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THE ANGELUS ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTICLE REPRINT

Let your speech be “Yes, yes: no, no”; whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37) • November 2010

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I BELIEVE IN “ONE” CHURCH: Reflections on the Notion of Ecclesial Communion

Words to express the idea of a “Christian community” in “less than full communion” with the Church have definitively entered the Church’s vocabulary. Numerous ecumenical endeavors have been justified by this concept. Yet in light of traditional doctrine this expression appears to us incompatible with the very nature of the Church.

Among the most significant elements introduced in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council is the “analogical” notion of communion with the Church, which admits of union with the Catholic Church in varying degrees or different levels. Thus there can be full communion and less than full communion, which, if we draw from this principle its logical consequences, can be variously qualified: imperfect communion, “marginal” communion, growing communion, virtually existing communion, and so on.

Far from being of merely academic interest, this element is in reality indispensable for assuring the ecumenical movement’s continuation, especially for giving an ecclesiological basis to the convergences upon which it is founded and seeks to advance. We are convinced that this notion constitutes the doctrinal element most necessary to securing this end. Indeed, every aspect of Christianity to be found in the *false churches* (this definition is obviously incompatible with the new ecclesiology) is presented as an appeal to the unity which the Catholic Church possesses in full. In this sense, these Christian elements are held to be already at work and positively taking shape as the foundation of a certain unity: communion is already present even if it is not yet full; it is unfull communion, but communion nevertheless.

For example, from this perspective, the sacrament of baptism administered in Lutheran churches or

faith in Christ the Savior, being material elements in common with Catholicism, would establish a certain unity in the name of which prayer in common might be offered or ecumenical gatherings organized. It should be noted in passing that in this analysis, there is no place for conversion, but only a supposed common convergence¹ which must be stimulated in order to rebuild the original Unity that was destroyed by the sin of all. It should also be noted, somewhat ironically, that the “Lefebvrists” themselves would be in the state of *unfull* communion with the Church, but in communion nevertheless.

In fact, “Lefebvrists” as well as all other Catholics find themselves constrained to refuse the usage of this notion so as to be faithful to the Church’s unchanging Tradition. Communion with the Catholic Church is by nature a univocal reality that does not admit gradation: one is either in communion or one is not.

The New Ecclesiology

Before coming to the heart of our considerations, it is useful to enlarge upon the present direction of ecclesiology on this crucial point. It should be remembered that the analysis of the phenomenon of divisions among Christians in contemporary theology is based on purely historicist and naturalist criteria. The separations are allegedly the fruit of jealousies, disputes, caprices, and sins, of which all Christians have been guilty over the centuries. Consequently, the ecumenical movement seeks to recompose Unity by starting from a genuine purification of memory so as to efface the “stains” of sin still remaining. The Catholic Church is also in some way stained by this sin like the others: this first element provides a key to understanding the scandalous *mea culpas* we have witnessed in recent years in which the institution of the Church is implicated.

Needless to say, this understanding of the question is unacceptable, especially as it presupposes a notion of unity that is not Catholic. The sin against Unity is a sin against the Catholic Church, and it is inadmissible that the Church should be more or less directly put in the dock with the accused while she is the sole victim of all the schisms and all the divisions between Christians known to history. The real sin that should be purified for the sake of Christian Unity is called “schism,” and by definition it involves a sin the Church cannot commit,² nor those who remain members since, when this sin is committed, separation from the Church occurs. It is the sin of separation of the “separated brethren,” and necessarily it can only be theirs.³

Let us not forget that the ecumenical movement arose and developed in Protestant circles long before the Council. The acceptance of the rules of the game after the Council presupposes an intolerable contempt for the Church of the past, found guilty in some way, and for the generous labors of a long line of popes and saints who expended themselves in calling the “separated brethren” back to the one sheepfold by conversion to Catholicism.

Let us note also that in this context, the classic notion of “schism” loses in practice its traditional significance; the sin against the Unity of the Church becomes instead the sin of those who refuse ecumenism and the kind of recomposition it proposes: but this recomposition tends toward an absurd form of unity which cannot be proposed to Catholic consciences. The principle that seeks this kind of recomposed unity is absolutely indefensible. On the contrary, everything should be done to welcome the “separated brethren” within the Unity which the Church never lost and will never lose.

