

VON BALTHASAR AND THE OFFICE OF PETER IN THE CHURCH

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The Pope is head. Who else is known by all? Who else is recognised by all, with the power to infiltrate the whole body because he holds the main branch which infiltrates everywhere? How easy it would have been for this to degenerate into tyranny! That is why Christ gave them this commandment: 'But not so with you' (Luke 22: 26).

(Blaise Pascal, Pensées)

IN ENGLISH, WE HAVE A BOOK by Hans Urs von Balthasar called *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*. This title, however, ignores the point of the original German: *Der antiromische Affekt* ('The Anti-Roman Feeling').¹ The work was originally published in 1974 (in the pontificate of Paul VI) to offer a theological reflection on the 'deep-seated anti-Roman attitude within the Catholic Church' (p.9), 'the strangely irrational phenomenon of the anti-Roman attitude among Catholics' (p.16), an attitude that has 'not only sociological and historical grounds but also a theological basis' and that 'has to be overcome again and again by the community of the Church' (p.9). 'Throughout Church history, and today more explicitly than ever, there has been an evident *contest* within the Church herself, mostly against the Petrine principle.' (p.314) Von Balthasar presses the Church to examine the bias in its nature against its central focus of authority.

In von Balthasar's view, the papacy is misrepresented if it is pictured at the top of an ecclesial pyramid: such a hierarchical conception he regards as a legacy of imperial Rome and as a reaction

¹ The references in the text are to *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, translated by Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986 [1974]).

to the encroachments of medieval emperors. Such an image distorts the relation of the papacy to the rest of the Church. The Pope is not 'above' the Church in any serious sense, nor is the Church 'under' him ('... but not so with you'—Luke 22:26). Only Jesus stands above the Church as its Lord (p.308). Equally, von Balthasar has little time for attempts to remove the *scandalon* of the Petrine office by softening it into an Orthodox 'primacy of honour' based upon the autonomy of particular churches (p.77). Instead, the Papacy is one of the elements within the complex identity of the Church: it is both a *primary* feature of the Church as 'the guarantor of concrete unity in the concrete centre of the Church' (p.127), and *relative*, 'one of several indispensable elements in the ecclesiastical structure' which, by their very relationship to one another, constitute the Church's identity (p.21). Hence both protestantism and papolatry are unacceptable, because they dissolve the differentiated character of the Church, one by excising episcopal and papal authority from the structure, the other by exalting the Pope above everything else. Von Balthasar quotes Möhler's sharp comment on their common source in an exaggerated egoism:

Protestantism is papism carried to the extreme, that is, complete egoism *in principle*. In papism each gives himself unconditionally to *one* person: in protestantism, each *one* is in a position to oppose all others (in so far as he makes of himself the principle of interpretation of revelation).²

Von Balthasar prefers to speak of the 'multi-dimensional reality' of the Church' (p.26), the 'force-fields that bear upon the Church' (p.22), the 'network of tensions in the Church' (p.24). In the Church, there are 'more fundamental tensions' than that between primacy and collegiality or 'monarchy' and 'democracy' (for von Balthasar, sociological parallels from secular society are inadequate to the *mysterium*). In his view, the *necessary* tensions in the Church are neither the symptoms of spiritual shortcomings nor flaws which can be remedied by structural change: they are constitutive of the Church,

² Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolik*, volume 2 (Cologne and Olten: Hegner, 1958), 698, quoted and translated in von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 172.

because the Church is inherently *a complex, multi-dimensional network of principles*. He rejects the idea that the original form of the Church was a charismatic brotherhood of equality only later corrupted by patriarchal patterns of government. Instead, the Church, as shaped by Christ in its period of origins, is differentiated and invested with centres of authority, adjudication and service. Mary, Peter and the other figures around Jesus form a network of principles which, in their mutuality, interaction and tension, form the Church which relates to its Lord. Von Balthasar approves of Congar's definition of Catholicity as 'the Church's *universal capacity for unity*, or, in other words, the dynamic universality of the principles which yield her unity',³ and proposes an ecclesiology of symbolic archetypes as a way of identifying these constitutive principles and missions which form the *Catholica*.

