

A CONTRIBUTORY DOCUMENT

The Army of Mary and the Catholic Church: Separated Brethren

At the beginning of the 1960s, the expression “separated brethren” was brought to the fore by Pope John XXIII to describe the relationship existing between members of the Catholic Church and those of other Christian Churches. In the context of that time, the meaning of that expression was something like this: the Protestants and we are separated, that is true, but all the same we are brothers

in Jesus Christ. So the emphasis bore more on fraternalism and less on separation, brought out the first and blurred the second.

And now, that expression could re-surface to describe the evolution of the relationship between the Army of Mary and the Catholic Church, with the emphasis on fraternalism or separation, on what unites or on what divides, depending on the point of view

from which the reality is considered. What will perhaps be astonishing is that this expression should be used to describe the relationship with the Catholic Church of a group that had made fidelity to Rome and to the Pope the *sine qua non* sign by which it could be recognized. But the occurrence of recent events raises several serious questions. Let us take a closer look at them.

Strange Presbyteral Ordinations

Separation: that is what emerges from a ceremony held, June 1, in their chapel at Lac-Échemin when the simulated ordination of six priests took place there. It was indeed a simulation since the minister presiding over the ceremony is not a bishop and has no part in the apostolic succession; he had no power to do validly

what he did. So the six men who were the beneficiaries of the ceremony are not priests; they cannot celebrate the Eucharist, pardon sins, preach the word of God – in short, they cannot exercise the functions of a priest.

Other priests are members of the Sons of Mary and tied in with the Army of Mary. They were previously validly ordained, but they are not authorized by the Archbishop of Quebec to exercise the priestly ministry here. In a *Special Declaration* published in *Pastorale-Québec*, March 26, 2007, Cardinal Marc Ouellet said, "I confirm and reinforce what was formerly expressed by the Canadian Bishops... The Army of Mary has clearly and publicly become a schismatic movement and thus a non-Catholic association.... Its priests and deacons can no longer exercise any ministry within the Archdiocese of Quebec." In technical terms, these priests do not possess the required canonical faculties, they have no jurisdiction and neither can they any longer carry out the functions of a priest for the benefit of the faithful.

A Pontifical Commissioner

Moreover, the Sons of Mary priests are in a complicated situation with regard to their priesthood. They were ordained priests for service in dioceses from which they have long been absent; the relationship with the bishop who called them to the priesthood has become a sort of empty shell; the bond of incardination no longer has meaning. To remedy that situation, Rome, in 2003, gave them a Pontifical Commissioner, that is to say, a provisional ecclesiastical superior, in the person of Archbishop Terrence Prendergast. Born in Montreal, he is a Jesuit, a professor Sacred Scripture, involved for long in matters concerning formation for the priesthood. He is likewise familiar with pastoral government through his experience as Auxiliary Bishop in Toronto and then as Archbishop of Halifax. His *curriculum vitae* made him the most appropriate candidate to render this service to the Church.

Archbishop Prendergast made a number of trips to Quebec and Lac-Etchemin in order to meet with the Sons of Mary and to get firsthand knowledge from them on their perception of the situation. He wrote them a number of letters to encourage them. He visited most of those who were in pastoral service in other dioceses. The implementation of his mandate became problematic when the Sons of Mary refused to abstain from acts of an ambiguous nature on the plane of the faith, or, again, when some of them celebrated the sacraments in an illicit or invalid manner, even after having been formally urged

not to do so. Currently, the Sons of Mary priests have all returned to Quebec and are without any recognized ministry. This situation cannot fail to appear paradoxical when pastoral needs are so pressing.

The one who holds the legitimate authority in regard to the diaconal or presbyteral ordination of the Sons of Mary is the Pontifical Commissioner. The ordinations performed outside his authority are a major act of rupture.

Another Church

On the side of separation, let us add that astonishing ceremony of September 17, 2006, in Lac-Etchemin, during which a priest, on the strength of celestial revelations received by the Foundress, was designated and enthroned to be the head of a new spiritual group called "the Church of John". The Army of Mary paper (*Le Royaume*, no. 181) published a full report of that ceremony. One can remark in it how the set of symbols associated with the person and mission of the Pope is fully utilized and adapted in order to describe in what the function of this new spiritual head consists: interrogation and acceptance of the mission, the wearing of a white soutane, the golden sash and medal, a new symbolic name, coat of arms and motto, a ring the sign of his authority, a homily delivered from a sitting position in an armchair suiting the occasion, the blessing of the assembly, the signing of an act in an official book.

Under the name of Padre Jean-Pierre, this priest has become the spiritual head of a group that is undergoing a change, or *transmutation*, to employ the term used, "from the Church of Peter to the Church of John". This latter thus becomes a new religious group distinct and separate from the preceding, under the guidance of a spiritual head who succeeds, or replaces, the preceding head. Another Church, another head: there we certainly have a major factor of separation from the Catholic Church.

Private Revelations

Basic to the Army of Mary are the private revelations the Foundress declares she has received since the age of twelve. There is also its adherence to other private revelations coming from apparitions that took place in Amsterdam where the Blessed Virgin is known under the appellation of "Lady of All Peoples". There are also the commentaries or theories based on these various private revelations and elaborated and produced by authors whose texts are circulated by the Army of Mary. That constitutes a lot of material; in it are to be found declarations irreconcilable with the

Catholic faith, for example those concerning a reincarnation of the Virgin Mary, the Co-Redemption, the *Quinternity* in God, the Church of John.

