

DYSFUNCTIONAL IDEAS

Or

Why We Do Not Need a Pope

By

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Part Two

In the first part of this article, we spoke about Bob and Ray's Advertising Satellite and one other wrong-headed idea, namely the "Papal Patriarchal Theory." We saw that this latter notion finds no support in the Holy Canons or in the Patristic literature.

On the other hand, one of the finest expositions on the subject of how the Church understands itself is found in the book *Against False Union*, especially in the chapter on ecclesiology. The translators of the first (1967) English edition call this chapter "unparalleled." Here is what we find there:

The commotion about union of the churches makes evident the ignorance existing as much among the circles of the simple faithful as among the theologians as to what the Church is.

They understand the catholicity of the Church as a legal cohesion, as an interdependence regulated by some code. For them the Church is an organization with laws and regulations like the organizations of nations. Bishops, like civil servants, are distinguished as superiors and subordinates: patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops. For them, one diocese is not something complete, but a piece of a larger whole: the autocephalous church or the patriarchate. But the autocephalous church, also, feels the need to belong to a higher head. When the external factors of politics, history or geography prevent this, a vague feeling of weak unity and even separation circulates through the autocephalous churches.

Such a concept of the Church leads directly to the Papacy. If the catholicity of the Church has this kind of meaning, then Orthodoxy is worthy of tears, because up to now she has not been able to discipline herself under a Pope.

But this is not the truth of the matter. The catholic Church which we confess in the Symbol (Creed) of our Faith is not called catholic because it includes all the Christians of the earth, but because within her everyone of the faithful finds all the grace and gift of God. The meaning of catholicity has nothing to do with a universal organization the way the Papists and those who are influenced by the Papist mentality understand it.

Of course, the Church is intended for and extended to the whole world independent of lands, nations, races, and tongues; and it is not an error for one to name her catholic because of this also. But just as humanity becomes an abstract idea, there is a danger of the same thing happening to the Church when we see her as an abstract, universal idea. In order for one to understand humanity well, it is enough for him to know only one man, since the nature of that man is common to all men of the world.

Similarly, in order to understand what the catholic Church of Christ is, it suffices to know well only one local church. And as among men, it is not submission to a hierarchy which unites them but their common nature, so the local churches are not united by the Pope and the Papal hierarchy but by their common nature.

A local Orthodox church regardless of her size or the number of the faithful is by herself alone, independently of all the others, catholic. And this is so because she lacks nothing of the grace and gift of God. All the local churches of the whole world together do not contain anything more in divine grace than that small church with few members.

She has her presbyters and bishop; she has the Holy Mysteries; she has the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Within her any worthy soul can taste of the Holy Spirit's presence. She has all the grace and truth. What is

she lacking therefore in order to be catholic? She is the one flock, and the bishop is her shepherd, the image of Christ, the one Shepherd. She is the prefiguring on earth of the one flock with the one Shepherd, of the new Jerusalem. Within her, even in this life, pure hearts taste of the Kingdom of God, the betrothal of the Holy Spirit. Within her they find peace which "passeth all understanding," the peace which has no relation with the peace of men: "My peace I give unto you."

"Paul, called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ ... to the Church of God which is at Corinth" Yes, it really was the Church of God, even if it was at Corinth, at one concrete and limited place.

This is the catholic Church, something concrete in space, time, and persons. This concrete entity can occur repeatedly in space and in time without ceasing to remain essentially the same.

Her relations with the other local churches are not relations of legal and jurisdictional interdependence, but relations of love and grace. One local church is united with all the other local Orthodox churches of the world by the bond of identity. Just as one is the Church of God, the other is the Church of God also, as well as all the others. They are not divided by boundaries of nations nor the political goals of the countries in which they live. They are not even divided by the fact that one might be ignorant of the other's existence. It is the same Body of Christ which is partaken of by the Greeks, the natives of Uganda, Alaska, or Siberia, The same Blood of Christ circulates in their veins. The Holy Spirit enlightens their minds and leads them to the knowledge of the same truth.

There exist, of course, relations of interdependence between the local churches, and there are canons which govern them. This interdependence, though, is not a relation of legal necessity, but a bond of respect and love in complete freedom, the freedom of grace. And the canons are not laws of a code, but wise guides of centuries of experience.

The Church has no need of external bonds in order to be one. It is not a pope, or a patriarch, or an archbishop which unites the Church. *The local church [i.e., diocese] is something complete; it is not a piece of a larger whole.*

Besides, the relations of the churches are relations of churches, and not relations which belong exclusively to their bishops. A bishop cannot be conceived of without a flock or independent of his flock. The Church is the bride of Christ. The Church is the body of Christ, not the bishop alone.

A bishop is called a patriarch when the church of which he is the shepherd is a patriarchate and an archbishop when the church is an archdiocese. In other words, the respect and honor belongs to the local church, and by extension it is rendered to its bishop. The Church of Athens is the largest and, today, most important local church of Greece. For this reason the greatest respect belongs to her, and she deserves more honor than any other church of Greece. Her opinion has a great bearing, and her role in the solution of common problems is the most significant. That is why she is justly called an archdiocese. Consequently, the bishop of that church, because he represents such an important church, is a person equally important and justly called an archbishop. *He himself is nothing more than an ordinary bishop.* In the orders of priesthood — the deacon, the presbyter, and the bishop — there is no degree higher than the office of the bishop. The titles metropolitan, archbishop, patriarch, or pope do not indicate a greater degree of ecclesiastical charism, because there is no greater sacramental grace than that which is given to the bishop. They only indicate a difference in prominence of the churches of which they are shepherds.