Catholic Identity

For von Balthasar, the 'larger unity' of the Church corresponds to the 'constellation' of people around Jesus in the New Testament, a constellation of 'real symbols' which designate particular missions within the Church, forming the dimensions of the *Catholica* (p.309). The historical Jesus stands within a 'constitutive human group'; withdrawing him from this differentiated network makes him (and Christology) 'hopelessly abstract' (p.136). The Church is born in the relationships Christ establishes in 'the period of origins' (p.158), and their symbolic pattern forms the subsequent pattern of the Church in which the Risen Jesus continues to give missions: it is this subsistent pattern of continuity between 'then' and 'now' which makes them constitutive *principles* of the Church in every age.

An analogy can be drawn between von Balthasar's ecclesiological approach and Carl Jung's account of the process of individuation. For Jung, all the elements which surface in a dream are aspects of the self pressing for attention. Becoming 'individuated' as a person means coming to acknowledge the self in all the aspects of its fullness. Just as the self is complex and composed of different dynamic aspects, all of which emerge from and contribute to an integrated personality, so the life of the Church is constituted by different elements or principles involved in a dynamic interchange and tension between the figures

³ Yves Congar, quoted and translated in von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 323.

ARCHETYPES WITHIN THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

Peter

(Pastoral Office)

The Twelve

(Collegiality)

Paul

(Adaptation to Cultures/Mission)

The Baptist

(OT Witness; Prophetic Martyrdom)

Judas

(Betrayal)

Outsiders

(Sinners & Weak)

Children

(Unlettered)

Mary

(Lay Holiness)

Nicodemus

(Searchers)

Women at Tomb

(Generating Resurrection Faith)

Joseph

(Fatherhood/Work)

Martha & Mary

(Domestic Church/Hospitality)

Beloved Disciple

(Love/Contemplation)

James

(Tradition & Law)

who are archetypal dimensions in its 'individuation'. (Significantly, one of von Balthasar's essays is entitled 'Who is the Church?', rather than 'What is the Church?', because he favours imagery of the Church as Virgin/Spouse/Mother—a 'person' rather than an 'assembly'—in relation to God.)

Von Balthasar identifies a number of individuals and groups in the New Testament and amplifies their symbolic significance as foundational archetypes within the Church: Mary, Joseph, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, the Jews who were sympathetic to Jesus (Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simon of Cyrene), Judas Iscariot, John the Baptist, Peter, the Twelve, Paul, the Beloved Disciple, James, and so on. The diagram above gives an idea of the resulting picture of the *Catholica*. Mary is at the centre of the Church because her faith

represents 'the all-inclusive, protective and directive form of all ecclesial life' (p.208), 'the model of all being and acting' in the Church (p.206). The form of her faith radiates through the other dimensions, which, for all their importance, do not have the paradigmatic quality of Marian holiness. The Church, after all, begins in the chamber at Nazareth, in the faith of the Virgin 'through which the Son of God becomes man', and by which 'he also forms the truly universal Church' (p.207). The first of the redeemed, she is the 'archetype of the Church', the bodily image of the Church's holiness, realised in advance through her conception without sin and fulfilled in her assumption into resurrection life. In her is seen 'the nuptial encounter between God and the creature'. 'The entire Church is Marian', von Balthasar says, quoting Charles Journet (p.205), because 'Mary disappears into the heart of the Church to remain there as a real presence which, however, always gives place to her Son' (pp.158-159). For von Balthasar, the radiant heart of the Church is *lay, faithful and holy*, characterised by contemplative receptivity in relation to God, and symbolised by the femininity and virginal maternity of Mary: as she is, so is the Church.

