

Disenchanted comments of Catholic correspondents at the close of the Synod revealed a collective mentality that saw authority in the Church as residing in the People of God and its decisions as made by popular mandate. In comment on this mentality, Father Crane notes its contradictions and warns of its dangers.

Is Church Authority Dependent On Popular Mandate?

NOTHING BECAME Catholic correspondents at the Synod less than their concluding comments on it. These were revealing to say the least. The collective mind portrayed was that of a group wedded to change for its own sake; petty in the tantrums displayed when change was not granted on the terms it desired; arrogant in its assumption that what it desired was identical with the hopes of clergy and faithful throughout the world — hopes that were dashed in the end, the correspondents would have us believe, by a clutch of reactionary and/or unrepresentative Churchmen, most especially the nineteen Cardinals of the Roman Curia and a further twenty-five Fathers who were at the Synod by special invitation of the Pope alone. In other words, the Synod, in the mind of the correspondents, was a fix. The voice of the People of God was stifled by a fiddle. The questions at issue remained, therefore, despite the adverse (in the eyes of the correspondents) voting. The decisions taken were, in fact, invalid because unrepresentative; this is the implication that appears to have underlain the disenchanted writing in final comment on the Synod. The assumption is sinister. It is that authority in the Church derives not from God, but from the People of God: its decisions carry weight, therefore, only when representative of or ratified by the popular will. This is heresy. There is, naturally enough, no trace of it in the documents of the second Vatican Council in whose name

these outrageous claims were made.

Synod not a Popular Assembly

It is precisely because this wrong-headed theology was present in the minds of many correspondents at the Synod that they tended to regard it as a species of popular assembly whose decisions would be made by majority vote and draw their binding force from the majority that made them. This view is totally false and doctrine within the Church can never be made on its basis. Father James Tolhurst put the point very well in a letter to the Universe on November 19th, 1971:

"The result of the Synod was hardly good press material. However, this may have been because it was regarded as a 'parliament'. The inevitable connotations are that the bishops are M.P.'s and lobbies must be formed to ensure a good majority.

"In fact, the Synod is merely an expression of collegiality in which the magisterium (teaching authority of the Church) attempts to deepen its possession of the truth revealed by Christ.

"The college of bishops and the Pope who is their head and often their spokesman (cf. Acts 15/7) are not 'representing' anyone but Christ the high priest whose leadership and witness they assume by virtue of their office.

"It may be very democratic to talk of forums and parliaments,

but the deposit of faith cannot be decided by a majority vote."

Hoisted with their own Petard

There is, of course, no reason why the vote should not be used as an indication of opinion for reference to a Bishop, a Conference of Bishops or, indeed, the Holy Father himself. It was so used at the Synod, but the Holy Father is not bound by it though, in his wisdom, he will indeed take count of it. He is not responsible to Parliament. This is so because his authority does not derive from the Synod or, indeed, the Church. It comes to him direct from God. The Synod Fathers showed their clear awareness of this by delivering to the Pope, at the end of the Synod, the documents on the priesthood and world justice for emendation, completion and publication as and when he saw fit. The decision, in other words, is the Pope's because supreme authority is his.

In fact, such voting as there was at the Synod went massively in favor of a celibate priesthood. Very naturally this infuriated the Progressives who wanted it made optional at the very least and whose low view of papal authority had brought them to Rome hoping to see the Holy Father "mandated" in this direction by massive majority vote. In fact, the voting on this question (which, as I have already explained above, was merely indicative and in no way binding, as Progressives chose to believe) went totally against the progressive position. Thus, they were

hoisted with their own petard. Their reaction was typical. They took immediate steps to write down the value of the decision, attributing it to the presence of a reactionary and unrepresentative element within the ranks of the Synod Fathers. In other words, according to them, mandated decisions (of which, as we have seen, there can be none where Church Authority is concerned) are valid only when set in a progressive direction. This is the height of hypocrisy. It is, I am afraid, typical of the progressive outlook in all fields. Liberal democracy is splendid when it works in favour of liberals. If it does not, then you talk about "structures of violence" and use violent — i.e. non-democratic — means to destroy it in order to get your way. The rules, in other words, are fine so long as they work in your favour. If they don't, then change them; accuse those who make them of being unrepresentative and so on. Thus the progressive correspondents at the Synod, whose hopes were dashed by its findings, and progressive participants like Cardinal Suenens. Immediately after the Synod, at a dinner given him by the corps of Spanish newsmen in Rome, he commented that "representation suffers because the vote of the Brazilians, with millions behind them, is the same as the vote of the Malta delegation". In other words, because the rules worked against Cardinal Suenens and his friends at the Synod, the first moves are being made to change them so that, in future, they work to the Cardinal's advantage. Grounds for the change are found in the unrepresentative nature of a selection that gives Brazil, with eighty million Catholics, the same representation as Malta, with three hundred and ten thousand. The Progressives, it would appear, are opting for representation at future Synods to rest on a basis of numerical equality. This, they feel, will work in their favour. I bet there would have been no complaints from them about lack of representation had the Synod gone their way.

Smear and Derision

The Progressives, however, went further than this, as they usually do. In their anger at seeing their hopes dashed, they brought to their aid two other weapons whose combined effect was to discredit the Synod and, in consequence, its decisions. They made use of the smear,

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which is the lowest weapon of all, the ultimate, I think, in verbal nastiness. In this case, low motives were attributed by a leading Dutch Progressive to those whose views prevailed over his own at the Synod. They made use also of derision, branding a leading personality at the Synod as out of touch, implying thereby that his opinions were valueless.

