

PAUL VI AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH*

*An Interview with H. E. Most Rev. Giovanni Benelli,
Substitute of the Secretariat of State*

On 30 June 1972, an interview was granted by H. E. Mons. Giovanni Benelli, Substitute of the Secretariat of State of His Holiness, to Father Francisco Farusi, S.J., Director of the Vatican Radio "News Bulletin". It was broadcast at 2:30 P.M. on 1 July 1972 in the "News Bulletin".

The text of the interview, which was recorded, is as follows.

At the beginning of the 10th year of Paul VI's Pontificate, interpreting the sentiments and desires of listeners to the Vatican Radio "News Bulletin", it occurred to me, Your Excellency, to ask you a few questions about the Pope's activity, since in your capacity as Substitute of the Secretariat of State you are one of the closest collaborators of the Holy Father.

1. First of all will you tell me, how the Pope is keeping?

The Pope is very well. The intense activity he carries out every day is the best proof, which can be verified by everyone, of his excellent state of health. He is 75 years old: nevertheless he subjects himself daily to an effort that is really superhuman. The public audiences, the great problems that must be thought out, matured, for weeks, months, sometimes years by himself personally, who is responsible for the solution. Then there are the daily problems, the files of official papers which he follows directly and which impose a really heavy, extenuating rate of work.

* *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 July 1972.

2. What are, in your opinion, the principles by which the Holy Father is inspired in the government of the Church?

The fundamental principle that directs and governs the whole activity of Paul VI is frankly pastoral principle. Paul VI will remain in history as the Pope of an eminently pastoral Council, Vatican II, completed and put into practice by him.

His essential concern is substantially that of the Council. How to renew the structures of the Church to bring them into line with modern requirements. How to keep the deposit of the faith intact, in a world that people wish to be desacralized.

And at the same time to make the Church intelligible to this world of ours in which she must live out her life.

Precisely because it is pastoral, his Pontificate is characterized by great perference, accompanied, of course, by the necessary firmness.

This fundamental principle is expressed in precise doctrinal and operative dimensions, such as the collegality on which he has structured the Curia, and based his policy of increasingly close collaboration between the Apostolic See and the local Churches.

This called for a tiring effort of adaptation by the Roman Curia which, let us admit, was accustomed by and large to act on its own. But this effort, we must admit also, has been highly advantageous.

Ecumenism. Paul VI opened dialogue with everyone. He is deeply aware that he is the centre and sacrament unity. He carries on ecumenical work with great openness and at the same time great realism.

Cult of man: new Christian humanism. More, perhaps, than any of his predecessors, Paul VI wishes the Church to be the servant of mankind; he wants the Church to be a school of humanism; he wishes her to commit herself thoroughly in all initiatives aimed at the real progress of man and of the community. Hence *Populorum Progressio*, hence *Octogesima adveniens*, hence the cordial support recently given also to UNCTAD, to the struggle against illiteracy, pollution, hunger, illness, etc. So Paul VI sets up the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et pax", the human advancement Committee, the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum".

Peace: Paul VI will be remembered as the Pope of peace. Peace among the peoples, but in justice! It was he who said that the new name of peace is development. Peace to the extent to which we succeed in shortening distances, inequalities between rich and poor peoples.

3. Since Your Excellency assumed the office of Substitute have these principles, to which Your Excellency has referred, undergone any variations?

I would not say there has been any evolution in the principles. I would say rather that there has evidently been a progress in the application of them. Let us take an example, that of collegiality.

I was nominated Substitute a month before the promulgation of *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*: the magna carta of the reform that the Pope has carried out in his Curia, to make it more in keeping with modern needs and the demands of the Council, particularly the demands for the collegial work of the Pope with the bishops. Since then progress has been constant; this progress — if we look back — evidently makes the first steps accomplished in the application of *Regimini* look quite out of date. This does not mean, however, that there has been any change in the fundamental principle which, in the pontificate of Paul VI, as said before, has always been and remains, the pastoral principle.

4. What are, in your opinion, the greatest concerns of the Holy Father, and what are the symptoms of hope and comfort that he finds in the life of the Church and in the world?

The question is a very vast one. Let us try to give a few brief indications.

The greatest concerns of the Pope. I would say, in the first place, to strengthen his brothers in the faith. At this moment when doubt has penetrated everywhere, even in the Church, the Pope's greatest concern is to strengthen the faith. It is to keep the deposit of faith intact, protecting it from every threat. He himself said so yesterday in St. Peter's and also the Wednesday addresses clearly manifest this fundamental concern to his.

Another concern, that of unity. How to prevent the providential decentralization desired by the Council from harming the unity of the Church and her cohesion.

Another concern: how to make himself understood by the new generations, by the young; how to make the message of the Church intelligible to the society of technology, how to succeed in getting this people of ours, today, to participate really in the ecclesial community in all its dimensions.

Another concern: the torment of this society which the Church must serve. Its uncertainties, its contradictions, its violence, its deep uneasiness, in the quest, perhaps, for new ways.

Then you asked what are the symptoms of hope. Here, too, there are a great many. We will just mention some, by way of example.

I would say the spiritual wealth of the new generations, so sincere, authentic and in a certain sense mature.

The strength of the faith of the vast majority of priests, religious and faithful. We often let ourselves be impressed by certain ambiguous or blameworthy manifestations, and we forget that the main body is healthy and vital.

I would say, further, the liturgical reform, which permits a wider participation of the faithful in the sacramental life of the Church. Let us think for a moment. Let us think of the effects of the abundance of the sacramental grace, which by virtue of the reform is present in the community today.

Then, too, the fact that the laity have become aware of their responsibility for the Church. This is really a great strength, a great guarantee for the future.

The increasingly close and fruitful collaboration between the local Churches and Rome, between the Pope and the Bishops, which is a direct effect of the application of the Council.

Again, the increasingly keen, though often still vague, expectation of the message of the Church that exists everywhere; a sign of this is the growing interest in the things of the spirit, in all circles.

But never so much as today, perhaps — this my conviction — has the Church, this Church of ours, so restless and meeting with such opposition, been so much alive, vital and vigorous. She is growing in every direction, in the impulse to works, both missionary and social, on the plane of work for peace as in theological research, the updating of the structures and the development of ecumenical work, etc.

The Pope, who more or better than anyone else has a view of the whole, cannot but rejoice and give thanks to God.

5. Now, with your permission, another little question, little as regards formulation, but perhaps rich in content. What do you think of the recurring rumours of Paul VI's resignation?

I will not repeat here the various reasons why the Pope considers it is his definite duty to remain at his post as "Servus servorum Dei", even after reaching the age of 75.

The Pope has never given anyone any reason for thinking he would resign at 75. On the contrary, he has expressly declared he will not do so. Strangely enough, however, these rumours are still going round. I don't know how to interpret this insistence. I know only one thing that there has never been any basis for these rumours, for less now, after the Pope has spoken.

Thank you, Your Excellency, for the illuminating answers, and allow me to request you to convey to the Pope the sentiments of filial devotion and of unconditional loyalty of all employees of the Vatican Radio and of all its listeners.