Von Balthasar's use of male-female symbolism can pose problems in a society uncertain about these terms in its own cultural life. His fundamental distinction is between 'a feminine element ... [which] makes a person *secure* in nature and in being', and a masculine element by which a person 'pushes forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own'.⁴ At the level of individual identity there is a corresponding distinction between *who you are* and *what you do*. Mary symbolizes the Church in its core identity; simply by being herself in perfect union with God's self-gift in Christ, she expresses the identity of the Church.

Within this overarching Marian pattern, the other dimensions arise as active expressions of the Church's selfhood, just as personal identity flows into individual action. Hence, for example, von Balthasar can think of papal infallibility as arising within the trustworthiness of what is known in the Marian Church:

⁴ An extract from *New Elucidations* reproduced in 'Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture', *Communio*, 22/1 (1995), 164-170, at 165.

What Peter will receive as 'infallibility' for his office of governing will be a partial share in the total flawlessness of the feminine, Marian Church. (p.167)

In the same spirit, one might say that the women at the tomb on Easter morning, who generate the Church's faith in the resurrection, speak of what Mary already knows of God's power and love. Similarly, John's contemplative discipleship, James's sense that Christ is the fulfilment of Jewish observance, and Paul's preaching of the universal efficacy of faith in Christ, are particular expressions of what is comprehended in Mary's faith.⁵

Peter has a distinctive role, set within the network of missions in the Church:

As shepherd who has to pasture the *whole* flock, he has a right to claim authority (in doctrine and leadership) and to demand unity. This prerogative is his alone. But it does not isolate him from the others who have founding missions and who, in their own way, have no less a continuing life and representation in the Church. (p.158)

The office of Peter, von Balthasar argues,

... must take ... (its) ... bearings by the all-encompassing totality of the Church, which expresses itself concretely in the dynamic interplay of her major missions and in the laws inherent in her structure (pp.314-315).

While he develops this idea, several alternative configurations are rejected as inadequate. Von Balthasar rejects a neo-scholastic division of the Church into a 'teaching' (*ecclesia discens*) and a 'listening' part (*ecclesia docens*), preferring a 'much more nuanced scale of ministries in the Church' (p.236); even the New Testament ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11) are insufficient in his view to account for the scale of differentiation within

⁵ I can only touch on the role of those principles which bear upon authority in the Church, but it is important to note the presence of 'sinners' within a communion called to holiness—omit them, and you create the Church of the righteous elect. The presence of Judas requires constant acknowledgment. The women at the tomb are an important symbol of the role of women in the Church, and the Josephite dimension of fatherhood and work has been an equally unexplored aspect of the *Catholica*.



the *Catholica*. Nor does he accept the typological division of the universal Church into ‘Petrine’ (Catholic), ‘Pauline’ (Protestant) and ‘Johannine’ (Orthodox) Churches (p.146). Paul and John are not to be thought of as principles ‘tending in opposite directions’ from Peter: *communio* is not incompatible with collegiality and primacy. But it is wrong to see the office of Peter as the defining feature of the Catholic Church, perhaps by contrast with a Protestantism understood as having a Pauline stamp, and an Orthodoxy that was somehow Johannine:

... the communion of the *Catholica* cannot be characterized exclusively by the Petrine principle and thereby placed in opposition to other Christian communions and communities (pp. 145-146).

It is precisely the task of the Church to realise its Catholicity in ways which bring together Petrine, Pauline, Johannine and other dimensions within a concrete unity. Petrine authority is at the service of the other dimensions of the Church, and it flourishes when it promotes the functioning of the other missions and dimensions within the Church. When it marginalises itself from them—for example, by

acting as though they had no proper status within the life of the Church—or when it is marginalised by them—something not uncommon in some parts of the Western Church—the *Catholica* becomes as dysfunctional as a family in which the father has no role.

