

THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH AFTER THE SYNOD

At the close of the year 1969, the Christian Centre of Patrons and French business directors welcomed Cardinal Danielou who had accepted an invitation to participate in an after-dinner discussion on the topics the situation of the Church after the Synod.

The Church of today must be present in . . . contemporary civilization, she must not get lost in it—Cardinal Danielou

The period before the Synod was quite agitated and troubled. The events of last May were not without repercussions even within the Church. Last year we witnessed various movements of contestation, either by priests or laymen. The *Humanae Vitae* and the Profession of Faith of Pope Paul VI occasioned various reactions.

On the eve of the Synod, there was in the Church a situation of anxiety and expectation: people were asking themselves what the Synod would contribute in the face of this disturbance.

But the Synod proved to be a new starting point, not only with regard to the specific problems submitted to it, but also concerning the spirit it manifested, a spirit which appears as a sort of example for the entire Church.

In fact, on the eve of the Synod, people freely spoke of opposition between those who supported the democratization of the Church and those who were more faithful to its monarchical character. Moreover, one of these attitudes was supposed to be symbolized by Cardinal Suenens, and the other by Cardinal Danielou! All this was a sort of myth which seemed to presage spectacular confrontations.

Sense of Common Responsibility

From this point of view, those who were hoping for spectacular events were disappointed, for what actually happened in the Synod was something quite different. The Synod was a meeting of men endowed with the highest responsibility. It united around the Sovereign Pontiff the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and a certain number of other responsible persons appointed by the Holy Father. Above all there was a sense of common responsibility in the face of the immense tasks of the contemporary Church, and a very loyalty and sincerity in tackling the questions posed.

It is clear that the Church of today finds itself in the movement of contemporary civilization. She must be present in this movement but she must not get lost in it. Therein lies the whole problem.

An attitude of systematic opposition and rejection of all change would be a betrayal of the mission of the Church and of the representatives of Christ. On the other hand, to allow the very substance of the Faith to be eroded in our contemporaries would likewise be a betrayal.

What appeared to me essential in this Synod was the awareness of the common responsibility of the Sovereign Pontiff and the Bishops — an example, I believe, for all Christians. It was in the nature of an appeal to strive to overcome the partisan oppositions that paralyze the immense activity which the Church should exercise on the spiritual plane, and, in a general way, on the plane of civilization. These oppositions are a scandal to non-believers. Because of the very sense of these common and essential responsibilities, we are entering into a more constructive period.

The Synod must be the sign of a new step forward in this post-conciliar period which is distinguished by two factors: on the one hand, a constructive period, and on the other hand, unity between men and movements which can be legitimately different but which, nevertheless, must collaborate together in the accomplishment of a common task.

There were two categories of questions in the Synod: those about which we spoke and those about which we did not speak. The paradox is this: those about which we did not speak were the most important

ones in the final analysis, that is they were constantly present in the mind of the Synod members but as a sort of back-drop.

The Bishops frequently said that the problems tackled, problems of structure, were secondary in relation to the problems of life which were primary. Moreover, the Bishops put the Synod on its guard against the tendency — it was the Cardinal Archbishop of East Berlin who made the remark — a tendency all too frequent at the present time, of believing that the renewal of structures or the formation of new structures solves all the problems.

The Bishops pointed out that it was not sufficient to change structures. More fundamental problems existed, human problems, problems of attitudes which were more important than the problems of organization and structure properly so called.

What We Spoke About in the Synod

The essential theme of the Synod, therefore, was the organization of the collaboration between the Sovereign Pontiff and the whole Episcopate, the problem of primary and collegiality.

Two Concomitant, Fundamental Affirmations

First of all, there was a doctrinal problem. On this question the Bishops were agreed, namely, that we had to abide by what had been defined by Vatican Council I and II, that is to say, that there are two equally fundamental principles in the Church. On the one hand, there is the personal responsibility of the Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter, such as Vatican I had defined it and which was not questioned by any member of the Synod; on the other hand, Christ entrusted the responsibility of the Universal Church to the twelve Apostles united with Peter — this is the collegiality of Bishops, heirs of this responsibility.

There is a paradox here, namely, two supreme authorities, the Sovereign Pontiff personally, and all the Bishops united with the Sovereign Pontiff. But as often happens in Christian realities, we find ourselves in the presence of two affirmations which must be posed

at the same time and which cannot be limited or weakened in relation to each other.