The Church Is the Mystical Body of Christ

Above all, we should not forget that the Church is essentially a supernatural society in which the human and the divine are joined and harmonized. This presupposes a different set of criteria for our subject than would commonly be employed in judging a purely natural society. To circumscribe the problem adequately, we must focus our attention on the fact that, throughout history, the Church is the continuation of the work of the Incarnation, without which it would be unthinkable. Since the Word assumed a human nature and perfectly united in His Person two natures, human and divine, the prolongation of this work in time is effected in the institution He founded. It alone exclusively represents Him and in which, and only in which, men can find all the supernatural elements needful for their sanctification and their incorporation in Christ Himself, of whose Mystical Body they become members by baptism. Once incorporated in Christ, men, while remaining men, are cloaked with grace and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, that is to say, purely supernatural realities: it is in this sense that the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation in history.

We should especially note that the union of two natures in the Person of the Word represents the most unique, inseparable and indivisible unity possible, and this for a specific reason. The person is “unrepeatable,” to employ a term dear to modern philosophy. This means that no unity can exist that is more *one* than that of a person’s, for the apogee of unity is attained in the person. This oneness is so absolute that every person represents a unique

reality, perfect and complete. If in creation multiple cats or horses can exist, there can be but one Julius Caesar or one Robert Bellarmine: the person is an unrepeatable and incommunicable *unicum*. Consequently, a person who was divisible into his essential parts (soul and body), or who (*reductio ad absurdum*) was repeatable, as if there could be multiple Julius Caesars, would simply cease to be a person.

But if this is true of the human person, is it not truer still of a divine person and, by analogy, of His Mystical Body, which continues His mission through the ages?⁴ Consequently and analogously, the members of the Body of which the Head is our Lord cannot be partially attached to it: either they are an integral part of the body, or else they are no longer part of the body; either the members are incorporated in the perfect Mystical Body, or else they cannot exist elsewhere, as if there could be imperfectly attached members.

We observe this in reality: there is no intermediary state for a member of the body in which it both belongs and does not belong to our body. This fact has to be granted absolutely under pain of losing or diminishing the absolute and intrinsic perfection of the Church which is called Unity: Communion with the Church is one because if the Church's Unity could subsist in imperfect modes, it would simply cease to be Unity. For what is by essence and by definition perfect—and hence one and absolute—would no longer subsist, that is, would cease to exist, once it lacked the unique and irreplaceable perfection that specifies and characterizes it. In this case, the thing would become something else with other characteristics.⁵

Historical Precedents

The contemporary ecclesiology under discussion is decidedly new. Not new, however, is the root of the underlying error, which coincided with the greatest Christological controversy ever known in history. Indeed, from the first centuries of the Christian era, the devil sought to attack the fundamental dogma which is the expression of the fundamental truth by which he was vanquished: the Incarnation, that is to say, the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Word. This historical duel, which underwent numerous variations, reached its height in the debate between St. Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius in the fifth century.

We shouldn't be surprised that unity, as a unique and certain prerogative of the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of the Incarnate Word, should today be the dogma most attacked and tarnished by the new ecclesiological notions. As in the fifth century

unity was attacked in the Person of the Word, so today it is attacked in His Church.

Conversion Is Not a Matter of Math

Before going further, we should specify that our reflections bear upon non-Catholic Christian *groups* possessing a certain ecclesiality or at least a legitimate statute as a constituted community. Staying therefore on a strictly ecclesial level, we shall not entertain considerations linked to the personal paths of conversion which can happen in individuals belonging to these communities.⁶ Moreover, we would like to clarify a point to which we shall return later: it concerns the numerous elements held in common by Catholicism and the different Christian confessions. It is undeniable, for example, that the Church has much in common with the Orthodox, and consequently an unfull but important ecclesial communion seems undeniable.⁷ In reply, it should first be pointed out that this communion is founded solely upon the presence of elements in common considered *materially*; we intend to focus on the *formal* value of these elements in relation to the Church and its particular nature.