By displacing the Petrine office from the ‘centre’ or ‘top’ of the Church, von Balthasar aims to restore an ecclesiological balance which an over-judicial, ultramontane approach to papal authority has disturbed. He places the papacy within the ‘larger unity’ of the Church, within a network of other, equally valid principles and missions—‘relativising’ it, as he puts it, without marginalising it—and thereby restores to the heart of the Church the dimension of lay holiness and faith embodied in Mary. Participation in the ‘all-embracing form’ of Mary’s faith, not obedient acceptance of Peter’s authority, is the deepest dimension of the Church’s identity. He argues that one nourishes the other—the Church is both Marian and Petrine—and that they are not to be opposed; but it is necessary to clarify the issue of which is *central* if we are to avoid an exaggerated estimate of papal authority:

While this office [of Peter] is definitely not the centre, it must be rooted and maintained *in* the centre to become the criterion, the concrete point of reference for unity (and without it unity would fall apart), thus leading beyond itself to *the* centre, Christ, and liberating people for Christian freedom. (p.287)

Differing Principles

If the Church is regarded as one, then the Pope, as its head, represents the whole; if it is regarded as a multiple reality, then the Pope is only a part. The Fathers sometimes looked at it in one way and sometimes another, and thus spoke in different ways about the Pope But in laying down one of these two truths, they did not exclude the other. Multiplicity which is not reduced to unity is confusion. Unity which does not depend on multiplicity is tyranny.

(Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*)

The structure of the Marian Church emerges during Jesus’ ministry, when he appoints Peter and the Twelve to apostolic authority in his name, and is completed when the risen Christ calls Paul to apostolic service. Within the Church’s complex network of principles, von Balthasar identifies a smaller network concerned with the exercise of

authority—what he calls ‘the Apostolic Foursome’ of Peter, John, James and Paul, the ‘four who dominate the field of force of the developing Church’ (p.309). Each principle in the Foursome represents a mission within the Church, a mission which is at once clearly defined in itself and also necessarily involved with the others. Hence there has to be a ‘breathing together’ (*conspiratio*): Petrine authority must respect the demands of other principles, which function as ‘checks’ on its unrestrained power; conversely, the Petrine ministry sets a framework within which the other principles can operate most effectively.

Each principle, like each human being, has its own particular way of going wrong, the Johannine, Jamesian and Pauline no less than the Petrine. (Only the Marian gets it right.) Separated from the others, each principle in the fourfold office can become distorted. Johannine love can weaken into a mere ‘universal humanitarian benevolence’; Pauline flexibility can become a fashionable assimilation to cultural mores; the tradition of James can give rise to an ‘anxiously integralist, reactionary clinging to obsolete forms’; and the distortions to which the Petrine ministry is subject need ‘no further mention here’ (pp.328-329). The four *equal but differentiated* foundational principles must interact with one another if there is to be genuine Catholicity.

THE FOURFOLD OFFICE

Peter
(*Pastoral Care*)

Paul
(*Adaptation*)

James
(*Tradition*)

John
(*Love*)

Peter

Peter exercises the *pastoral office*. The scandal of Peter is that he is given ‘singular participation in Jesus’ authority’, which obliges him to

'participate especially in Jesus' spirit of service and his readiness to suffer' (p. 142). A sinful man, he is to hold the keys of the kingdom and feed the sheep and lambs of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In his weakness, he is chosen as the Rock and the Shepherd, who is to exemplify Christ's own position as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and as the true shepherd (John 10: 11). His denial of Christ places him closest to Judas in betrayal, yet he is called to strengthen the faith of his brethren and be the unifying principle within the Church. The authority given to Peter is 'social and universal, affecting the entire flock' (p.62).

