

INDIVIDUAL FAITH AND COLLECTIVE FAITH

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A priest friend of mine, an eminent theologian who shall be nameless, told me on his return from Poland, that what he feared concerning the faith of that country was the equation of faith with national resistance.

In Poland, faith is now synonymous with resistance to the Russian enemy. What will happen whenever Russia no longer controls the country?¹ Shall we then witness, this priest said to me, a collapse of the faith such as we find at present in Quebec, where there was also a false equation: 'Faith = resistance to the English Protestant ascendancy'² Since the new Canadian government (of English Protestant origin) adopted a more flexible and understanding attitude towards the French Canadians, and since they realized that it would be difficult for them to maintain their position if they formed an independent government, we have seen a collapse of faith among Catholics.³

This made me reflect. I think that we ought to be chary of a certain kind of 'tribal' Catholicism which is not strong enough to persevere when external circumstances change merely in the direction of a liberalism lacking any really Christian political framework.

I have often found that good boys and girls from Catholic provinces like Brittany, ceased very quickly to practise their religion and lost the Faith when they were separated from their usual surroundings, and were no longer kept in control by the parish priest. Their faith could not withstand the disorientation and the pagan atmosphere.

WHY CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS ARE NECESSARY

Men are spiritually weak. This is why they revert so readily to paganism when shrewd governments, without persecuting them, create material conditions which help to promote their concupiscence and cease to remind them of the truths necessary for their salvation.

Pope Pius XII, who was a great Doctor of the Church, wrote on 1st June, 1941 (for the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*):

'Upon the form given to society, whether in harmony with divine law or not, depends and proceeds the good on ruin of souls, that is, whether men, who are all called to be invigorated by the grace of Christ, imbibe, amidst the contingent events of this world, the salutary, vivifying air of truth and moral virtue, or conversely, the tainted and often deadly germ of error and depravity.'

Cardinal Pie expressed the same thought in different terms when he declared:

¹ There may yet occur events in the world which will rid Central Europe of Soviet enslavement.

² In Ireland this equation appears to have been replaced with another; *Faith = obstacle to Irish Unity*. Hence the clamour of Irish politicians and political parties, north and south, for the removal, from the constitution, of principles which are distinctly Catholic. Witness also the organised political opposition to constitutional bans on abortion and divorce. Extreme nationalists are motivated not by a desire for a United Catholic Ireland but rather for a secular socialist Ireland. (Editor)

³ We may also wonder what will become of the faith of certain traditionalists whenever the crisis in the Church is over; for obstacles exist there too.

' Evil policy is simply the principles of an evil philosophy endowed with the force of public law.'

Consequently, it is essential that the State (the temporal sword) should facilitate the mission of the Church (the spiritual sword) in public life, and see to it that true philosophy, that which is based upon Revelation and the Decalogue, becomes a reality, by being given the force of law.

In a Christian civilisation, the two powers have the same objective, although they operate in different fields. The goal is man's welfare - above all, his eternal welfare, but also the good of the human race:

'The unique source of public authority is God, for God alone is the true, sovereign Master of things. All things whatsoever must of necessity be subject and obedient to Him, so that whoever has the right to command holds this right from God alone, the supreme Head of all. All power comes from God.' (Immortale Dei, 1st November, 1885)

By the fact that He is God, Jesus Christ possesses the two swords: the spiritual, which He entrusted to Peter, and the temporal, which He entrusted to kings or to those who hold political power.

The spiritual sword takes precedence over the temporal. Their union, despite certain conflicts, was maintained in our country for thirteen centuries, until the French Revolution. This is what Pope Pius XII recalled in his address to the first World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, in October 1951.

'Nor would it be right,' he declared, 'to overlook the close union which, until the French Revolution, brought into a mutual relationship the Catholic world the two authorities established by God - the Church and the State not to fail to recognize the beneficial influence of that union. The intimacy of their relationships...created as it were, a general, Christian atmosphere which rendered unnecessary much of the labour which priests and laity have to undertake today, in order that the Faith may be safeguarded and esteemed.'

