

RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH TODAY

On 8 November, the Holy Father spoke at the General Audience of the necessity of an interior renewal in the Church.

There has been talk of a renewal of the Church: the Council awakened the idea in us, gave us the hope, left us the orders. This word "renewal" still speaks to us: to lovers of the Church, to indicate in a simple word the many needs of the age-old institution which, still alive and consistent with its roots, receives as impulse the divine sap of the Holy Spirit always flowing through it towards the blossoming of a new spring. Yes, the Church needs renewal (cf. Decree *Optatam totius*, n. 1; etc).

This same word has not always been rightly understood by everyone. For some it rang out as a condemnation of the past and license to break with it regardless of binding and vital function as the vehicle of the essential principles by which the Church lives, her faith especially, and her constitution. The word renewal seemed to authorize some adaptation of the latter. And there were some who conceived it as detachment from the institutional, historical, visible, exterior structures, in order to keep its spiritual and characteristic content more pure and efficient, forgetting that the soul of the Church without the body in which she lives could no longer be found or be active, as St. Augustine already repeated. There were also some who thought they could renew the Church by secularizing her, that is modelling her, sometimes without discernment, in forms and in mentality on the mould of secular society, which, as the daughter of history and of time, could confer on the Church the coveted title of modern.

CHECKING TWO POINTS

Two things were, and still are, overlooked. The first is that renewal, a continuous, vital process in a living organism like the Church, cannot be a metamorphosis, a radical trans-

formation, a betrayal of essential and perpetual elements, the renewal of which can only be to strengthen, not to change. The other is that the desired renewal is interior, rather than exterior, as St. Paul admonishes us in words still relevant today: "There must be a renewal in the inner life of your minds" (Eph. 4, 23).

Pithy words, these, easier to utter than to put into practice. How should we translate them? You must renew your mentality by virtue of the Christian inspiration that is conferred on you by grace, by the inner action of the Holy Spirit.

You must from your speculative and practical judgment according to Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel, or, as is said, according to Christian analysis. We must have a Christian mentality, we must think according to the conception that the Word of God gives us of the world, life, society, present and future values. It is not easy; but this is what has to be done. The adaptation of our overall way of feeling, knowing, judging and therefore operating is the permanent programme of the individual Christian and of the Church in general.

It is a question of continual self-reformation. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. Living in the world, today so meaningful and diffusive, so aggressive and tempting, so trained to conformism, even in its contestation, has a strong influence on our personality. The accepted norm, particularly in the new generations, that we must be "people of our times", obliges all of us to put up with the philosophies, that is to say, the current opinions, and to regulate our inner spirituality and our exterior conduct along the lines of the age, that is, of the world which disregards God and Christ. To travel along these lines may ensure a great speed, that is, great intensity of life, but all things considered, it will deprive us of our originality, our real and autonomous freedom. We are conformists. The Church, too, has her temptations of conformism. St. Paul warns us: "Do not be conformed to this world (understood as an environment the atmosphere of which is infected by ideas that are wrong or deprived of Christian light), but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12,2). Claim your freedom to live according to the charity that the Spirit has poured forth in Christian soul (cf. Rom. 5,5). Here we must remember: "Where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom" (II Cor. 3, 17); cf. Jn. 8, 36; Rom. 8,2).

THE VISION IS POSITIVE

To renew oneself inwardly, what work, what toil! Who is ready to modify his way of thinking? To purify his inner cell of his fantasies, ambitions and passions? Yet how often the Lord exhorts us to make this inner renewal! (cf. Mt. 15, 18-20). And the Council invites us to do so, individually, and invites the whole Church altogether; and this is what she is doing, with God's help: renewal, which is the same as purification.

But we should not like, ending our little talk, to leave you with a purely negative impression of the renewal that the Church needs. There is a whole positive vision that would deserve our attention, for example, the one opened up by the education of the modern Christian values of human activity, etc. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 31). To be able to see in every man an image of Christ, a brother to be respected, served and loved, is not this a fundamental and formidable criterion for the renewal that the Church and the world need? To see a secret of divine goodness in every sorrow, a coefficient of personal or collective progress in every event (cf. Rom. 8,20), is this not tantamount to opening a marvellous source of optimism, and therefore, of renewal for the old, weary and disappointed heart of man? To have rekindled eschatological hope in the mind of us mortals today, is this not to instil a meaning, an impulse of newness into present and future time?

"Ecce nova facio omnia", behold, I make all things new (Ap. 21, 5; cf. II Cor. 5, 17)! The Lord's word. The Church's need. The commitment of all of us!

With Our Apostolic Blessing.

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