John

John, the Beloved Disciple, exercises the *office of love*, reciprocal love between Christ and his Church. This office is exercised by the saints of the Church, who always 'represent the link between the Marian and the Petrine Church' (p.225). Von Balthasar sees Johannine love as fulfilling a mediating role, first of all between Christ and Peter's pastoral office. When Peter is asked by Christ, 'Do you love me?', he is being asked to share in Johannine love as a condition of his exercising the pastoral ministry ('Feed my sheep'). Peter is reminded by Christ that Johannine love will remain in the Church until Christ returns in glory: 'In the unfathomable mystery of Jesus' good pleasure, John retains his own mission, distinct from that of Peter'. John 21 contains 'a subtly composed symbolic doctrine of the Church in which the task of "office" (Peter) and the task of "love" (John) become ... intertwined' (p.142). John's second mediating role, between the (lay) Marian and the (institutional) Petrine Church, is signalled by his faithful discipleship at the foot of the Cross when, Peter having denied Christ, John becomes the son and guardian of *Maria-Ecclesia*. 'The truly Johannine Church is ... the one that stands under the Cross in place of Peter and on his behalf receives the Marian Church.' (p.225)

James

James, the brother of the Lord, represents the dimension of *tradition and law* (Torah). He is the leader of the Jewish-Christian Jerusalem community (the Church of the circumcision), and takes Peter's place after he leaves Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). He represents continuity between the Old and New Covenants on the one hand, and on the other the dimension of Torah-observance that Jesus came to perfect. James mediated between Jews and Gentiles at the first Council of

Jerusalem, reconciling conservative Jewish Christians to the presence in the Church of those outside the Law. He puts forward nothing less than ‘the perfect law ... of liberty’ (James 1:25). The Jewish writer Franz Rosenzweig suggested that God’s ‘Star of Redemption’ had Judaism at its core, from which the rays of Christianity spread to the Gentile world; Rosenzweig argued that Christianity had to stay close to Jewish faith and observance or it would get lost in the gnosticisms of the pagan world. By regarding the principle of tradition and law as a constitutive element in the Church, von Balthasar echoes Rosenzweig in making the tie to Jewish tradition a bulwark against cultural assimilation and compromise.

Paul

Paul represents the dimension of *universalism and inculturation*. The apostle of the ‘Church from the nations’, he represents the Church’s engagement with the cultures of the world in which it is to find a home, becoming ‘all things to all people ... for the sake of the gospel’ (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). He also represents charismatic vocation—he is outside the structure of the Twelve, yet is given a vocation which the hierarchical Church must acknowledge as willed by Christ (p. 144). He stands for the dimension that is the creation and development of local churches which are to find their place within the *Catholica*. He writes of his ‘anxiety for all the churches’ (2 Corinthians 11:28), and of his ‘pain of childbirth until Christ is formed’ in them (Galatians 4:19). Paul also symbolizes the dimension of freedom in the Spirit; the dialectic between James and Paul (Romans 4:2-3 versus James 2:20-23) mirrors the dialectic in the Church between freedom from the law and obedience to the law until the return of Christ. He represents, in short, the dimension of *apostolic energy* in the Church.

Authority and Reciprocity

Pope. God does not perform miracles in the ordinary conduct of his Church. It would be a strange miracle if infallibility resided in one man, but that it should be in the many seems so natural that God’s work is hidden beneath nature, as in all his other works.

(Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*)

The Petrine office is thus set in an indispensable relation to other principles; the concrete centre of unity in the *Catholica* requires a



living relationship with the principles of love and holiness, of tradition and adaptation. It is important that the Petrine dimension, located in the *collegium* of the Twelve, is the only one to find visible, institutional expression (the papacy); there is no stable focus of holiness (how could there be?), while the principles of Jamesian tradition and Pauline adaptation have been in tension since the admission of Gentiles at Antioch, and continue to be so today.

Each element in the fourfold office should be directed, von Balthasar judges, towards what he calls 'the *eschatological centre of gravity* of the Gospel of Christ', a dense phrase whose meaning is

difficult to discern (p.329). I take it to mean that the fourfold office must aim at giving the most complete form of witness to God's unsurpassable self-gift in Christ, and must settle for nothing less than this. In which case, it is the Johannine principle, the ideal of holiness and unitive love for Christ, towards which the interaction of the other three principles must be directed. (John, after all, is the point of contact between Marian holiness and Petrine authority.) The goal of the fourfold office is the holiness of the Church. Consequently, the Petrine office should be enabling the Church to embody Johannine love and holiness, with an eye on what comes both from the Jamesian principle of tradition and from the Pauline principle of adaptation.

