

From: "Reflexion d'un théologien": Yves CONGAR

UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS No. 7. July 1972

Section: OECUMÉNISME ET EGLISES LOCALES

The question here arises in the context of the relation of local initiatives to the demands of the Unity and Communion which mark the whole Church and which no local initiative must ignore.

1. 'Church' exists when the Eucharist is celebrated.

But does any sort of group gathered round any Eucharist (i.e. celebrated in any circumstances) constitute 'church'? The answer is negative: the existence of the 'church' requires a certain stability and a certain form of ministry. There is a difference between 'ministry' and 'service' (the Greek word diaconia covers both):-

"La notion de service évoque quelque chose de plus occasionel et de plus spontané tandis que la notion de ministère requiert chose de plus stable éventuellement homologué par en haut et même liturgiquement consacré. De même, un groupe rassemblé occasionnellement pour la Messe sera appelé 'communauté' et non 'Eglise'."

2. In the normal run of things the local Church is the Church which has the full complement of its instruments of ministry - and this presupposes the Episcopate which has been the 'clef de voûte' since the end of the first century.

The local church is, therefore, the d i o c e s e .

3. Does the local church enjoy complete autonomy? Can it decide to unite (with another local church) independently of the whole Church?

"Ainsi maintenant un grand nombre de foyers mixtes se prétendent d'accord sur la foi et revendiquent de pouvoir communier ensemble. Ils n'ignorent pas en effet que nous sommes arrivés à un point de maturation très avancé dans le consensus doctrinal et spécialement en matière d'eucharistie. Il s'agit de la substance de la foi et non pas de la théologie ... Et si un tel accord existe

sur l'essentiel, des foyers mixtes ou d'autres groupes se demandent si la division persiste. Ils ne sentent plus ni catholiques, ni protestants, mais unis dans une même communauté. Ils sont prêts à communier ensemble dans une même Église."

But this raises a very serious question, especially as, if this practice is adopted, there emerge new 'schisms' within the respective churches committed by this individual action.

It is true that historical instances exist where two churches have maintained communion with one another but not with a third! (cfr. St. Basil and the schism of Méléce.) But this is rare and exceptional. Nicaea had already declared the indivisibility of 'communion'.

Section: LA QUESTION DU BAPTEME NON CONFSSIONNEL

The question is: can one be baptised without adhesion to a particular Christian community?

1. Karl Barth is quoted (by Congar) as having said: "pour travailler à l'instauration de l'Église indivise, il faut se situer quelque part dans l'Église divisée".

Baptism is indeed becoming a member of the Body of Christ but it is also entrance into a community and into a Church. This principle - this fact - is all the more important as the part of the community in the sacraments is progressively realised.

2. Baptism is 'insertion' into a Church and so yet more vividly linked to a confession of faith. Even though content to recite our common credo, the confession of faith to which one adheres is that of the community which admits the new member.
3. To the objection that a person might feel much nearer to, for example, certain Protestants (even in the area of eucharistic faith) than to ignorant or indifferent Catholics, one must assert firmly that, though true at a human level, it is far from true on the dogmatic or objective truth level. We must firmly adhere to the distinction between subjective and objective truth, however unpopular at the moment. Sincerity is no substitute for such truth.

In the case of the present objection, the poverty-stricken Catholic is still linked o b j e c t i v e l y and intentionally to the fullness of faith which is in the Church. He is in fact and in reality in communion with the Church of his baptism (unless he explicitly denies that faith) - even though he does not explicitly affirm it and it remains true that a Protestant, conscious of his eucharistic faith, can l i v e a more authentic faith in his life.

Section: THE PROBLEM OF INTERCOMMUNION

After a tart comment about the undisciplined who then turn to their responsible authorities to validate their deviant practice, Congar remarks that we cannot fail to recognise the strength of the demand among the young and from 'foyers mixtes'. He notes also the thrust embedded in the doctrinal consensus of WINDSOR in the sphere of the Eucharist, and the further consensus on ministry obtained in the USA.

He feels that a new situation is emerging that requires a new attitude but one, nevertheless, in conformity with the depth of Tradition in the Church. We cannot isolate the Eucharist when we speak of agreement at the level of faith: Trinitarian and Christological belief are just as firmly at issue.

His own opinion is that, when this is obtained, then there should be freedom to admit Christians, professing substantially this faith, to the altar. (I imagine he would go along with the Tillard nomenclature: pastoral admission to Communion - A.C.C.).

1. However, we must be aware of the intensely personalist character of this demand of the young, etc. A person cannot isolate himself from his Church. He c o m m i t s his church as much as a bishop or priest and he may not shrug off this responsibility.
2. Of course the insoluble (this is his adjective - A.C.C.) question of reciprocity must be confronted! Here he has his own solution to the particular case of two committed members of different denominations (obviously professing the same eucharistic faith) who go to Taizé, a married couple. In this case he would allow reciprocity on condition that every ambiguity was absent from the action (in order to safeguard the unity of the marriage.) To avoid the inherent ambiguity he demanded, in the case in question, that the children should not be involved. He goes on to say:-

"Alors la partie catholique donnera à sa communion à la Sainte Cène le sens que lui donnent les protestants eux-mêmes, à savoir qu'elle est le mémorial de la mort et de la résurrection du Seigneur. Elle ne pourra y voir la plénitude du dogme catholique" (p.19)

3. It is here, he notes, that we confront the difficult question of the reconciliation of ministries:-

un pasteur
"Il n'y a pas en effet d'équivalence: un prêtre n'est pas un pasteur; n'est pas un prêtre. Pour nous l'ordination épiscopale ou presbyterale ou diaconale est l'objet d'un sacrement proprement dit qui, à mon avis, engage une participation nouvelle au sacerdoce du Christ" (ibid)

Congar admits that his opinion is not shared by all Catholic theologians who reject the idea of such a participation, But he affirms that it is required by Catholic dogma and by Vatican II.

4. He rejects the ideas put forward in the October Number of the NRT on the possible reconciliation of ministries which he cites in his own article.
5. He confesses that he now understands Apostolic Succession more correctly which, he says, is nothing other than "the permanence of the uniqueness (L'unicité) of the Mission given to the Twelve". In spite of secondary differences (not all their powers were transmitted), we know of no other guarantee in the concrete for entrance into this apostolic succession than the imposition of hands by the bishop, given that, at the same time, continuity in the faith is assured (rightly insisted upon by our Protestant brethren).
6. Referring back to his article (already documented for the Commission - A.C.C.) and his reference to "reception" and "economy", he asserts that neither of these factors can create anything (which was not there before? - A.C.C.). The rite is always presupposed by the Church when it ratifies or rejects a ministry.
6. His final conclusion is important:-

"Toujours dans la perspective d'une réconciliation des ministères, on répète volontiers aujourd'hui qu'une vraie communauté doit avoir et a de vrais ministères. Or Vatican II a reconnu à la communauté protestante

la qualité de vraie Eglise. Il ne faut pas cependant oublier que, pour Vatican II, l'Eglise du Christ et des Apôtres subsiste dans l'Eglise catholique qui est en communion avec les évêques présidés par le Pape. Et lorsqu'on affirme que les Eglises et les ministères protestants sont de vraies Eglises et de vrais ministères, je remarque seulement qu'ils le sont dans un certain sens. Mais s'agit-il de la pleine vérité du ministère issu des Apôtres? Ma réponse est négative et j'attire votre attention sur le fait que des simplifications hâtives n'ont jamais favorisé une véritable avancée de l'œcuménisme".

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