In evidence of the smear, one need only take an address given by the Dutch Dominican, Father Edward Schillebeeckx, at the University of Liverpool Catholic Chaplaincy, as reported in the *Catholic Herald* for November 19th last year. Many of the Bishops at the Synod, Father Schillebeeckx was reported as saying, were concerned not with human and Christian values, but with power. "Without the law of celibacy", he maintained, "they (the Bishops) would have less power." There could not be changes in the structure of the Church without changing the law of celibacy. Therefore, they refused to change the law of celibacy. This, I think, is a shocking attitude. It is not, I am afraid, the ultimate. For that we must look to Father Rene Laurentin, the French progressive priest, writing in *Le Figaro*. The weapon he employed was derision. This is what he said about the Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne, chosen specially by the Pope to present to the Synod an all-important paper on the priest-

hood, in which he came down heavily on the side of celibacy:

"On Saturday morning I positioned myself at the exit to see the triumphant hero of this third Synod; Cardinal Hoffner. It was easy because he came out on foot, alone and with no pomp, although he is in charge of one of the world's wealthiest dioceses.

The Archbishop of Cologne, who for a long time taught social doctrine, remains what he was before his election: a simple little professor, friendly moderate in his deeds as in his smile. His strength lies entirely in his ability to fit everything into narrow categories, within which he cultivates a satisfied perfection.

"A majority of bishops, breathless at the present changes and giddy before the endless problems, found in him a sign of security. They liked above all his reassuring perspective, which wipes away the nightmares of 'new sociology' and 'permissive society'. For Cardinal Hoffner the height of dialogue is the university directed by a competent professor. This is his model for the next Synod."

The contempt is thinly veiled. This is derision—mockery—used to perfection by one who is obviously adept at it. One can only say that the kind of writing in which Abbé Laurentin indulges here is contemptible beyond words. One remembers a little of his history and one is not surprised. The technique used here is, of course, as old as the hills; the arrogance quite nauseating. The effect, thank God, cannot be lasting. The pretensions of the avid seeker stick out like so many sore thumbs from every word the Abbé writes in this passage. He will end up, as I wrote some years ago Charles Davis would end up, drowned in a sea of his own unlovely eloquence.

Illiberal Liberals

An interesting and rather sad—indeed, disturbing—thing to note about the type of mentality represented by the Synod correspondents and, indeed, Catholic Progressives in general, is their seeming determination, despite setbacks, to thrust upon us all their desired reforms irrespective of the cost. This mentality has been very much in evidence since the close of the Second Vatican Council. It is time it was driven back into the hiding from which it emerged so

shabbily in recent years. The mentality extends to all fields and it is in flagrant contradiction of the democratic ideal advocated so loudly and with such vulgarity by those in possession of it. Here, once again, we have the old story; liberalism is alright so long as it works to the advantage of Liberal Progressives: let it work against them and it becomes an instrument to be discarded. There is, for example, the matter of clerical dress in, say, developing of missionary countries. In many cases, progressive priests in African countries have abandoned overnight, as it were, their cassocks for a bush shirt and a pair of slacks. Sisters, in many cases, have done the equivalent. Now, the thing, I think, to remember is that the African people do not like this. Speak of this, however, to those concerned and they say, "We think this is the best thing to do". We are determined, in other words, to give the people what we think best for them whether they like it or not. Thus the progressive mind where its own innovating practices are concerned: all is based on the premise that the progressive knows better than the People of God what is good for the People of God. Knowing this, there need be and is no discussion. Nanny knows best. What is this if not the old paternalism, which Progressives affect to despise, in new and vulgar form? So, cassocks and habits and, in general, clerical dress are discarded, statues are pitched out of churches, the rosary relegated—all without discussion and all by unilateral imposition on the part of progressive priests and nuns, who are constantly calling for discussion within the Church and profess themselves outraged when its opportunity is denied them. What they really want, however, is not discussion, but the imposition of fast and further changes on a now long-suffering and patient Catholic people. Unable to secure all of these by single-handed fiat, as in the case of the discarding of clerical dress and the downgrading of the Blessed Sacrament, they are forced into attempts to secure what they want through discussion and dialogue, which they seek to pressurize into channels they consider desirable because leading to the realization of their progressive goals. Thus, they are all in favour now of democracy and majority rule, knowing that their best way forward is to manipulate both to secure what they really want, which is not the true interests of the

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Church, but the imposition on the Faithful of a whole host of their own pet ideas whether they are wanted or not. There are no true democrats, in the finest sense of the word, amongst the Catholic Progressives who clamour for democracy only when it suits their purposes to do so. All you have are little men in search of power, which they find in bending others to their will through the imposition on them of alien devotions and practices of their own devising. These are harsh words. History, I feel, will reveal them as true.

Hope for the Future

No one is more illiberal than the Liberal Progressive in pursuit of his

liberalism. He is by nature a destroyer. What we have been feeling in the Church since the Council is the impact on us all of his inbred aptitude for destruction. By the Grace of God alone have we been spared its full effect. Evidence of the power of the Spirit in the Catholic Church today is not in the mass prophetic utterance that is said by some to have taken hold of it; this is mostly nonsense. It is to be found, rather, in the fact that the Church has not and, we know, will not crash in total confusion despite the all-out attack from within at present being made upon it. There lies the hope for the future. It is to be found nowhere and in nothing else. By PAUL CRANE,