

THE HOLY FATHER

The Freedom-Authority Conflict



"WHAT'S THE NAME OF THIS CHURCH THAT YOU FOUNDED IN LOS ANGELES?"

Following is the text of a talk on "Freedom" Pope Paul VI gave at a recent general audience:

Beloved sons and daughters! As everyone knows, a great deal is being said these days about freedom. This word comes up whenever anyone discusses man, his nature, his history, his activity, his rights and his development.

Man is a being undergoing growth, movement, a being in the making; freedom is necessary to him. He is self-determined; and we call freedom the power of man's will to act without either interior or exterior compulsion.

It has been observed that this free will is so peculiar to man as to represent his specific character, to establish his initial claim to personal dignity, and to confer upon him the characteristic mark of his likeness to God.

People generally speak about freedom wherever they see manifested the human capacity to operate: freedom of thought, freedom of action, freedom of word, freedom of choice, etc., searching for the inner roots: psychological freedom and moral freedom, and describing the external specifications: juridical freedom, economic freedom, political freedom, religious freedom, artistic freedom and so forth.

We will limit ourselves to reminding you that the Catholic Church has always upheld the doctrine of human freedom and has built its great moral and religious edifice on it. It is impossible to be true Catholics without acknowledging this supreme prerogative of man.

Man's freedom is not abrogated by original sin, which of course has produced great disorder in the exercise of the human faculties; nor by the exercise of thought which, discovering truth, remains bound to it; nor by the intervention of the mysterious aid in our action, which is called Grace, nor by divine action in the natural world, which we call Providence.

Freedom needs education and formation. This need is so profound where a genuine development of the spirit and of human activity is concerned, and is so important to social life, that history documents for us how much has been done, rightly or wrongly, to limit, restrain and to deny the use of freedom.

This has resulted in the well known and, we might say, perennial conflict between the use of freedom and the exercise of authority.

We must remove from our minds certain false concepts of freedom. For example: the thought which confuses freedom with indifference, with laziness, with inertia of the mind; with freedom-to-do nothing; with a selfish lethargy of the energies of life and with lack of concern for the basic imperative which gives it meaning and value: duty.

We are given freedom, in order that we may do our duty with proper virtue.

Another mistaken concept, and unfortunately one quite widespread, is

that which confuses freedom guided by reason and consisting in self-determination of the will, with acquiescence in the sentimental or animal instincts which also exist in man.

Modern trends in revolutionary thought uphold and spread this false concept, which entices man to lose his true freedom, to become a slave to his passions and to his moral weaknesses: as the Lord teaches us, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8, 34).

This is a classic and ever present phenomenon, and today more than ever, in modern emancipation from external law and from moral law.

Another fashionable distortion of freedom is that which makes freedom consist in willfully adopting, a priori, an attitude of conflict with the existing order, or else with the opinion of others. In this way, freedom finds its real expression in contention, whether it be reasonable or not.

Furthermore, we must guard ourselves against the folly which regards

it as personal freedom to violate the freedom of others.

Conflicts of all sorts have arisen, and arise every day, because of the evil inclination of this unbridled freedom: we would prefer to call it license, arrogance, bad manners, rudeness, but not freedom.

Let us, with Christian insight, meditate on current expressions referring to freedom: autonomy, election, choice, revolution, despotism, etc., and let us try to give them the sense Christian thinking gives them, recalled to us by the council, with many references.

Here for example: "Never before today has man been so keenly aware of freedom, yet at the same time, new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. The modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest. Before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery." (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world — Nos. 4 and 9).

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

On Preaching the Word of God

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Thanks to the GI bill, I took some courses at Assumption College, Windsor, Ontario, in 1950-1951.

Father John Murphy, CSB, first president of our St. John Fisher College, was dean of studies. He invited me to teach the senior Religion classes.

The students were good young men, and cheerful. One week I assigned a paper to be developed from: "If I were pastor of my parish, I would make the following improvements." Almost every one of the 21 students wrote: "I would make the sermons more interesting."

The following week I gave the assignment: "Write what you consider a good sermon." It was a mind-opener to all the students. Such drive! Such riches!

