

# AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

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**W**E LIVE in critical times. For some religious the task of revising constitutions seems an exercise in near-futility. Others take a more stoical approach, bow to the directives of the Council and the Pope, and knuckle down to their unenviable assignment.

For the majority, I would venture to say that the prospect of revised constitutions fails to stir great enthusiasm. This is how it should be. Expectations of help from written constitutions for living the christian religious life should be modest. At the same time, if we are sincere in our desire to belong in mind and heart to any group of religious men or women, we need to be deeply convinced of the necessity of such written constitutions.<sup>1</sup>

The *Motu Proprio* of Pope Paul VI recognizes the necessity of 'fusing' both the spiritual and juridical elements in future Constitutions: 'If the principal charters of Institutes are to have stable roots and be imbued by the spirit of truth and an order which breathes life, then both the spiritual and the juridical elements must be fused in them. It is for this reason that all must avoid producing a purely juridical text or one given over to exhortation'.<sup>2</sup> Such honest recognition of pitfalls may not increase the confidence of those setting out on or already engaged in this work, though it brings to light an important point. The remarks that follow are intended to encourage and help.

Constitutions are concerned with persons and institutions, and both have their own properties. Any serious attempt to provide a framework within which the whole group and each member can live, directed by the same Spirit, must respect persons and organizational structures. It is worth recalling that St Ignatius, in the second paragraph of the preamble to his constitutions, draws our attention to the 'body of the Society taken as a whole', as well as 'the individual members'.<sup>3</sup> In all that follows the preamble, he is sensitively aware both of individual persons, their growth and development, as well as of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf Ganss, G. E., ed. and trans.: *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis, 1970), Const. 134; and Giles Cusson, *infra*, pp 82ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Supplement to The Way*, 4 (November 1967), p 13.

<sup>3</sup> Const. 135. Ganss, p 120.

social organization to which they belong. Revised constitutions will need to show the same sensitivity to persons as well as organizations.

Why revised constitutions at all? Until we religious have become much more aware of the profound changes which have taken place and are still taking place in the world around us, and the influence which such changes have on us, it is unlikely that we will see any necessity for revised norms for our congregations. The Council fathers certainly showed themselves aware of such changes: 'Today the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world . . . these changes recoil upon (man), upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective. . . . Hence, we can already speak of a true social and cultural transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well'.<sup>4</sup> So they recognized the need for revision: 'The institutions, laws and modes of thinking and feeling as handed down from previous generations do not always seem to be well adapted to the contemporary state of affairs. Hence arises an upheaval in the manner and even the norms of behaviour'.<sup>5</sup>

Most religious today scarcely need to be reminded of 'upheaval' in their lives, but it never ceases to surprise how often they seem to think such upheaval is confined to religious houses. Their frustration is only increased by the failure to appreciate and understand what is happening in the lives of their married brothers and sisters and their families. The Church teaches us otherwise: 'Thus the Church, at once a visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity, and experiences the same earthly lot as does the world'.<sup>6</sup>

As already stated, constitutions are concerned with persons and institutions or organizations. The reflections which follow focus more on the organizational side of our lives. From my own limited experience of religious communities, the area of religious life today on the organizational side which is causing most hurt and confusion is the area of authority and freedom. Hence the ambivalent attitude of many about revised (or indeed unrevised) constitutions.

Some see revised constitutions as a last hope of getting back to the stability of former days, when superiors commanded and their subjects obeyed. It is precisely this return to former ways that is feared

<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

and resisted by many others. The latter much prefer the present uncertainties to the former systems which they experienced.<sup>7</sup> Religious 'horror stories' come in two varieties today: stories (often about superiors) depicting the authoritarian régimes of yesterday, illustrated with examples of their depersonalizing processes and effects; stories (often by superiors) depicting the *laissez-faire*, free-for-all systems of today. The depersonalizing effect of the newer system is felt by some, but it may be only clearly seen in retrospect. Horror stories provide extremes. (Like all caricatures, they can help us to situate ourselves.)