Sometimes the fourfold office discerns easily what teaching to give in order to foster love and holiness, but not always:

... there are cases where it is extremely difficult to weigh the reasons for and against, particularly when one tries to keep in mind the 'eschatological centre of gravity', not only because some current situation did not exist in the period of biblical revelation, which means that conclusions have to be drawn from the spirit of a unique historical past and applied to a very different present, but also because Christ's Church contains a wide spectrum of human possibilities or obstructions, at the same time contributing to and detracting from a perfect human response to the perfect grace of God in Christ A decision that is justifiable for those whose love is alive might be impractical for the lukewarm ... on the other hand, a decision made to suit these latter could seriously endanger the balance of the Church's eschatological response, the ideal of those who love. (p.329)

The situation generated by *Humanae vitae*, von Balthasar says, is precisely of such a kind. *Humanae vitae*, in which Pope Paul VI opted to point the Church's teaching regarding marriage and contraception towards the latter (Johannine) ideal, is the most controversial instance of recent papal teaching. Paul VI was offering a difficult teaching. Von Balthasar's presents the case of *Humanae vitae* in terms of the functioning of the fourfold office:

... though empowered and obliged to take the final, personal responsibility alone, the Pope is directed to share in a dialogue with the other three partners of the 'foursome' (pp.330-331).

The problem, according to von Balthasar, has to do with the *form* of the teaching (an encyclical which bound the consciences of married Catholics) rather than its *content* (p.330). Von Balthasar challenges neither the decision made by the Pope to issue the encyclical, nor its (non-infallible) content. But he does wonder whether another, less decisive response might not have been as effective:

It might have been sufficient to point to the ideal as a 'normative goal' to satisfy the objective, eschatological idea of the Christian concept of selfless and self-renouncing love, the personal ideal of the committed, while at the same time both stimulating and reassuring those who were either too unable or too perplexed to follow this course.⁶ (p.330)

Peter's ministry has to be exercised collegially:

... Peter too must be continually learning: he must not think that he can carry out his office in isolation (which could easily tempt him to overvalue it). He too must take his bearings by the all-encompassing totality of the Church, which expresses itself concretely in the dynamic interplay of her major missions and in the laws inherent in her structure Revelation is entrusted to the whole Church, and all, under the leadership of Peter, are to preserve it, interpret it and produce a living exposition of it. And since the office of Peter is borne by fallible human beings, it needs everyone's watchful but loving co-operation so that the exercise of this office may be characterized by the degree of 'in-fallibility' that belongs to it. More precisely, this means that a pope can exercise his office fruitfully for all only if he is *recognised and loved* in a truly ecclesial way, even in the context of instruction or dispute. (p.315)

That quotation is worthy of meditation, not simply for what it says about how the papacy should behave, but also because it directs attention towards the question of the appropriate response to Petrine authority. For authority to work well, the one in authority and the one under authority must be in accord; either of them can cause the process to break down.

⁶ It might be argued, nevertheless, that what von Balthasar outlines here as an alternative is nevertheless what the encyclical actually achieved. For all its insistence on the Johannine ideal, *Humanae vitae* (for example in n.29) is coloured by a nuanced Pauline response to the presence of both 'strong' and 'weak' members of the community and a pastoral strategy for directing them toward unity (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-9:14)—a point which public comment often ignores.



Holiness, Maturity and Mutuality

At one point, von Balthasar engages with Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932), whose works were prohibited during the purges of theologians under Pius X. Though Laberthonnière was a sharp-tongued critic of Roman authorities, he asked three penetrating questions which von Balthasar sees as still pertinent:

In what spirit and in what manner should leadership and instruction be given, to be truly human and Christian?

And, in turn, how should a person who is progressing in faith prepare himself to receive guidance and instruction?