Actually no one could reasonably expect much from the students. Their knowledge of scripture and dogmatic and moral theology was small. They had no training in giving sermons. They had no experience in presenting the Word. Given time and training most of them would have done well. In fact, four of the students were Basilian seminarians who today are preaching that Word effectively.

On Thursday, May 22, Bishop Sheen gave the diocesan priests pointers on homilies for today. (A homily is defined by Webster as "a sermon", or a "tedious exhortation on some moral

point." The liturgy intends it to mean an exposition and application of the Sacred Scriptures, especially from the Mass of the day.)

Among the bishop's points were these:

The general congregation today is more learned than the congregation even of a generation ago; the linear age (printed word) has given way to a sensate age, in which communications are more sensate than intellectual. Our appreciations are largely through the eyes and ears from TV, radio, comics and commercials.

We live in an anti-intellectual age. Hence our preaching must be presented existentially; i.e., from our own experience and the experiences of our people. Biblical characters relate to our own personal experiences.

We must find a point which is common to the whole congregation, and nothing is more common to all than our sense of guilt. So said Bishop Sheen.

Do not expect from your priests the gifts of this master-preacher and teacher. But you can hope from us, not our personal opinions on politics or unproved personal theories, but the orthodox Word of God, simply developed and personally applicable.

It seems not to have occurred to our revolutionaries that our Lord Himself comprehended the tyranny

of the Roman Empire, the injustices in the tax structure, the presence of Roman and Jewish soldiers in Palestine, the legalism of the Pharisees, the method was far from picketing Pilate or teaching civil disobedience. He did not burn down the Rabbinical schools. He did not hold a sit-in against the presence of Roman mercenaries.

Cardinal John Wright, in an address at Rome a few weeks ago, said: "The Church in our day often seems 'open' or 'forward looking' in facing social problems. Yet in her teaching 'she often seems 'cautious' or 'conservative' in matters of faith and morals."

The contrast recalls a parallel in St. Paul. No one can fail to note the openness of St. Paul to all the world of the Gentiles of his time, to their culture and to the need of change in the old order to meet the needs of the new.

And yet "St. Paul was intransigent in his fidelity to the revelation made to the prophets and, above all, in and through Jesus Christ." (L'Osservatore Romano, May 22, English edition, p. 9)

In our preaching God's revelation, it is good to recall G. K. Chesterton's comment: "The purpose of the open mind is to close it on something solid." This is the "intransigent fidelity to divine revelation" as taught by Christ in and through the Church.

COMMENTARY

Courier-Journal — Friday, May 30, 1969 17

Cardinal Suenens Views Problems of Church

Paris — (RNS) — Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, Primate of Belgium, said here that the present crisis in the Roman Catholic Church is due to the fact that Church laws and structures are behind the times.

The "co-responsibility" of bishops and laity with the Pope, an idea which emerged from the Second Vatican Council, must be made a practical reality, he said in an interview.

The interview, published only a few weeks before a symposium of European bishops slated in Switzerland, called for sweeping reforms in Church thinking and structures to end the "present tension between the Roman 'center' of the Church and the 'periphery'."

Many people, "all over the world," are criticizing the present ecclesiastical structures "precisely because they love the Church," Cardinal Suenens noted.

"It is not the authority of the Pope which is in doubt among faithful sons of the Church," he said, "but the system which holds him prisoner and involves him in the smallest decisions made by the Roman congregations, whether or not he has actually signed a given decree."

"What is wanted is to liberate everyone, even the Holy Father himself, from the system — which has been the subject of complaint for several centuries, although we have not succeeded in really loosening its grip or reshaping it. For while Popes come and go, the Curia remains."

"I believe that the basic problem dividing us, consciously or otherwise, is a problem of theology, a different initial vision of the Church, particularly regarding its necessary unity," he said.

The extreme centralization of Church administration, Cardinal Suenens said, blocks local bishops in their efforts to introduce reforms and to make the Church's approach to particular problems more flexible or experimental.

The centralist, bureaucratic and static tendency is characterized by "men who are more sensitive to established order and the past than the demands of future, who are closer to Vatican I than to the year 2,000, who are more anxious to repress abuses than to understand and to promote the new values and aspirations in the Church and the world today," Cardinal Suenens said.

"They are inclined, even if they deny it, to consider the local Churches as administrative departments, the bishops as mere delegates and executors of the central power, the decentralization of power as a dangerous prelude to some latent schism," he charged.