DECHRISTIANISED SOCIETY

The Revolution destroyed the Christian state, Christian society, the Christian family and Christian teaching.

Cardinal Pie wrote:

'The Revolution is dechristianised society, it is Christ thrust back into the recesses of the individual conscience, banished from the whole of public and social life; banished from the State, which no longer seeks in His authority the consecration of its own; banished from the laws, for which His law is no longer the supreme rule; banished from the family which is formed in isolation from His blessing; banished from the school, where His teaching is no longer the life and soul of education; banished from science where the only homage He now receives is a sort of neutrality, no less harmful than contradiction; banished from everywhere, except perhaps a corner of the soul, where he is permitted a tiny abode.'

The Revolution is the Christian nation de-baptised, repudiating its traditional, historic faith and seeking to rebuild itself in isolation from the Gospel on the basis of pure reason, converted into the sole source of law and the sole rule of duty. A society with no other guide than the natural light of the intellect, separated from Revelation, and no other object than the welfare of man in this world, disregarding his higher, divine ends – that of the fundamental essence, is the doctrine of the

*Revolution*⁴

But - Cardinal Pie states elsewhere⁵:

'To my knowledge, the idea of the Christian state, the Christian price and the Christian law, has never been called into question until recent times, nor has any Catholic school ever seen its destruction as a sign of progress and of the amelioration of human society.'

A Christian society will have to be rebuilt one day. The Virgin said at La Salette that this would be before the end of the world, when the present crisis in the Church has ended. People will then have to revert to the doctrine of the two swords, as it is called, and put into effect in their institutions and laws all that pertains to the social kingship of Our Lord. I am profoundly convinced that this is an essential doctrine.

OUR OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that our salvation is an individual matter; that Church and State create conditions or a climate which favour it, but do not determine it. Each of us retains his freewill, remaining free to accept or reject God's grace.

In the spiritual, as in the temporal field, we are individuals, even if we belong to Our Lord's Mystical Body or to societies. Our spiritual journey and our adherence to grace, whether aided or hindered by external circumstances, nevertheless remain a personal matter between God and ourselves. This is the most secret and intimate side of the human person, because it concerns the relationship between our soul and Him who created it. There can be no profound faith without interior life.

There is no collective salvation, even if, in particular historical circumstances, the Faith appears as a collective, national resistance to the encroachments and pretensions of the Devil.

I am always conscious of the fact that, remote in their convent, certain nuns with no intellectual gifts and often very ignorant, attain a high degree of sanctity. This proves that sanctity must be distinguished from the religious emotions of the multitude, and from the combat that we, in the world, wage for the triumph of the Faith.

Those nuns, deeply united to God, achieve more through their prayers than we achieve by our articles, group demonstrations and conflicts against the adversaries of God and of His Church. Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, who was intelligent, has shown us what was obtained by the '*Little Way*.'

They are messengers of love, and love surpasses action. They are Mary and we are Martha (if it can be supposed that we possess the virtues of Martha). They are not only necessary, but indispensable to the fulfilment of God's plan.

Living in community, monks and nuns support one another, spiritually, by praying together and, materially, by working together; but their spiritual life, protected by the role of silence, grows in their souls individually. Each does not attain the same height, that is, the same degree of contemplation and union with God.

As for us, laymen, we have to move forward most often here below in a state of dryness, in the

⁴ Text quoted on page 224 of '*Pour qu'Il regne*.' Jean Ousset.

⁵ '*Oeuvres*,' vol V, pp. 179-180.

night of the Faith (illuminated by a few beams of light), striving to meditate and pray, for meditation and prayer strengthen faith. God sometimes gives higher graces, such as contemplation and unitive graces, to some of us. Mystical theology teaches that contemplation is the normal conclusion of a life of fidelity to God, a '*crowning grace*' of the spirit of faith and prayer, united to the generous accomplishment of the will of God. The world in which we live, with its duties, its cares and unceasing vexations, does not, indeed, make it easier.