There is an inevitable tension between freedom and authority. If a person is not comfortable with tension, he can attempt to eliminate it by coming down heavily on one side and turning a blind eye on the other. Some communities have done just that. The style of leadership in one community can be basically authoritarian: that is, all determination of policy, down to details of behaviour, is decided by the leader. In another community, a *laissez-faire* style of leadership is prevalent, where there is complete freedom of group or individual decision, with the absolute minimum of the leader's participation.

Both styles create atmospheres that are de-personalizing and hurtful. Both styles emanate from an implicit but specific anthropology or understanding of human nature. The authoritarian approach seeks to control the behaviour of others because it distrusts human nature; the *laissez-faire* approach provides no real help to individuals, because of a naïve belief in the maturity of those who are no longer children.

One can see both styles operating today, to the detriment of good and generous people. I am thinking of the principal of a large school who must have the superior's permission to go visiting in the evening; or of another community where community vehicles have been allowed to become the virtual property of two members. Examples could be multiplied. As one author puts it: 'Both styles of leadership undermine the dignity of man as expressed by his freedom: the authoritarian style, because it does not accept the freedom to be wrong; the *laissez-faire* style, because it considers man as *de facto* invulnerable, and thus without the dignity of responsibility which presupposes freedom'.<sup>8</sup>

If we admit that cultural and social patterns influence the human dimensions of the Church as an organization, and thus influence the

<sup>7</sup> Cf *What should be included in the new constitutions?*, Michel Dortel-Claudot S.J. (Rome, 1978), p 7.

<sup>8</sup> Rulla, Luigi M. S.J.: *Depth Psychology and Vocation* (Chicago, 1971), p 281.

structures of religious communities, then it is important for those revising constitutions to know what *are* these patterns in the area of freedom and authority. John Courtney Murray identifies three aspects of Pope Leo XIII's thought which had a determining influence on catholic understanding of authority before 1962:<sup>9</sup>

1. His retrospective reading of history, which led to a style of authority fashioned as a reaction to the threats of the Protestant Reformation and then the French Revolution.
2. His conception of the political relationship between ruler and ruled was vertical: the ruled are subjects, their single duty is to obey; 'the ruler is to be the tutor and guardian of virtue in the body politic; the whole of the common good is committed to his charge. The people are simply the objects of rule. Leo's political doctrine was plainly authoritarian'.<sup>10</sup>
3. His ecclesiology, his theology of the Church: 'those who hold office make the decisions, doctrinal and pastoral. The faithful in the ranks submit to the decisions and execute the orders. The concept of obedience is likewise simple. To obey is to do the will of the superior: that is the essence of obedience'.<sup>11</sup>

Most religious will recognize the above picture. Indeed, some have seen no other. Of course, this classical conception of authority has much to recommend it: a vivid awareness of God, the vision of obedience as a sharing in the humanity of Christ, an awareness of the charism that accompanies authority. The problem is that the classical conception is not adequate for us *today*; and many religious Institutes still seem incapable of recognizing its inadequacy.

The Church, like every institution, fashions its doctrine under the 'signs of the times'. The fathers of Vatican II recognized two such signs as crucial: man's growing consciousness of his dignity as a person, and his increasing awareness of community. Granted this twofold consciousness, then it becomes clearer why the classical conception of authority is inadequate today, why frustration and enervation can occur in communities where it is still operative. Its emphasis on authority, discipline and dependence often led to a frustration of the subject's initiative and responsibility to the point of turning a person

<sup>9</sup> Murray, John Courtney S.J.: 'Freedom, Authority, Community', in *America* (1966), pp 734-41.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p 735.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

into a 'thing'. Often, such an exercise of authority leads to religious being motivated through fear of punishment or hope of reward (compliance), or through desire to enjoy a satisfying relationship with those in authority (identification). Such behaviour is a long way from the interior deepening of gospel-values, which occurs when a person freely makes these values his own because of their intrinsic worth. These three concepts, compliance, identification and internalization, drawn from the field of social psychology, can be of great help to anyone who is trying to provide guidelines for himself or others to live by.