Regarding the bishops, Cardinal Suenens said that they also must work themselves out of "a certain paternalistic isolation." The bishop must accept a new mode of exercising authority by employing more democratic methods "which are expressly wanted by the Council."

"Church and the City" by Father P. David Finks, does not appear in this week's edition. Tied up in preparation for his move to Washington, D.C. and his new position with the U.S. Bishops Conference, Father Finks also is preparing a farewell for next week's Courier Journal.

Tension between the Roman Curia and the local Churches can only increase if the former "jealously grasps its powers and slows down the freedom of action of those responsible in domains that they are more qualified to understand," said the Belgian Primate.

He predicted that there will be drastic changes in the relationship between bishops and laity, as bishops continue to gain new experience in the practice of dialogue. The same openness to dialogue must be introduced into the Curia, he said. "It must not be presented to the bishops as having the sole monopoly of solving problems on the spot."

At present, he said, "if any group of bishops decides to confer together, they are seen as conspirators."

"Nothing can be achieved," Cardinal Suenens insisted, "if every honest criticism, every desire to question, is seen as arising out of pride or ill will. Real truthfulness, in full deference but without servility, remains an essential condition of all collaboration in renewal."

A LAYMAN'S VIEW

Due Process Procedure Urged

At its first meeting, the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen adopted the following resolution:

"Be it resolved that this association ask our bishop to exercise his leadership by immediately establishing such procedures . . . which will safeguard the God-given rights and freedoms of all priests, and will secure for them accepted standards of due process in their relationships with their superiors."

Priest associations throughout the country have recently called for due process within the church. Associations of laymen are taking up the call. Clergy, whose very professional existence is directly dependent upon decisions made by their superiors, have an acute need for the protections of due process. Lay people, as subjects of church authority, also have a personal interest in the subject.

Due process is a concept with ancient antecedents in Anglo-American law. Applied by the Magna Carta to dealings between the king and his nobles, the idea was gradually extended to cover all dealings between the citizen and authority.

Although it is an essential element of democracy, it was found in law long before modern democracy evolved from monarchical institutions. It was consistent with the theory of divine right of kings, and, in fact, it may have been an even more useful concept under that philosophy of government than under democracy.

Due process, whether self-imposed by those in authority, or imposed upon them by the governed, is an essential element for the humane exercise of authority, and the more limited the number of persons who hold authority, the more necessary is the protection offered by the concept.

Due process is concerned with the processes by which justice is achieved, or at least approximated. It is procedural. It is generally agreed that the idea includes the right to a fair hearing before an impartial tribunal, with reasonable notice of specific charges, the right to be heard and confront one's accusers, and the avoidance of secrecy. In professional matters, one must be judged by his peers. Appeal from arbitrary decision should be available.

The idea of due process arises out of considerations of justice, rather than charity. The loving exercise of authority is not seen as requiring the protection of due process. When viewed in the abstract, this is at least arguable, for authority always exercised out of perfect love will theoretically result in justice. But authority is held and exercised by humans, and neither absolute charity nor justice will be attained by mere humans in this world.

Even the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is, after all, also present to our civil authorities, is no substitute for the presence of safeguards and restraints in the exercise of authority.

Due process procedures are as important to those holding authority as it is to those subject to it. They help assure the attainment of justice, and they are a test of the love with which authority should be exercised within the Christian family. Those holding authority ought to be eager to impose upon themselves the salutary restraints of due process for the good of their own humanity.

The currently pending revision of Canon Law gives some sense of urgency to a discussion of the subject. But most of the occasions when due process will be used will not involve, for the majority of Christians, matters between them and Rome. Relations of priest and laymen with their bishops or their pastors are much more significant.

The voluntary adoption of due process procedures within a diocese is a much more immediate need, and is a more readily attainable goal. It will take no more than a gesture of love by our Bishop to initiate such procedures within the diocese. A joint committee of the Priests' and Laymen's associations could develop a specific set of procedures appropriate to our diocese.

They could be adopted most easily now, when matters are calm, and a crisis atmosphere does not prevail here. Once again, this diocese can be a leader in the continuing process of church reform.

—Herbert J. Walz, Rochester.



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