This prominence of one church in relation to the others is not something permanent. It depends upon internal and external circumstances. In studying the history of the Church, we see the primacy of prominence and respect passing from church to church in a natural succession. In Apostolic times, the Church of Jerusalem, without any dispute, had the primacy of authority and importance. She had known Christ; she had heard His words; she saw Him

being crucified and arising; and upon her did the Holy Spirit first descend. All who were in a communion of faith and life with her were certain that they walked the road of Christ. This is why Paul, when charged that the Gospel which he taught was not the Gospel of Christ, hastened to explain it before the Church of Jerusalem, so that the agreement of that church might silence his enemies (Gal. 2:1-2).

Later, that primacy was taken by Rome, little by little. It was the capital of the Roman Empire. A multitude of tried Christians comprised that church. Two leading Apostles had lived and preached within its bounds. A multitude of Martyrs had dyed its soil with their blood. That is why her word was venerable, and her authority in the solution of common problems was prodigious. But it was the authority of the church and not of her bishop. When she was asked for her view in the solution of common problems, the bishop replied not in his own name as a Pope of today would do, but in the name of his church. In his epistle to the Corinthians, St. Clement of Rome begins this way: "The Church of God which is in Rome, to the Church of God which is in Corinth." He writes in an amicable and supplicatory manner in order to convey the witness and opinion of his church concerning whatever happened in the Church of Corinth. In his letter to the Church of Rome, St. Ignatius the God-bearer does not mention her bishop anywhere, although he writes as though he were addressing himself to the church which truly has primacy in the hierarchy of the churches of his time.

When St. Constantine transferred the capital of the Roman state to Byzantium, Rome began gradually to lose her old splendor. It became a provincial city. A new local church began to impose itself upon the consciousness of the Christian world: the Church of Constantinople. Rome tried jealously to preserve the splendor of the past, but because things were not conducive to it, it developed little by little its well-known Papal ecclesiology in order to secure theoretically that which circumstances would not offer. Thus it advanced from madness to madness, to the point where it declared that the Pope is infallible whenever he speaks on

doctrine, even if because of sinfulness he does not have the enlightenment or sanctity the Fathers of the Church had.

The Church of Constantinople played the most significant role throughout the long period of great heresies and of the Ecumenical Councils, and in her turn she gave her share of blood with the martyrdom of thousands of her children during the period of the Iconoclasts.

Besides these churches which at different times had the primacy of authority, there were others which held the second or third place. They were the various patriarchates, old or new, and other important churches or metropolises. There exists, therefore, a hierarchy, but a hierarchy of churches and not of bishops. St. Irenaeus does not advise Christians to address themselves to important bishops in order to find the solution to their problem, but to the churches which have the oldest roots in the Apostles (*Adv. Haer.* III, 4, 1).

There are not, therefore, organizational, administrative, or legal bonds among the churches, but bonds of love and grace, the same bonds of love and grace which exist among the faithful of every church, clergy or lay. The relationship between presbyter and bishop is not a relationship of employee and employer, but a charismatic and sacramental relationship. The bishop is the one who gives the presbyter the grace of the priesthood. And the presbyter gives the layman the grace of the Holy Mysteries. The only thing which separates the bishop from the presbyter is the charism of ordination. The bishop excels in nothing else, even if he be the bishop of an important church and bears the title of patriarch or pope. "There is not much separating them [the presbyters] and the bishops. For they too are elevated for the teaching and protection of the Church They [the bishops] surpass them only in the power of ordination, and in this alone they exceed the presbyters" (Chrysostom, Hom. XI on I Tim.).

Bishops have no right to behave like rulers, not only towards the other churches but also towards the presbyters or laymen of the church of which they are bishop. They

have a responsibility to oversee in a paternal way, to counsel, to guide, to battle against falsehood, to adjure transgressors with love and strictness, to preside in love. But these responsibilities they share with the presbyters. And the presbyters in turn look upon the bishops as their fathers in the priesthood and render them the same love.

All things in the Church are governed by love. Any distinctions are charismatic distinctions. They are not distinctions of a legal nature but of a spiritual authority. And among the laymen there are charisms and charisms.

The unity of the Church, therefore, is not a matter of obedience to a higher authority. It is not a matter of submission of subordinates to superiors. External relations do not make unity, neither do the common decisions of councils, even of Ecumenical Councils. The unity of the Church is given by the communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, the communion with the Holy Trinity. It is a liturgical unity, a mystical unity [emphasis added].

The Papacy is the distortion *par excellence* of Church unity. It made that bond of love and freedom a bond of constraint and tyranny. The Papacy is unbelief in the power of God and confidence in the power of human systems.

But let no one think that the Papacy is something which exists only in the West. In recent times it has started to appear among the Orthodox too. A few novel titles are characteristic of this spirit, for example, "Archbishop of all Greece," "Archbishop of North and South America." Many times we hear people say of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the "leader of Orthodoxy," or we hear the Russians speaking of Moscow as the third Rome and its patriarch as holding the reins of the whole of Orthodoxy. In fact, many sharp rivalries have begun. All these are manifestations of the same worldly spirit, the same thirst for worldly power, and belong to the same tendencies which characterize the world today.

People cannot feel unity in multiplicity. Yet this is a deep mystery. Our weakness or inability to feel it originates from the condition of severance into which the human race has

fallen. People have changed from persons into separated and hostile individuals, and it is impossible for them now to understand the deep unity of their nature. Man, however, is one and many; one in his nature, many in persons. This is the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and the mystery of the Church.

In conclusion, we believe that the "Papal Patriarchal Theory" should go the way of Bob and Ray's Advertising Satellite.