I am thinking, for example, that when we say that Christ is true God and true Man, we have stated two truths whose close relationship or unity we do not clearly see, and which, nevertheless, must be simultaneously respected. Therefore, we have to admit that there are in the Church two fundamental principles as the summit of its structure. In this sense, it is important to say that any description of the Synod considered as a slight victory of collegiality over the authority of the primacy, or a slight victory of primacy over collegiality is a caricature.

A Church Adapted to its Times

Having said this, it is clear that the structure of the Church exists in a world beset with problems. It is also perfectly true to say that this structure has existed in a primitive Christian society, in a Byzantine and medieval *milieu*, in the 19th century, and exists in our own times. The Church of 1969 must be of its time. A collegiality — in the sense of a greater participation of everyone in all the responsibilities exercised today in all domains without exception — must also find a very legitimate expression within the Church, not in such a way as to change the structures, but in a manner that gives life to these structures in cooperation with contemporary man.

It is from this point of view that a greater participation of all the Bishops on the one hand, of all the priests on the other hand, and finally of all the laity in the responsibilities of the Church (without a confusion of competencies) constitutes precisely the authentic requirement of today. But one must not mix up the fundamental problems of structures — which are unalterable — and the manner in which these structures are exercised within a living human context where, in fact, they must take on different forms of expression.

This is the whole problem of the Church which is permanent in its essential elements and which, on the contrary, is contingent in its accidental elements. This is fundamental. We understand, then, that in the Church there is always the possibility of creating new situations whilst remaining faithful to the doctrine of the Church.

Having said this, once again, the Synod considered that a more thorough reflection on these questions was not its essential task. Its essential task was the practical implementation of collaboration between the Holy See on the one hand — that is to say, the Sovereign Pontiff and the various departments at his service, what we call the Roman Congregations, the Curia and, on the other hand, the Episcopal Conferences.

We are no longer involved here with theoretical problems. We are concerned with problems that are almost sordidly practical. That is to say, it is essentially a question of the mechanism of administration and, from this point of view, we can say that, well understood, the perspectives have come down from utopian principles into a world of concrete facts.

I myself was a *rapporteur* of one of the linguistic groups which were happily formed. Apart from the general assemblies, the Bishops met in linguistic groups: an Italian group, a Spanish group, two French groups, two English groups, and one German group.

Need to Modernize Administrative Structures

I was in one of the French groups with Cardinal Marty, some African Bishops, and a few Bishops of the Oriental Church. As *rapporteur* of this group, I was extremely interested when a recently appointed Cardinal presented the legitimate complaints which Bishops were making against the Roman Curia. I am in perfect agreement with this: the Roman Curia is a rather old-fashioned administration from many points of view, and is terribly in need of reform. It is essentially a question of the technical problem of organization. This is important, for if an organization does not function well, it can give rise to fundamental problems. We became aware of this especially during the Synod: the modernization of the methods of the Curia is particularly urgent and important.

From this point of view, what seems to me very important in this Synod was essentially the practical implementation of the decisions of Vatican Council II.

Concerning these questions of Church structure, it is evident that other problems have arisen at the present time, which affect not only the Universal Church, but also the National Churches. The re-adjustment of ecclesial structures for adaptation to modern sociological situations is fundamental — everywhere.

At all levels, there is a certain realism, a certain common sense which should prompt us to take into account the present situations of the contemporary world, so that the Church may give its attention to vital points, and not find itself cast aside on the fringe of this society about to be constructed.

What We did Not Speak About

Apart from matters about which we spoke, there were other matters about which we did not speak, but which, however, were in the background of the questions treated. In fact, several Cardinals and Bishops intervened to say: "In as much as the world is in great expectation, the Synod should not be concerned only with problems of interior structure and be indifferent to the dramatic problems the Church faces today in its confrontation with the contemporary world."

Here, I shall simply indicate a few guidelines for study. It is clear that the problems concerning the Faith, that is, those which constitute for a Christian the primary and essential matter, are confronted at the present time with a very serious contestation linked to the evolution of contemporary culture.

Confront the Contemporary World

The Faith of the Christian today must face up to everything in the contemporary world that represents the cultural changes of our times. I am thinking here of all the progress made in scientific research, and more so in human sciences — sociology, psychology, psycho-analysis — which affect the very core of man and intelligence much more intimately than the sciences of the physical and biological world.

Man has the impression that he is beginning to conquer the cosmic destinies to which he had been subjected. This gives him a sort of

boundless confidence in his capabilities: he wonders if it is not more worthy of him to solve his own problems himself rather than seek external help or help from God, from whom he thinks he can free himself.