The full significance of this distinction can be shown by a concrete example: common experience testifies that it is not at all certain that people materially possessing many elements in common with the Catholic Church will convert more easily or rapidly than those who do not. For example, a non-Christian might convert more easily than an Orthodox even though the latter certainly has many more things "in common" with the Church. The contrary can even be affirmed: those who have little or nothing in common with the Church can convert more readily than those who in theory share almost everything with Catholicism but who have the preconceived hostility toward the Church which affects those stained with the sin of schism. History is there to confirm it: during the last millennium, the Church has succeeded in converting millions of pagans, whereas the number of converts from the Schism of the East has always been small.

That is why basing the "reconstruction" of Unity on a number of elements held in common between the different Christian confessions, elements considered exclusively in their numeric aspect, means analyzing the problem on a purely material level and failing to take into account the reality of the facts and of the true nature of the problem.

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The Church Is the Spouse of Christ

The analogy adopted by St. Paul in defining the Church as the Bride of Christ is well known.⁸ In fact, our Lord already used the theme of the marriage banquet in the Gospel to present the mystery of the Church. This recurrent image finds its most solemn and definitive expression in St. John's Apocalypse, where the blessed eternity is illustrated by the image of the wedding of the Church and the Lamb.⁹ This analogy has a special place in the New Testament among many other figures. Marriage signifies first and foremost a stable, definitive union, exactly what our Lord wished to achieve with His Church and through her, with the souls belonging to His Mystical Body. Clearly the two figures of the Bride and the Mystical Body overlap: where a genuine conjugal union exists, the spouses become one. To be valid, a marriage must above all be vowed to perpetuity and absolute mutual fidelity: without these presuppositions, there simply is not a true marriage.

It should also be noted especially that the commitment to absolute mutual fidelity expresses and protects the sacredness of the conjugal bond, such that even the slightest offense against this commitment seems incompatible with it. Here more than in any other element we find expressed the nature of the bond Christ wishes to have with His Church.

This bond is unique for two kinds of reasons. First of all, it can only exist validly in one case: just as communion between two spouses cannot exist except in one unique and specific case, such that an existing marriage is an impediment to a second marriage, so also union between Christ and the Church can only exist in a specific case. In the second place, this bond where it exists cannot be varied or diluted in different forms: it only exists in one absolute, perfect mode.

Just as a true and legitimate union between spouses exists only in marriage and cannot exist between two false "spouses" who refuse, for example, the obligations of marriage, so also union between Christ and the Church exists only in its perfect form, that is to say, in the one Church willed and founded by Him.¹⁰ In simpler terms, a marriage is either valid or invalid; if it is valid, it is necessarily perfect.¹¹

From this perspective, which is the only one admissible, the notion of partial unity, of the unfull communion of false churches or communities, appears rather as an attempt at legitimating an illegitimate union or a false marriage: still more

absurd is the attempt to validate this type of union as a positive element and intrinsically valid for attaining perfect union with Christ in the Church. We can never repeat it enough: whether considered theologically or historically, a false church is not a means of attaining "full communion," but an effective instrument for keeping souls away from the one true Church.¹²

The outlook created by the notion of *unfull* communion pretends especially to impose on our Lord "spouses" of an inferior rank whom He did not choose and whom He cannot accept as such.

Once again, only the ecumenical ideology could produce an error of this scope with the result of provoking confusion and a decline of faith in the Unity and Unicity of the Catholic Church and, consequently, of eclipsing in the eyes of those who are in error the absolute need to belong to the Catholic Church or to convert to it.

The Unity of the Church Based on Supernatural Adherence to the One Truth

We must now examine the elements that guarantee the Church's unity and then apply the logical conclusions to the problem under examination.

As classical doctrine teaches, in the Church there are three factors for unity: unity of faith, of government, and of worship. This means that in the Church there must be one faith, one government, and one liturgy with the sacraments and with substantially equivalent rites. These three factors obviously represent a *unicum*, and it is not possible to choose among them or exclude any.

Nonetheless, faith logically takes priority over the other two elements as the basis of Christian life, the door and fundamental presupposition of all the other supernatural virtues. It is not by chance that faith is the first thing the candidate for baptism asks of the Church. Faith procures eternal life: this is the second affirmation of the baptismal candidate. The sacraments do nothing else than fructify the germ of faith sown by baptism, and the government of the Church has no other end than to lead souls to eternal life. In this *unicum*, faith has consequently a logical priority. We shall concentrate our attention on the profession of Catholic faith understood as a fundamental factor of unity: this will allow us to dissipate some serious equivocations already alluded to and which we shall subsequently explain.

