

# CRISIS OF FREEDOM—CRISIS OF INTELLIGENCE\*

by Cardinal Danielou

There is a drama, that of a fundamental, deep, dramatic crisis of intelligence, of a surrender on the part of intellectuals and of those who, today, should bring a certain vision of man, which would give a meaning to all the virtualities of our world. The crisis of the present-day world is a crisis of intelligence, a crisis of truth, a crisis of thought, and it is just because no answer is given at this level that the situation in which we find ourselves is, in fact, a dramatic situation: the problems raised by men of action do not find an answer among men of thought and of faith.

It is said: "It is civilization that is more and more inhuman and degrades man." What is meant by this "Civilization that degrades man?" Does it mean that contemporary civilization, in the sense in which it is a body of technical means, scientific means and sociological transformations, that this civilization, as such, is bound to degrade man? I refuse to accept this view, I am too optimistic for that, I really do not see why this civilization should necessarily degrade man.

It is not the civilization as such that stifles man. I would say there are two levels, as it were: there is what stifles man in this society, through no fault of society itself, but because of what man does with it; and so I do not say that it is this society as such. This society does not exist as something that is species in itself, independently of the men who live in it, control it, take advantage of it use it.

There is a real problem here, I remember that my friend Emmanuel Mounier raised this problem as early as 1929, when he protested "against the established disorder." I think, in

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\* L'Ossevatore Romano, 1 June 1972.

fact — and I have not a particular type of structure in mind — that this disorder is everywhere, that we have to struggle perpetually to prevent the instruments that contemporary civilization offers us from being put in the service of particular interests, whatever they may be, financial or ideological. An effort has to be made continually to put these instruments in the service of the human community.

And I will say precisely — because I am deeply attached to the values of our Western tradition, because I believe it is absurd to contest it globally, because I believe there are, in the successive acquisitions of the centuries, things that are perfectly valid — that the test we have to pass today is to prevent this freedom, which is dear to us and characterizes our Western tradition, from necessarily degenerating into anarchy and self-destruction. There exists a possibility of disciplining freedom and as long as we have not proved that freedom is capable of disciplining itself, we will always be at the mercy of the threat of a totalitarian power to crush it.

### A PERVERSION OF INTELLIGENCE

This is the drama of the West, in my opinion, a fundamental drama, and one that involves the whole of our responsibility, for it must be said that our present freedom, this freedom that is rightly so dear to us, is too often a freedom that has gone wrong because it is unable to control itself. That is an essential element in my idea of man. It would be really dreadful if man needed big stick methods to observe a certain number of fundamental requirements. And it would be dramatic if freedom were not capable of eliminating by itself the threats it bears within it in order to create a fully acceptable civilization.

But it is at this level that my greatest worries arise. They concern those who ought to guide freedom, who ought to be the educators of modern man.

No, at present, there is a perversion of intelligence; it is of a triple order. It consists either in a certain flattening of intelligence to the level of pure scientific positivism, or in the claim of freedom to be self-sufficient and not to recognize anything above it or beyond it, or finally in a scepticism that sees

in values the expression of passing cultures and does not recognize any permanent truth.

It is evident that, in such an intellectual situation, there is no hope. Today's hope is that a certain number of young people, weary of the fact that this world gives them no reasons for living, should ask themselves at least what could fill this emptiness. But for these aspirations a constructive and positive element is needed. It is not enough to challenge the system. It must be done on the basis of a certain view of man. Christians have all the chances today: they have all the chances because the rest is collapsing.

What remains of a certain Marxism? Maurice Clavel, in his book: *Qui est aliene?* reverses the Marxist alienation and proves that it is Marx who is alienated and Christians who are not. This testimony is all the more valid in that no one would dream of putting Maurice Clavel among the witnesses of political conservatism. He is a revolutionary, but he is pitilessly clear-sighted as regards the emptiness of present-day ideologies and is deeply convinced that only faith in God can bring an answer to the anguish of young people today.

There is, in fact, a collapse of the ideologies that claimed to fill this emptiness, and the problem is to know if we will be capable of filling it. For I am more concerned by what is happening inside the Church than by what is happening outside.

It is said to me: "It is impossible that the Church, today, should be reduced to being no more than a delirious centre of purely subjective opinions; she is responsible to Christ for the authenticity of the deposit of the faith."

I am deeply convinced of this. What interests me is not at all the opinions of one theologian or another. What interests me in the Church is the fact that there is, in her, precisely, something that is of another order than the more or less wavering and more or less subjective opinions of such and such a sage of such and such a philosopher.

### THE FAITH QUESTIONED

Now, from this point of view, there is a crisis, within the Church, of a certain doctrinal faithfulness; there is, and this troubles us often at present, the questioning of certain funda-

mental dogmas, of their objectivity, of their permanent value. Through more or less subjective and more or less toned down interpretations, they are emptied of their simple and valid meaning, which is that the God who created us came to seek us in Christ in order to make us participants in the life that is his, and that all that constitutes real events that actually happened in our history and what is most interesting in it. This remains the fundamental element of our faith and if belief in it were shaken, nothing would much be left.

If really it was not the living God who came in search of us to make us participate in his life, if Christianity is only a certain way of being a man, if it is reduced in the last analysis to a morality of love of one's neighbour and service of others, I say that, at that moment Christianity no longer interests me at all because it is only a variant of human wisdom, because it is nothing more than an ethics, because Christ is no longer anything more than a teacher, just another teacher.

For what we need is a Saviour, which is something quite different. If Jesus is not the Son of God, I will join the Communist party tomorrow. For, if it is a question of working efficaciously to implement a certain type of human society, it is not of fundamental importance to me, after all, whether it is that type of another.

But Christianity in me is a fundamental reason, which gives values a meaning. What interests me specifically in Jesus Christ is something quite different; it is this irruption of God into our universe which reveals to me and guarantees me a new vision of man.