Most communities today straddle the year 1962, and have come under other influences as well as the thought of Leo XIII. What are these influences in the area of freedom and authority? Again, Courtney Murray picks out four facets of Vatican II's ecclesiology which are relevant:

1. The Church is primarily the people of God and the members enjoy a basic equality in dignity and freedom because they possess the same Spirit.
2. The Church is an inter-personal communion.
3. It is essentially missionary and has a service to perform towards all humanity.
4. The Church is a visible society in which authority and juridical functions are essentially related to and in service of its communal and missionary activities; authority therefore . . . stands, as it were, within the community as a ministry to be performed in the service of the community.<sup>12</sup>

Leo XIII's ecclesiology gave us a much different emphasis: 'authority seems, as it were, to stand over the community as a power to decide and command'.<sup>13</sup> Leo XIII formed his concept of Church as society: hence he started from and stressed the structure of authority in the Church, giving little scope for the functions of freedom. Vatican II, on the other hand, formed its concept of Church as community, thus bringing to light the functions of christian authority and christian freedom, all in the service of community.

Just as before the second Vatican Council, most religious communities were governed according to the 'classical theory' of organizations in line with Leo XIII's thought, today, many have adopted a community structure and system of leadership closer to

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 737.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

the so-called 'Industrial Humanism', which lays heavy stress on *referent influence* in groups. Thanks to the behavioural sciences, we can have a clearer understanding of this powerful source of influence in our communities.

Referent influence is only one of six sources of influence understood as properties characterizing the *structures* of a group or organization: informational, coercive, reward, referent, expert and legitimate. Referent influence is operative when the one being influenced may attain a gratifying self-image through his relation with the influencing agent (an actual leader or an absent but inspiring person or group). However abstract that may sound, anyone who lives in a religious community today will have experienced this influence in some way. The current emphasis on a continuing evaluation of ourselves, our apostolates, our life-styles, our attitudes, and so on, is partly cause, partly effect of the increased strength of referent influence. This exercises a 'comparative function' rather than a 'normative function' between individuals and their reference group or leader. For our ordinary standards and ways of behaving, we tend to be much more influenced by other members of the community or reference group, rather than by the behaviour of superiors, the exhortations of chapter documents, constitutions and the like.

It has been noted that the new stress placed by Vatican II on community in a renewed ecclesiology can be misunderstood as an emphasis on referent influence in community.<sup>14</sup> But these emphases are not identical; and the tension, disillusionment and lethargy in religious communities can be traced to this fundamental misunderstanding. Referent influence takes on increased significance and force when an individual finds himself in a situation of uneasiness, where he has only a vague idea of 'what is going on', or where there is an empirical questioning of all norms, of uncertainty about previous frames of reference. Part of this uneasiness can be due to a failure to understand that our religious communities and congregations are normative organizations, based on the internalization of ideals and directives, freely accepted as legitimate. The very welcome swing away from sensing our communities as in some way coercive does not always lead to an understanding of them as normative.

The emphasis on community life understood as 'referent influence in community' may lead religious communities to adopt a structure based on the so-called 'Industrial Humanism'. This has much to

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<sup>14</sup> Rulla, *op. cit.*, p 351.

recommend it, in that it includes the desire to restore a sense of personal dignity to every man, stresses participation in decision-making, emphasizes opportunities for self-determination to offset the paternalism of the more authoritarian system, and strives to integrate individual and organizational goals. Clearly, the organizational theory proposed by industrial humanism is a great improvement over the classical theory of organizations. Nevertheless, this humanism is also inadequate for our religious institutions of today and tomorrow.

For those engaged in revising constitutions, Paul VI has made a most enlightening suggestion: 'If religious life is to be renewed, it must alter what is accidental in its structures to suit the rapidly changing circumstances of human life at every level'.<sup>15</sup> This directive belongs to what we would call 'vocational humanism': a concept of authority which steers a course midway between the classical theory and industrial humanism,<sup>16</sup> and one which appears most suitable to present circumstances. We see that the classical approach, emphasizing a kind of autocracy with powers of rewarding or punishing, often leads to mere compliance, or at most identification, with the institution and its representatives. The industrial humanistic approach is more democratic, encourages participation and stresses the referent influence. However, it too, can often lead to mere compliance and horizontal identification.

