that elects the Sovereign Pontiff not only poses no questions but seems to me altogether desirable provided this enlargement be not represented simply by Italians. At the present time, however, the majority are non-Italians.

It would be quite another matter to say that the Sovereign Pontiff must no longer be elected by the College of Cardinals, but by the Presi-

dents of Episcopal Conferences. This is altogether different. As a matter of fact, the traditional principle is this: *the Sovereign Pontiff is the Bishop of Rome. As Bishop of Rome he is the successor of Peter and, by this very fact, has a special place in the Church.*

The Cardinals are the heirs of what was formerly the ensemble of the suffragan Bishops of the Bishop of Rome; likewise, there are suffragan Bishops of the Patriarch of Alexandria, the Patriarch of Antioch, the Patriarch of Constantinople, etc.

If the Pope were elected by the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, he would no longer be the Bishop of Rome, but would be elected in some way from among the body of Bishops; that is, he would be a sort of super-Bishop attached to no See in particular. Then we would end up with a sort of monarchical conception, which is not in conformity with the traditional structure of the Church. In fact, what do we find at the very beginning? Twelve Apostles, and among these twelve, one of them has a particular role.

Now, this is what is being continued wherever there are Bishops and where, among these Bishops, one of them has a particular role. This is very important with regard to the Churches of the Orient who are specifically attached to the idea that the Bishop of Rome has a responsibility and particular character among the Bishops and Patriarchs, but who are altogether repugnant to the idea of a super-Bishop who could substitute in some way for their competencies and for their legitimate authorities.

Considering the questions posed, it is from this view point that I believe it is very wise to enlarge the College of Cardinals so that it may reflect more the Universal Church. But for my part, I believe it would be dangerous to change the principle itself of the constitution of this College, and to have the Sovereign Pontiff elected by all the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions.

The Church and Ease?

A moment ago, you disapproved of easing things, and I am happy about that, but we are always being told: the purpose of Vatican I and II was to adapt the Church to modern life. What do I see? All the

measures proposed to adapt the Church to modern life are all measures to ease things; for example, Mass on Saturday evening, certain forms of *Holy Communion*. *Is there not a sort of contradiction between this refusal of the easier way and these measures proposed?*

Cardinal Danielou: — When you allude to certain liturgical innovations, I am entirely opposed to your opinion. What is being done from this point of view on the liturgical level — I myself worked in the Liturgical Pastoral Movement — seems to me to really proceed from a concern to come closer to, we may say, the earliest and original tradition and, consequently, to express anew this earliest and original tradition in forms which are acceptable to men and youth of today.

In the course of the centuries, there was a Byzantine Mass, a Carolingian Mass, a Baroque Mass. To believe this would be a gross illusion. It was a Mass where the centuries had accumulated their successive and deeply respectable contributions, but which, however, did not form part of the very substance of what constitutes the Christian Eucharist.

I am obliged to say that I react with vivacity — perhaps even with too much vivacity at times — against certain deviations of some theologians today in the domain of Faith and in the domain of Masses, not to mention the fact that I find, on the other hand, that in this domain of liturgy there is often a lack of understanding, in certain traditional milieus, which is entirely uncalled for.

Let us learn to distinguish if we wish to be taken seriously. A person who says, “no” to everything loses respect completely. In order to be able to say “no” we must always be able to say “yes” whenever we have no valid reason not to say “yes”.

From this point of view, on the liturgical level, I am an historian and I know perfectly well that in the 4th century Holy Communion was given in one's hands. Christians were authorized to bring the Holy Eucharist to their home. They could preserve it in a sort of tabernacle so that they could bring it to the sick when there were some. Many other examples could be given.

Consequently, from this view point, I request that we see no compliance in facts which are in reality a renewal of traditional facts, and

which can specifically restore a certain significance to acts that are purely routine.

Abuses are possible. The Bishops are sensitive to this. During the Assembly in Lourdes whence I have just returned, the Bishops protested, for example, against the fact that certain priests were celebrating or concelebrating Mass dressed in suits without putting on the liturgical vestments, and condemned this practice. You will say: the Mass on Saturday evenings is a convenience. At the same time, we must take into account the sociological evolutions. It is clear that Sunday morning poses difficult problems:

1) Because it is, all the same, the day when people rest.

2) Because the week-end today has become more and more developed, which likewise poses questions along this order and, consequently, brings about the authorization of a Saturday evening Mass, is perfectly traditional.

Furthermore, you know that, according to the Jewish calendar, the day begins at sunset. It is absolutely traditional that Saturday evening can be considered already as the preparation for Sunday.

You see that on this point, if our Church merits certain various reproaches — she must cede to certain concessions — I do not think that what is being actually done on the liturgical plane is a type of reprehensible concession. *What is being done arises from a concern to find an expression of the Eucharist that is acceptable to men of today, and which takes into account certain sociological situations.*

We must not attribute to the Church abuses that arise on the part of those who have gone astray. We are all the more justified to criticize those who have gone astray when we do not criticize the structures. I am rather inclined to be concerned with certain deviations, but in this domain, I do not think there are criticisms to make on the orientations taken by the French Episcopate and by the Church in general.