If there is unity in the profession of the same faith with all its dogmas, then it would seem that a certain unity really exists with the profession of Lutheran faith (for example), insofar as both Catholics and Lutherans believe in some of the same dogmas: the divinity of Christ, eternal life,

the necessity of baptism, hell, *etc.* The promoters of ecumenism maintain that it is on these essential elements held in common that we should focus in order to rebuild the unity lost because of sin. In this sense, the Lutherans would be in a certain communion with the Church. The Anglicans would be even more so, and the Orthodox still more so in that they share with us almost all the dogmas.

This outlook is, alas, erroneous; it reduces faith to a body of affirmations more or less shared by the different confessions. It involves a resolutely “horizontal” and material vision of the givens which should be considered at a supernatural level that respects the intrinsic nature of the theological virtue of faith: it is “faith” as seen by those who no longer have faith or are in the process of losing it.

Formally considered, the unity that characterizes those who profess the true faith is not based merely on a sum of more or less identical dogmas held in common, but on the fact of submitting to the authority of God who reveals and who speaks through the Church: such is the fundamental motive of Unity for whoever professes the Catholic faith. Now, the authority of God who reveals can only be One because God is One (obviously with such premises, the dogmatic content can only be absolutely identical).

Consequently, whoever believes in something or even in almost all the Catholic dogmas could not do it for the reason we have indicated, but on the basis of personal convictions of another nature, which excludes any type of communion in the formal sense of the term. All that remains is a more or less extended community of a material, phenomenological type.¹³

In simpler terms: someone who shared all the truths taught by the Church except one would not believe all these truths by obedience to the Church but by obedience to his own reason. Thus while having a great number of things in common with Catholicism on the quantitative and material level, on the level of faith (which as we have seen is the basis of all the others) he would be substantially indistinguishable from someone who refused all the dogmas.

The End of the Church Is the Salvation of Souls

Lastly, we must consider the specific finality of communion with the Church. Indeed, on this point a number of serious equivocations exist: membership in the Church is often reduced to a simple sign of cultural or religious identity, legitimated especially by the local tradition of Catholic countries, which in fact justifies all sorts of alternatives.

The problem is in fact much more serious and should be considered in relation to the

mission of the Church, outside of which there is no salvation. Membership in the Church thus is related to this dogmatic truth, and in terms proportionate to the scope of this same dogma. Now, salvation as such represents both the ultimate end of every man’s life and the purpose for the Church’s existence. It is a reality that cannot be qualified or diluted: formally speaking, it is not possible to be in a state of quasi-salvation, of unfull salvation, of partial salvation; and it would not make sense to offer imperfect salvation to someone as good for his soul. Unfortunately, the only alternative to salvation is damnation, without any intermediary nuance. Consequently, the bond with the Church (communion), through which salvation is conveyed, can in no instance be partial without being at the same time absurd and hence nonexistent.

Jesus’ Prayer for Unity

We wish to conclude our reflections by a few considerations on the famous prayer of our Lord for Unity.¹⁴ It occurs in the well-known passage of St. John’s Gospel (17:11-21) in which Jesus prays to His Father to give the gift of unity to the apostles and believers. The famous passage is systematically used to justify the ecumenical movement, which certifies that it is the faithful response to the teaching and explicit will of Jesus expressed in this prayer. In reality and paradoxically, it is precisely this prayer of Jesus that demolishes and condemns the ecumenical movement.

Indeed, when Jesus asks His Father for something, His prayer is always infallible, that is to say, He always gets what He asks for.¹⁵ Jesus is the Sovereign Priest and hence the Sovereign Mediator, established as such by the Father. This is always and necessarily true, unless the prayer is conditional as at Gethsemane, when Jesus submitted the outcome of His petition to His Father’s will. In the prayer for unity, this is not the case: Jesus asks for unity for His Church as an absolute and necessary good. Consequently, He can but obtain it, and His Father can but grant it to Him. It is question of absolute unity, a built-in, irremovable prerogative, of which we have treated, which the Church can never lose and which can neither exist nor be sought nor be recomposed outside of her.