The framers of constitutions today must aim at fostering a response which goes deeper than either compliance or even identification. They must aim at drawing up directives which bring together the insights of a developing theology and the relevant contributions of the behavioural sciences. The purpose, of course, will be to help those sincerely dedicated religious who desire to progress along the path mapped out by *these* constitutions: that is, to make their own according to time, place and circumstances, the dispositions of Christ Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

Religious institutions are *normative* organizations as distinct from coercive or utilitarian organizations: that is, the members freely choose to live by the gospel-values as proposed by this group, neither compelled by an authoritarian system, nor simply to be like the others in the group. What distinguishes the religious institution

<sup>15</sup> *Evangelica Testificatio*, 51; cf *Supplement to The Way*, 14 (Autumn 1971), p 24.

<sup>16</sup> In what follows I draw on the excellent treatment by Luigi Rulla *s.j.* *op. cit.* The interested reader will find the topic treated more exhaustively there.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Phil 2, 5.

from others are the unalterable, normative Christo-centric values. Such values are perennial: union with God, imitation of Christ, poverty, chastity and obedience; though the norms for the living out of these values will change in a changing world. Hence the possibility and desirability of revising constitutions.

These same Christo-centric values will be witnessed to in all three dimensions of the institution: the intra-personal, the inter-personal and the apostolate. Unlike the classical theory and the industrial humanism outlined above, the individual members of the organization will be seen as variable, not as 'given': that is, each one is vulnerable, but vulnerable in different degrees, and therefore requiring appropriate *personal* care and concern. Both the classical and the industrial humanistic approaches are inadequate when they treat of human motivation. The former tended to over-estimate the rational and the cognitive at the expense of human affectivity; the latter neglects the pervasive influence of the subconscious, so that it often leads to an over-optimistic and unrealistic view of the person. What is needed is a more complete understanding of both the cognitive and the affective, and the unconscious as well as the conscious dimensions of human nature. In revising constitutions which are to serve as norms for others to live by, it appears *simpliste* to suggest that 'we must believe in the grace of the Council',<sup>18</sup> unless those responsible for the delicate work of revision are theologically and psycho-socially equipped or assisted in their task.

Many people today experience membership of institutions as barriers to individual self-fulfilment and happiness. Indeed, institutions of any kind are often perceived today as preventing growth and self-fulfilment. The followers of the industrial humanist school of thought suggest changes in organizational structure to meet the growth-needs of the members. Clearly this principle is useful for religious communities, provided that gospel-values retain their primacy. However, it should be honestly recognized, particularly in our consumer society where our felt needs are under constant stimulation, that the lack of opportunity for gratifying needs is not always due to inappropriate organizational structures. Quite frequently it is because such needs are integral to personal conflicts. Though conflictual needs are not the subject of this article, it is worth mentioning briefly one of their most consistent elements: their insatiability. Conflictual needs for autonomy, reassurance, affection, or for power

<sup>18</sup> Dortel-Claudot, *op. cit.*, p 12.



and control tend to be insatiable, like the alcoholic's need for drink. They can hardly be satisfied in any kind of structure. Similarly, it cannot be repeated too often that self-fulfilment in christian living must be understood and experienced as a side-effect of self-transcendence, which necessarily includes renunciation of *some* of our most deeply-felt needs: certainly not as the gratification of all our needs and the cult of self-worship.<sup>19</sup> 'Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life'.<sup>20</sup>

Religious institutions aim specifically at helping their members to internalize the values of the christian gospel. Thus they cannot be satisfied with the classical style of leadership, which aims at the mere organizational control of the members' behaviour with its heavy stress on observance of rules; nor indeed with the industrial humanistic style, which aims at a social control by attempting to provide a suitable inter-actional climate. What seems to be urgently required today is a style of leadership which aims at 'creating the organizational and social conditions which lead to *self*-control, because of internalization'.<sup>21</sup>