The unprecedented mission as Co-Redemptrix given the Foundress (see *Le Royaume*, no. 181) has the effect of making of the Army of Mary a group that is breaking away and isolating itself from the rest of the world of Christian Churches. The blessing given by Padre Jean-Pierre, September 17, in rendering "Glory to the Divine *Quinternity* in the highest heavens" will not soon be made part of Christian rituals, especially when it is noted that the Foundress is herself an integral part of that *Quinternity*.

Warnings

Over the years, a number of warnings have been given by successive Archbishops of Quebec or by the Canadian episcopate in general, with the accord of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of which the present Pope Benedict XVI was the head. For example, Cardinal Ouellet published a Pastoral Message April 4, 2005, in which he gave a just evaluation of the situation, pointing out the harm being done the faithful and the Church by the diffusion of these non-Catholic theories and urging the members of the Army of Mary to stop rejecting the pastoral judgment of the legitimate authority.

Those various warnings were disregarded, rejected by those responsible for the Army of Mary, on the grounds that the language being used was that of spirituality and not of theology, or again that it was a matter of doctrinal developments, the pertinence of which would eventually be recognized at some point in the future. In support of these grounds, the opinions of persons were presented, persons who, whatever their qualification or their status in the Church, did not have the responsibility of forming judgments regarding these matters.

The Amsterdam Apparitions

The bishop of Amsterdam, Bishop Josef M. Punt, acknowledged that "the Amsterdam apparitions are of a supernatural origin", declaring at the same time that "the human factor also exerts a certain influence". In December 2006, the bodies mandated by him to give the interpretations flowing from the messages, accepted a request from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that they modify the prayer which posed a problem, and which could now be said in these terms: "May the Lady of All Peoples, the Blessed Virgin Mary, be our Advocate". In December 2004, Bishop Punt had declared that there

existed "no tie of cause and effect between the Amsterdam devotion and the movement that had formed around Marie-Paule Giguère". All of this information has not yet been divulged in *Le Royaume*.

Is There Persecution?

Are the Army of Mary and its foundress the victims of a persecution on the part of Church authorities? A number of articles in *Le Royaume* affirm this. The present disciplinary decisions are likened to others imposed upon persons who were eventually canonized. Saint Padre Pio is given as an example; he was subjected to sanctions from the Holy Office (ancestor of the present Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), and in 2002 he was canonized with great solemnity.

In fact, such examples could be multiplied, and we could add here those great theologians of the 20th century (Congar, de Lubac) who were silenced for a time, before becoming theologians of the first rank at the Second Vatican Council and being made cardinals. What has to be kept in mind is that the great saints or great theologians who were subjected to discipline, serenely accepted certain abuses of power of which they could have been the victims. They manifested their true grandeur in the noble acceptance of constraint and not by seeking to stand up to someone, or prove themselves right at any cost. In all of this is there not a way to carry the Cross after the example of a certain Jesus of Nazareth? Or to walk in the footsteps of Saint Paul, the apostle who bore more than his share of trials and spared no effort in order to bear witness to his Lord?

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ

The fraternal bond between the members of the Catholic Church and the members of the Army of Mary

manifests itself through the commitment they both have to the same Redeemer by virtue of their baptism and through a life that bears witness to his Gospel; that is certainly primary and fundamental. It goes without saying that God's grace can take paths, of which it alone holds the secret, in order to touch and sanctify spirits and hearts. In this regard, the paper *Le Royaume* frequently gives testimonials of those of Christ's faithful for whom their contact with the Army of Mary marked the beginning of a reform of their Christian life, an awakening or deepening of their piety. That is certainly a ray of light on a picture not lacking in shadows.

Moreover, the simple, industrious and prayerful life of the Sons and Daughters of Mary is an excellent foreshadowing to the eyes of the world, of the future times when Christ will be all things to all men. The liturgical ceremonies celebrated with fervor and dignity, and the care given the liturgical singing are already a hint of what the celestial liturgy, on an even grander scale, will be. The encouragement given family life and the attention directed to the young people are also the seed of the Gospel and constitute favorable ground for rapprochement with other Christians.

More on the level of the organization, the enthusiastic welcome given Archbishop Ouellet's assumption of the office of Archbishop of Quebec in 2003, or that given Archbishop Terrence Prendergast's appointment as Pontifical Commissioner the same year, was very positive and gave good hopes for the future. The cancellation by the Foundress of an agreed-upon meeting with the Archbishop seems to have been a turning point from which the chasm of divergence has made itself ever more clear.

Even when it became increasingly

apparent that their differences of view were irreconcilable, the personal meetings of the Pontifical Commissioner with the Foundress or her collaborators remained characterized by courtesy and respect. The articles in *Le Royaume*, with a few exceptions, have retained the same tone. This is a fact that must be noted and, after the example of Mary who "meditated upon these things in her heart", must be carefully preserved for the future.

Separated Brethren

That the recent events draw the attention more to what separates is obvious, and that is unfortunate. Possible canonical sanctions will, no doubt, be added to the present situation. It must be hoped that they will serve to awaken or reveal the Christian maturity of those who are the recipients of them. In faith and maturity, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they can open up new paths; otherwise there will be just sterility. Given the absence of a unity in faith or ecclesial communion, if there is one wish that must be formulated in the present situation, it is that there be maintained the climate of mutual respect that does not prevent saying the truth, but that serves, first and foremost, the search for that unity of disciples for which Christ, in the evening of His life, prayed.

"May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (John 17:21). May Christ's prayer be tirelessly our own.

Father Michel Founier

P.S.: Archbishop Terrence Prendergast has just been appointed Archbishop of Ottawa; I am honored to have been able to assist him in his mandate as Pontifical Commissioner. *M.F.*