

An interview with the Superior General of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X on the pontificate of Pope Francis

*WE MUST NOT CAPITULATE BEFORE THIS WORLD,
BUT RECAPITULATE ALL THINGS IN CHRIST.*

DICI: Reverend Father, it has been eight years since Pope Francis ascended the throne of Saint Peter, and on the occasion of this anniversary, you have kindly granted us this interview, for which we are truly grateful.

For some observers of the pontificate of Pope Francis, particularly for those who are attached to Tradition, it seems that the battle of ideas is now over. According to them, it is now a praxis that dominates, namely concrete action, inspired by a wide-ranging pragmatism. What is your opinion of this?

Father Pagliarani: I am not really sure that actions and ideas should be opposed in this way. Pope Francis is definitely very pragmatic. But being a man of government, he knows perfectly well where he is going. A large-scale action is always inspired by theoretical principles, by a set of ideas, often dominated by a central idea to which all *praxis* can and must be related.

One must realise that all attempts to understand the principles of Pope Francis' pragmatism are not without trial and error. For example, some people thought they had found his principles of action in the *teologia del pueblo*, an Argentinean variation of liberation theology – but which is much more moderate. However, in reality, it seems to me that Pope Francis is beyond this system, and even beyond any known system. I believe that the ideas that direct his actions cannot be analysed and interpreted in a satisfactory way, if we limit ourselves to traditional theological criteria. He is not only beyond any known system, he is above them all!

What do you mean by that?

With Pope John Paul II, for example, in spite of everything that can be deplored, concerning his pontificate, certain points of Catholic doctrine remained untouchable. Then with Pope Benedict XVI, we were dealing with a spirit that was attached to the roots of the Church. His considerable effort to square the circle, by reconciling Tradition with conciliar or post-conciliar teaching, though doomed to failure, nevertheless revealed a concern for fidelity to Tradition. But with Pope Francis, such a preoccupation no longer exists. The pontificate under which we are living is a historical turning point for the Catholic Church: bastions that still remained have now been demolished forever – humanly speaking; and at the same time, the Church has redefined, by revolutionising it, its mission towards souls and the world.

It is still too early to appreciate the full extent of this upheaval, but we can already try to analyse it.

Sin and mercy

You say that bastions that were still standing have been demolished. Which bastions are you talking about?

I am thinking, in particular, of the last moral foundations on which not only Christian society, but any natural society is established. It was bound to happen sooner or later, it was only a matter of time. Until now, despite sometimes being vague, the Church has maintained its moral demands quite firmly, for example concerning Catholic marriage, and She still clearly condemned all sexual perversions... But these demands were unfortunately based on a dogmatic theology that was diverted from its purpose, and thus made unstable. It was inevitable that one day they would also falter. Solid principles of action cannot stand firm for long when the idea of their divine author is weakened or distorted. These moral principles could survive for some time, even for a few decades, but deprived of their backbone, they were condemned to be one day classed as "outdated", and practically denied. This is what we are witnessing under the pontificate of Pope Francis, in particular with the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, of March 19th, 2016. This document not only contains serious errors, it manifests a completely new historicist approach.

What is this new approach? What would have determined his choice?

Pope Francis has a very precise general vision of contemporary society and of today's Church – and even of the whole of history. He seems to me to be affected by a kind of hyperrealism, a sort of "pastoral" hyperrealism. According to him, the Church must face the facts: it is impossible for it to continue to preach moral doctrine as it has done up to now. She must therefore resolve to capitulate to the demands of modern man, and consequently, to rethink her role as a mother.

Of course, the Church must always be a mother. But instead of being a mother by transmitting her life and educating her sons, she will be one in as far as she knows how to listen, understand and accompany her sons... These concerns, which are not bad in themselves, are to be understood here in a new and very particular sense: the Catholic Church can no longer – and therefore should no longer – impose herself. She must be passive and adapt. It is the ecclesial life, as it is lived today, that conditions and determines the very mission of the Church, and even its *raison d'être*. For example, since she can no longer impose the same conditions for receiving Holy Communion as previously, because modern man sees them as an intolerable intolerance, the only realistic and truly Christian reaction, when following this logic, consists in adapting to this situation and redefining its requirements. Thus, by the force of things, morality changes: the eternal laws are now subject to an evolution, made necessary by historical circumstances and the imperatives of a false and misunderstood charity.

In your opinion, does the Pope feel uneasy about this development? Does he feel the need to justify it?

Without a doubt, the Pope must have been aware, from the outset, of the reaction that such a process would provoke in the Church. He was probably also aware of the fact

that he was opening doors that had remained, for more than two thousand years, well and truly closed. But for him, the historical demands outweigh all other considerations.

It is in this perspective that the idea of "mercy" acquires its full value and scope. This idea of "mercy" is omnipresent in his speeches. It is no longer the response of a God of love, welcoming the repentant sinner with open arms, to regenerate him and give him back the life of grace. It is now a fatal mercy, which has become necessary in order to meet the urgent needs of humanity. Henceforth considered incapable of respecting even natural law, men have a strict right to receive this mercy, a kind of condescending amnesty from a God who also adapts Himself to history without dominating it any longer.

In this way, not only faith and the supernatural order are renounced, but also the moral principles that are indispensable for an honest and upright life. This is frightening because it means definitively renouncing the Christianisation of morals: on the contrary, Catholics are now to adopt the morals of the world, or at least have to adapt – on a case-by-case basis – the moral law to current morals, including those of "remarried" divorced couples and even same-sex couples.

This mercy has thus become a sort of panacea, the foundation of a new evangelisation to be proposed to a century that can no longer be converted, and to Christians on whom the yoke of the commandments can no longer be imposed. In this way, souls in peril, instead of being encouraged and strengthened in their faith, are reassured and comforted in their sinful situations. In so doing, the guardian of the faith even abolishes the natural order: which means absolutely nothing remains.