By *internalization* is meant, briefly, that the individual, aware of his own needs, gradually makes his own appropriate classifications and choices, is able to accept the necessary renunciation of those needs opposed to the values of religious life, and progressively abandons false and unrealistic expectations.<sup>22</sup> The final purpose of any constitutions must be to favour internalization of values accepted and freely agreed upon by individual persons coming together to support each other in living out the same values. Detailed discussion of how this may be attempted is beyond the scope of this article. Indeed the vital matters of individual growth or arrest in the process of internalization and of religious formation have been treated elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf Vitz, Paul C.: *Psychology as Religion, the Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Jn 12, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Rulla, *op. cit.*, p 355.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Rulla L. M. S.J., Riddick Joyce S.S.C. and Imoda, Franco S.J.: *Entering and Leaving Vocation: Intrapsychic Dynamics* (Rome, 1976), ch 10.

<sup>23</sup> Cf The works of Rulla and of Rulla, Riddick and Imoda mentioned above. A most useful summary of these rather specialist treatises is that given by Roger Champoux S.J. in *New Perspectives in Religious Formation*, reprinted from *Supplement to Doctrine and Life* (Dublin, 1977).

It should be pointed out that the *via media* advocated here, of some reasonable minimum of concreteness and definition of structures and rules as an aid to the internalization of gospel-values, can never eliminate the tension to which this article has referred. Man is a being of infinite desire who resents limitation inherent in every choice.<sup>24</sup> Yet every decision is an act of self-limitation, whether it is purely private or institutionalized; and every decision is, in the last analysis, an anticipation of one's own death. One could say that every decision, private or institutionalized, is stamped with the sign of the Cross.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore any attempt to convert into practice, at least to some degree, the values of a particular religious group is marked by a degree of conflict which cannot be altogether eliminated. Yet there must be some conversion: actions are always concrete; theories can only be general. When it comes to practical directives, it also seems inevitable that some of the practicalities will be arbitrary, in the sense that the Gospels, Council documents, and so on, will indicate that they are not the only possible way of doing things.

Further, every group generates some norms to regulate the behaviour of its members; there can be no such thing as a normless group. In the absence of explicit norms, informal norms will take over in the form of group-pressure: that is, the most dominating and persistent will prevail, whether they are right or wrong.

Another major practical difficulty which cannot be dealt with here is where precisely to locate the frontier between what is regulated and what is left to individual initiative. Initiative there must be, or the individual is reduced to a dangerous passivity. But if everything is left to personal initiative, with total absence of structure, then we have set up the conditions which obtain in one of the 'projective tests' used by psychologists; the very absence of all structure serves to maximize the expression of personal idiosyncrasies or conflicts, rather than that of the reasonable or idealistic level of the personality. It is not difficult to envisage the seriously disruptive consequences for community living.

The tension existing between authority and freedom belongs fundamentally to our phase of salvation history. The law of God is not yet fully written in the heart of man; this promise<sup>26</sup> has been fully realized only in Christ himself. Meanwhile the Christian is instructed

<sup>24</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Demmer, Klaus: *Die Lebensentscheidung* (München, 1974), pp 72-80.

<sup>26</sup> Cf Jer 31, 31.

in two ways by the Spirit from within and by the Church (or part of the Church) from without.<sup>27</sup>

To conclude these observations in general terms: the task in revising constitutions seems to be to preserve what was best in the classical view (such as the spirit of faith and self-sacrifice, its stress on the 'vertical' dimension of religious living), and also to integrate the genuine and valid contributions of a more 'horizontal' or humanistic approach. Nor is this a matter of overcoming a contradiction or finding a compromise. While an excessive use of authority may stifle initiative and responsibility, a certain clarity and concord, both on the levels of principle and of practice, are needed in any religious group, in order to bring about an effective use of freedom both in individual commitment and in apostolic co-operation.

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<sup>27</sup> Schürmann, H.: 'Die Gemeinde des neuen Bundes als der Quellort des sittlichen Erkennens nach Paulus', in *Catholica*, 26 (1972), pp 15-27.