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¹ “Convergence” is the term used by Teilhard de Chardin—and adopted

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by many contemporary theologians—to replace the traditional notion of *conversion*, considered obsolete. Briefly, it would involve making all the Christian confessions “converge” by highlighting what they have in common rather than what separates them, thus bypassing the problem of conversion with all that it implies.

² Cf. Pius IX’s Syllabus of Errors, condemned Proposition 38: “The Roman pontiffs have, by their too arbitrary conduct, contributed to the division of the Church into Eastern and Western.”

³ We do not mean to hide the fact that linguistic, historical, and human issues came into play, but none of these things, even taken as a whole, can be considered a sufficient motive for an act as serious as separation from the Apostolic See. For both the ancient Eastern Churches and the Orthodox Churches, contemporary historiography minimizes the dogmatic problem and emphasizes the linguistic misunderstandings and a mutual tendency to prevarication. The essential problem, on the contrary, remains the following: “...it is not enough to accept willingly the ancient pronouncements of the teaching office of the Church, but...it is also necessary to believe humbly and loyally all that is subsequently enjoined upon our faith by the Church in virtue of her supreme authority” (Pius XII, *Orientalis Ecclesiae*). In evidence, there is the fact that after the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Eastern Church, signed in 1994 by John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, the Assyrian Church persists in schism, a clear sign that it is one thing to accept a definition, and another to accept it in virtue of the authority of the Holy See.

⁴ The Church, to be precise, is not a person but a *societas*; however, like a person, the Church is *one*.

⁵ This conclusion can easily be supported by a simple philosophical argument. When something is in motion towards its ultimate perfection, it necessarily is in a present state of imperfection. More precisely: when there is potentiality to a perfection, it means that it is not perfectly in act. If the unity of the Church could subsist in imperfect forms progressively in motion toward perfection, it would mean attributing to the unity of the Church an inadmissible imperfection.

⁶ Consequently, the question of baptism of desire will not figure in our study.

⁷ It is helpful to dwell for a moment upon this point. The Vicar of Christ on earth, that is, the legitimate successor of St. Peter, is not an “added element” with or without which the Church stays the same. The Sovereign Pontiff is the visible bond of unity, as the head is of the body. That is why, this bond being removed, there is no longer a body, but a heap of headless members. Pius XII clearly affirmed as much: “They, therefore, walk in the path of dangerous error who believe that they can accept Christ as the Head of the Church, while not adhering loyally to His Vicar on earth. They have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and so maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find

it.” (*Mystici Corporis*, §41) Analogously, to maintain an ecclesiology that explicitly refuses the Petrine primacy means not only denying a point of doctrine, but also of disfiguring the doctrine of ecclesiology in its entirety. The fact that the Orthodox do not perceive the doctrine of the Petrine primacy (in his successors) as belonging to the teaching of our Lord has repercussions on the entire body of Church doctrine. Historically, this has led them to an advanced state of caesaropapism and to the real problem of harmonizing the different patriarchates.

⁸ Cf. I Cor. 6:15-17; II Cor. 11:2.

⁹ Cf. Apoc. 22:17; Eph. 1:4; 5:27.

¹⁰ The development of the analogy may corroborate this notion. The two spouses, after their marriage, are one flesh (Mt. 19:6). On the ontological level, then, between the moment before and the moment after the marriage, there is an abyss. Reciprocally, during the engagement, there is a development in the relationship from the beginning of the engagement to the end of the period immediately preceding the marriage, which brings the fiancés to a better mutual understanding on the human level. But on the ontological level, nothing changes. Whether the couple scarcely know each other or whether they know each other perfectly well (on the day before the wedding), their conjugal union, so long as they are not married, is ontologically always the same, that is, null: it simply does not exist; observe especially that the two fiancés are not bound by any bond.

An analogous distinction can be applied to the relationship existing between non-Catholic communities and the Church. Between a Calvinist community and an Orthodox “Church” there is certainly a great difference materially, but there is none ontologically: both have no formal union with the Church; just as the two fiancés have no conjugal bond a year before as the day before their marriage: they cannot be “imperfectly married” or in a state of “unful marriage”! Ontologically, therefore, either the union subsists in its complete form, or else it does not subsist.