All these problems arise from the nature of modern man's evolution. The obsession to construct human society causes spiritual problems, contemplation and prayer to be regarded as evasions, even by many Christians today.

The immense forces of contestation of Faith form part of the very structure in which we are immersed. We should face up to these forces calmly and without any inferiority complex, for we cannot but be concerned with a certain weakening of the fundamental elements of Faith, of the spiritual life, and in a general way, of the religious man.

It is evident that the Synod could not but have this problem in the background of its discussions, and that this problem still remains today.

What does a Christian believe today? The troubles of many people, the problems raised by the catechism and by the various new theological expressions show that this is a vital question. It is evident that this problem must be tackled in the same spirit as the one I have alluded to above, that is, we should be concerned to integrate all the values of today's civilization — all forms of progress in modern science have very positive factors — but at the same time we have to confront whatever is not positive and which constitutes, on the contrary, a perversion of intelligence and of mankind.

Moreover, there is a magnificent confrontation today with regard to all modern trends. But the Faith of Christians must be sufficiently implanted, sufficiently young and living, so that it can face these forces without allowing itself to be contaminated by them, and that it may, on the contrary, and as I hope, plant in this technical civilization the Cross of Christ, without which this civilization would not be Christian. Here you have an essential problem which could inspire our young people today. Let us not have an inferiority complex in matters that are not of the modern world. We have a deep love for this world, for

all its positive aspects, but we do not love it in its perversion, in its lack of all morality, in its loss of the sense of God. We wish to defend it against the poisons that could prevent it from fulfilling its purpose.

This is what was in the background of the preoccupations of the Council and the Synod. It is something essential.

...in a Spirit of Faith

And this leads us to the question: What is a Christian of 1969? Is a Christian one who goes to Mass or one who fights in the underground forces of South America?

Today we have images of the Christian that end up by presenting a fan of so many different expressions that we finally get lost in them. What finally runs the risk of becoming jeopardized is a certain unity of what is specifically the Christian spirit. What are the Beatitudes? What does it mean to be a poor man in 1969? What does hunger after justice mean?

Two points are fundamental. In the first place, we know how it is essential that the message of the Gospel be expressed through the forms of life of contemporary man. An industrial or a common labourer, as well as a contemplative or a priest must bring the Christian salt to the world, but how is one to express the spirit of the Gospel within the real context of situations lived? Christians must make researches on these points. In this sense, certain forms of temporal commitment, for example, appear as the expressions of authenticity and charity even today, that is, a concern for the temporal, as well as the spiritual welfare of one's neighbor.

But in the second place, it is evident that we sense here certain basic threats for the whole Christian life. A Christian who does not pray is no longer a Christian, no matter how much he dedicates himself to social or trade union movements.

At the present time, the Christian is inclined to reduce Christianity to a certain type of social or political commitment. This social or political engagement is a duty of the layman and a duty of the Christian

layman. But if it separated from prayer, then it will very quickly and inevitably cease to be genuinely Christian. When this happens, the Christian will no longer be distinguished from any other man of our times, for, after all, it is not necessary to be a Christian in order to devote oneself to one's neighbor. Only Christians can give a spiritual dimension to their activity, on condition that this activity be linked to Christ.

Therein lies the Christian's authentic contribution to the world of today. If Christians do not understand this, then the salt loses its flavour and deserves to be cast into the garbage can.

The Danger of Moral Looseness

Certain forms of crises are characterized by what I would call the Atlantic countries, that is, countries of long-standing Christianity. These countries are going through the crisis of an old organism that must be renewed. Countries recently converted to Christianity — I am thinking here especially of the extraordinary role played by the African Bishops in the Synod — can contribute a great deal in this domain. We do indeed run the risk of perishing from the looseness that characterizes our consumer society. The great problem is that we should be able to overcome this looseness, that is, to show that liberty does not necessarily entail degradation and loss, and that men can be free without abusing freedom.

I would hope that our western Christian world could demonstrate this and create a civilization capable of stimulating the enthusiasm of young people, for which enthusiasm they would willingly fight and if necessary — surrender their life.

In the spirit of liberty upon which our society rests, there is a principle which conforms more to the dignity of man than the principle of discipline imposed from without and which, therefore, crushes initiatives. But again, we should demonstrate that liberty is susceptible of creating a world worthy of stimulating enthusiasm.

(to be continued.)