The main thing for us is to remain faithful, like the good servant in the Gospel, keeping the Faith and not putting it '*under the bushel*.'

Later, when we have completed our course and when the curtain which separates us from the Kingdom has been torn apart, we shall have eternity in front of us for contemplation.

It is extremely regrettable that the clergy of today (at least, the official clergy) no longer bother to lead the faithful along the way of prayer, meditation and, if possible, contemplation. Our need and hunger for the spiritual life is so great.

Yet they apparently do not care a straw for it, preoccupied as they now are with social injustice, world hunger, the duties that we have towards emigrants and goodness knows what else: a concern which, moreover, lies most often within the sphere of civil authority.⁶

I wonder whether, even if they so wanted, these clerics would still be capable of giving us spiritual guidance in accordance with Tradition, they who scarcely ever distinguish between supernatural and natural life, between the theological virtue of charity and the humanitarian quality of benevolence. In this kingdom of the blind where the one-eyed are kings, we are obliged to seek refuge with good priests who have remained true to the Faith and Catholic Tradition, and in abbeys which have retained the rule of their holy founder.

When a train jumps the rails, it seldom stops on the ballast. We may wonder to what abyss this evil clergy will bring Holy Church, if God does not intervene.

The so-called theology of liberation gives us a glimpse of the harmfulness of the new doctrines.

THERE IS NO INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE FAITH

It must, of course, be the same faith. In Nicaragua, where a certain church, with the support of a revolutionary government, is developing a 'liberating' theology which owes more to Marx than to Christ, there can be no accord between the 'religious' manifestations of the crowd and the true faith which is expressed in the intimacy of the heart.

Conversely, when religious manifestations are an expression of true faith, each Christian can only be comforted by the beautiful processions, hymns and liturgy which express a common faith.

Stendhal, in '*Le Rouge et le Noir*,' ch. 18, entitled '*Un roi à Verrières*,' portrays the monarch's reception by the local clergy and the young bishop of Agde. He writes:

After the bishop's address and the King's reply, His Majesty took his place beneath the canopy;

⁶ These clerics would be furious if the civil power likewise encroached on their domain, by complaining, for example that they no longer heard confessions etc.

then knelt down with great devotion upon a hassock near the altar....There followed a Te Deum, clouds of incense and endless rounds of musketry and artillery; the peasants were delirious with joy and piety....'

And he concluded:

'Such a day undoes the work of a hundred numbers of Jacobin newspapers.'

All this, however, is only the stage-setting, useful for the edification of the multitude, consoling for the Christian people but not essential to those who have a deep, spiritual life.

We must know how to offer public worship to God, since He is King of kings; but what He asks each of us is that He should be loved primarily for His own glory and in order that His own will may be accomplished'.⁷

When our attachment is disinterested, when we seek solely the Kingdom of God and His justice (justification by grace), He gives us much more than we asked because He knows our needs. This is why the prayer of the saints is so efficacious.

Conversely, when the love that we bear Him is not completely disinterested, when He is not the centre of our desires and preoccupations, because we identify Him with the attainment of a favour or an objective (whether it be national or social liberation), God has little patience with this obstacle, because He wants to be loved for His own sake. He is a jealous, exclusive God.

If the objective is gained, our faith, which was not perfectly pure, since it was interested, is in danger of disintegrating, of melting away, as it was only an alloy. This is why it is often necessary for the salvation of our souls that God should refuse us the favour we had asked of Him.

I do not question the necessity of beautiful processions, hymns and liturgical ceremonies which fortify the Christian people and delight God, but they are useful only if they promote that mysterious motion of our souls which, secretly, emit this cry of love: *'Father! Thou who art my Lord and my God.'*

⁷ These are the first petitions set out in the *Pater Noster*.