¹¹ Our reasoning is naturally on the ontological plane, where what constitutes validity is the totality and the perfection of the required characters, prescinding from the human and psychological limits and difficulties affecting the personal and phenomenological sphere.

¹² It is superfluous to repeat that this is true for the false religions as such, prescinding from the subjective dispositions of those who belong to them. As such, as a matter of fact, they can never be instruments of salvation, an attribute of the Catholic religion alone, by divine institution.

¹³ It must be noted also that as regards faith, the subjective intensity of the act of faith is unimportant. It is true that an Adventist or a Mormon can have a “faith” more intense (or fanatical) than a Catholic, who may be lukewarm, as often happens: what we are analyzing is the intrinsic nature of the act of faith understood as such, and the characteristics it must necessarily have in order to exist.

¹⁴ Cf. on this subject Pier Carlo Landucci’s excellent article, “La vraie signification de ‘*Ut unum sint*’ (Jn. 17:11-21)” in *Renovatio*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1983.

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 21, art. 4.

The Christian Life and Truth

In 1949, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) asked whether our faith can be practiced without its first being well known. Today, many live, or, rather, think they are living the faith by doing good deeds, often in the service of others, with some prayers to the good Lord, but without bothering about whether they profess the Truth and live it—the whole Truth as God in Christ Jesus, His Son made man for our salvation, revealed it to us. This kind of conduct is now so

widespread that it has become a mentality, a manner of behaving for some if not the majority. At the limit, thinks Maritain, such a faith would be but the acceptance of certain values. What then becomes of the theological virtue of faith? Today in the midst of the disorder and devastation caused by *aggiornamento* and by ecumenism at any price, it behooves us to make a thorough examination of conscience on the following points:

As a good Catholic, do I accept Jesus Christ as the Man-God, sole Lord and Saviour, and do I accept all the truths of faith He revealed and which the Catholic Church proposes to my faith? Are these truths the soul of my life? Are my prayer life and my relationship with God enlightened by the dogmatic definitions of the popes and councils, from Nicaea to Trent, on the mysteries of the most Holy Trinity and our Lord Jesus Christ?

Is my attitude toward non-Christian religions informed by the unqualified words of Christ on the necessity of faith in Him and in Him alone to attain eternal salvation and on the duty to be a missionary by promoting in prayer and in deed the conversion of unbelievers?

Am I certain and have I the courage to confess openly as Jesus taught that “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, and whoever refuses belief will be condemned” (Mk. 16:16)?

Is the way in which I approach the Eucharist, the Real Presence and Sacrifice of Jesus, informed by Jesus’ discourses at Capharnaum (Jn. 6: 1-70) and during the Last Supper (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:19-20; Jn. 14-17) on the offering one’s life for Him and on unity with Him, and is it sustained by Eucharistic dogma as the Church has defined and proclaimed it in the Council of Trent, in the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII, and in the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* of Paul VI?

Is my relationship with my brethren—in particular the poor—inspired by the presence of Jesus in them as He explained in the discourse on the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46)?

Is my position regarding truth and lies that of a child of light inspired by the Gospel’s “Yes, yes, no, no”?

Or else:

Is my faith but a sentiment of confidence in God without a body of precise truths; a romantic, sentimental, undogmatic Christianity; a Christianity that surely does not come from Christ? Have I a fideist attitude that neglects the harmony between faith and reason? Have I an “aesthetic” conception of faith which is content to leave to others the task of engaging the culture in order to transform it in the image of Christ’s Gospel, to uphold its primacy over all things, and its spiritual, Eucharistic, and social royalty over the world?

Under the influence of the prevailing utilitarianism, is my morality such that a good or pious end justifies the use of dubious or bad means (in which case I would be a Machiavellian and not a Catholic)? Does a purported discretion—an erroneous discretion—take the place of real Catholic witness when it suits me?

These questions are addressed firstly to myself, which is why I formulated them in the first person, and in asking them, it is myself I reproach; yet *every*

Catholic today, beginning with the mitred heads and scarlet shoulders, *should ask himself these questions* at this singular moment in history, at this time of devastation and of the Church’s unprecedented “self-destruction” (as Paul VI said).