How should people like us (who have not been given authority) act, so that, spiritually deepened by the acceptance of authority, we can contribute to the spiritual deepening of authority itself? (p.262)

I cannot prescribe what the answers to Laberthonnière's questions should be, since they bear upon each Catholic's core of spiritual responsibility: Levinas' aphorism, 'responsibility cannot be preached, only borne', is exactly right here. But some comments can be made.

The third of Laberthonnière's questions looks for spiritual deepening in the *acceptance* of authority, something which can be expected to deepen correspondingly the *exercise* of authority. We are called to a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality: by my acceptance of authority, I am building up the conditions under which authority in the Church can be exercised fruitfully. I have obligations to help those in authority as they seek to promote the Church's holiness. I must acknowledge this responsibility if my membership of the Church is to make any sense, and if my identity as a Catholic Christian is to be spiritually and ethically mature.

For von Balthasar, Laberthonnière's last question 'is still with the Church', and it is 'the question of mutuality, of *communio*' (p.265). It points, he says, towards how we should *help* one another. If we are to avoid provoking authority to respond in 'pre-conciliar ways', we need to bring this simple idea of 'help' to the fore in our reflections. Von Balthasar here is pointing towards the quality of *conversation* fostered in the Church, something for which everyone has responsibility. Where there is deafness, people shout.

In Laberthonnière's opinion, the mutuality which exists among members of the Church means that,

Obeying has the same dignity as commanding; the existence of both is justified only if they lead to free brotherly union of minds and souls in love and truth in the bosom of the heavenly Father (p.264; emphasis added).

This seems to me exactly right and evangelical in its insight. The question is not about where 'power' lies in the Church; the question is about how to eliminate the category of 'power' from Church members' attitudes. This will not happen by abrogating the claims of the Petrine

office, nor by transferring them democratically to synodical assemblies, however useful such bodies may nevertheless be.

That obedience has the same dignity as commanding is also the single point which disturbs any possible parallel we may want to draw between the Church and secular organisations: there are, after all, no 'greater' and 'lesser' individuals in the Church, since the only dignity which lasts into eternity is holiness. If obeying is not less than commanding, then the mature Christian acceptance of authority is not servility, but rather a responsibility freely undertaken for the good of all, as an expression of devotion to Christ. If commanding is regarded as no greater than obeying, it will be exercised humbly and responsibly.

Although von Balthasar would distance himself from the anti-Roman stance adopted by Laberthonnière in his long confrontation with harsh authority, there is an immense sympathy of tone between them. Laberthonnière's statements about the spiritual maturity which should be sought both by those who exercise authority and by those who respond to it are exact and profound: we help one another, not by creating an adolescent 'Church of Siblings' in which authority is banished or marginalised, but by fostering an attentive and humble maturity both in the exercise of authority and in our response to it.

Von Balthasar's constellation of ecclesial principles and of the features of the fourfold office describes the Church in a way which enables Laberthonnière's questions to be asked properly and answered appropriately. If von Balthasar is right that the centre of the Church is not Petrine but Marian, then the obedience of faith flowing from Marian experience generates a mature spiritual response to the authority of Peter and the *collegium*. A sense that the core of the Church is *lay holiness*, which precedes hierarchical structuring, is a corrective to any exaggerated estimate of papal authority, and should condition how the papacy conducts itself in the Church. If Petrine authority is to avoid destructive patterns of authoritarian isolation, it must acknowledge other, equally valid dimensions of the Church, and serve them and listen to them with respect.

At the same time, von Balthasar's insistence that Petrine authority is an indispensable dimension of the Church, whose role is not to be dissolved nor its claims softened, firmly sets papal authority within the essential structure of the Church and requires courteous acknowledgment from the members of the Church. His account of the fourfold office is, I think, a helpful configuration of the factors which

come into play in the proper exercise of Church authority. Von Balthasar indeed 'presses the community of the Church to examine the bias in its nature against its central institutional focus'; he also, I think, provides the Church with an account of its identity that enables authority to be set, judged, evaluated and valued in a way appropriate to the unique function of the Church in God's work of grace.

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