Voluntarism considers faith as a “pure obedience” to things to be done before being adherence to the immutable Truth that must be believed, defended, kept, and confessed. In another connection, novelties abusively introduced and presented as the Church’s positions have been introduced. Paul VI himself told Jean Guitton:

There is great unrest at this time in the Church and what they are questioning is the faith. I am alarmed, when I reflect on the Catholic world, that non-Catholic thinking sometimes seems to prevail within Catholicism and it could happen that this non-Catholic thinking within Catholicism will become stronger in the future. But it will never represent the Church’s thinking. (*Paul VI Secret*, 1976)

Today a certain kind of speech prevails in which the values of modernity are exalted and individual creativity is absolutized, tending toward a subjectivist mentality that spins itself a fashionable “credo,” or rather a creedless one: not God, still less Christ, but man alone is the measure of all things. Incredible but true, a “theology without God” has spread in parishes, seminaries, theology faculties, and in mitred heads. Even children, even my mother, who only know the Catechism of St. Pius X, have noticed. Many have noticed except those for whom it is more convenient not to notice.

That there have existed and still exist “men without God” and men “without Christ” we have known for decades if not centuries, at least since the French Revolution. Today a “theology without Christ” has spread as if it were normal. Cardinal Siri said: “The most dangerous one is Karl Rahner, who writes very well and gives the impression of being upright (he even spreads devotion to the Sacred Heart), but he has always maintained that a new theology was needed, a theology that sets aside Jesus Christ and suits our world” [B. Lai and A. M. Scavo, *Giuseppe Siri: Ses Images, Ses Paroles* (Genoa: DeFerrari, 2008)]. That is why Rahner today has a myriad of disciples among bishops, theologians and other doctors. *Rahner is the prince of heretics*. And the ones who follow him are guides leading souls to perdition. Assuredly, Rahner’s thought is not the thought of the Church, “Mother and Mistress of Truth,” and the Church in its highest authority has the duty to unmask Rahner as the wolf who slaughters the shepherds and the lambs.

(When Karl and Hugo Rahner were students with the Jesuits, a young *Christifidelis laicus* from Turin stayed with them on a trip to Germany, where

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his father was the Italian ambassador: Pier Giorgio Frassati... The mother of Karl and Hugo, seeing Pier Giorgio's living faith and intimacy with Jesus, said to her sons: "You see, Pier Giorgio is a layman, yet he is much better than you, seminarians!" Mama Rahner was very perceptive.)

Today's climate of secularization makes this attitude which the ancients with reason identified with "heresy" natural and spontaneous. But it is not enough to say "heresy," because heresy can conserve a common ground with truth. It is rather a matter of apostasy—the apostasy of churchmen—the worst apostasy and greatest chastisement that can befall a Christian people.

For authentic evangelization, a return to the fundamental certitudes of the unchanging Catholic Credo in accordance with genuine Catholic Tradition and to "the charity of Truth," which is the greatest charity, is today absolutely necessary. It is indispensable and urgent; it must be now and not tomorrow: the Truth, the whole Truth. "...[T]hat which has been believed everywhere, always and by all: That is truly and properly Catholic," wrote St. Vincent of Lerins. On this solid foundation, we should work at every level—formation of the clergy, catechesis, education in truly Catholic schools, defense of life, the life of prayer—for the return of an appreciation of the exact role of the truths of faith in the Christian life. There must be a return to Jesus Christ in full, to Him and to all that comes from Him: the Creed, the moral law, doctrine, the sacraments, the Church, the life of sanctifying grace in souls, flight from sin, eternal life, the salvation of souls.

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a mendacious ministry without Truth. The still-believing Christian people and the world today need only Jesus Christ. But today quite often we can but lament like the prophet Jeremias in his Lamentations: "Our children asked us for bread and there was no-one to give it them."

Holy Father, Reverend Lords, give us the Bread which is none other than Christ, were it at the price of martyrdom, as it was for the young Tarcisius (d. 250) who brought the Bread of Life to fortify the Christians awaiting martyrdom!

Candidus

Translated from *Courrier de Rome*, No. 3, June 2010.