What underlies these errors is the total absence of transcendence or verticality. There is no longer any reference, even implicit, to the supernatural, to our life after this world, and above all, to the work of Redemption by Our Blessed Lord, who has definitively provided all men with the necessary means for their salvation. The perennial effectiveness of these means is no longer preached and is no longer recognised. They no longer believe in them! Consequently, everything is reduced to a purely horizontal and historicist vision, in which contingencies prevail over principles, and where only the earthly well-being matters.

Does this turning point, you mentioned, still remain consistent with the Second Vatican Council, or does it already belong to a Third Vatican Council, that did not take place?

There is both a continuity with the premises laid down at the Council and a superseding of them. This is for a very simple reason: with the Second Vatican Council, the Church wanted to adapt itself to the world, to "update itself" with the *aggiornamento* promoted by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. Now Pope Francis continues this adaptation to the world, but in a new and extreme sense: the Church must now adapt to the sins of the world – at least when the sin is "politically correct". Therefore, it is then presented as an authentic expression of love, in all the forms allowed in contemporary society and thus permitted by a merciful God. Always on a case-by-case basis, but these exceptional cases are destined to become the norm, as we can already see in Germany.

The utopia of Pope Francis

Alongside this progressive annihilation of traditional morality, does Pope Francis propose values to be promoted? Or, to put it another way, in your opinion, on what foundation does he want to build?

This is a very pertinent question, to which the Pope himself gave the answer, on October 3rd, 2020, in his latest encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, when he affirmed that “all this calls for an alternative way of thinking”; and he continued by proposing that we “rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity. [...] This is the true path to peace.”¹ This is what is called a utopia, and this is what happens to all those who cut themselves off from their roots. The Holy Father, breaking with Divine Tradition, aspires to an ideal and an abstract perfection, totally disconnected from reality.

Admittedly, in the same passage, he defends his position, conceding that what he is saying “will sound wildly unrealistic”. He also specifies the basis on which he intends to justify his position: “the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity”. But precisely, Divine Revelation and Catholic Tradition teach us that human nature and human dignity are not self-sufficient. As Chesterton says, “Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural”². Without God, nature alone tends to become, in practice, “unnatural”. By calling and elevating man to the supernatural order, God has ordered human nature to grace. Therefore, nature cannot remove the supernatural order without introducing deep disorder into itself. Pope Francis’ dream - his “alternative way of thinking” - is profoundly naturalistic.

Another sign of this utopian character, his dream takes on a universalistic scope: it is a question of imposing it on everyone, and in an authoritarian and absolute way. Being conceived in an artificial way, dreams can only be imposed in an artificial way...

But what does Pope Francis’ utopia consist of?

In perfect osmosis with the aspirations of modern man, imbued with the rights he claims and detached from his roots, it can be summed up in two ideas: those of *integral ecology* and *universal fraternity*. There is no coincidence that the Pope has dedicated two key encyclicals to these subjects, which, as he himself maintains, characterise the two main parts of his pontificate.

The integral ecology of *Laudato si* (May 24th, 2015) is nothing other than a new morality proposed to the whole of humanity, leaving aside Divine Revelation and therefore the Gospel. Its principles are purely arbitrary and naturalistic. They harmonise without any problem with the atheistic aspirations of a humanity that is passionate about the earth where it lives, and mired in purely material concerns.

And the universal fraternity of *Fratelli tutti*, advocated by the Pope in a very solemn way during the Abu Dhabi Declaration, co-signed by the great Imam of Al-Azhar (February 4th, 2019), is nothing less than a naturalist caricature of Christian fraternity, founded on the divine paternity common to all men redeemed by Our Lord Jesus Christ. This fraternity is materially identical to that of Freemasonry, which, over the last two

¹ N° 127

² G. K. Chesterton, “Heretics”, Chapter VI

centuries, has done nothing but sow hatred, particularly against the Catholic Church, in a fierce desire to substitute itself for the only truly possible fraternity among men.

It is not only the negation of the supernatural order, reducing the Catholic Church to the dimensions of a philanthropic NGO, but it is also the lack of understanding of the wounds of original sin, and the oblivion of the need for grace to restore fallen nature and to promote peace among men.

In this context, how can the role of the Church still be distinguished from the role of civil society?

Today, the Catholic Church offers the image of a priestly power at the service of the contemporary world and its sociopolitical needs... However, this priesthood is no longer dedicated to the Christianisation of institutions or to reforming morals that have become pagan once more. It is a tragically human priesthood, without any supernatural dimension. Paradoxically, civil society and the Church thus find themselves, as in the heyday of Christianity, associated to fight side by side for common goals... but this time, it is the secularised society that suggests and imposes its own views and ideals on the Church. This is truly frightening: secular humanitarianism has become the light of the Church and the salt that gives it its flavour. The doctrinal and moral stampede of recent years is a good illustration of the inferiority complex that men of the Church maintain in relation to the modern world.

And yet – this is the mystery of our faith and it is also our hope – the Church is Holy! It is Divine! It is Eternal! In spite of the sorrows of the present hour, its interior life, in all its highest dimensions, is certainly of a beauty that delights God and the angels. Today, as always, the Catholic Church fully disposes of all the means necessary to guide and sanctify souls!

The necessity of Christ the King

In your opinion, how can the Church get rid of these errors and regenerate itself?

First of all, we must reject all utopias and return to reality, a return to the foundations of the Catholic Church. We can identify three key points that the Church must reclaim and start preaching again, in a straightforward way without concession or compromise: the existence of original sin and its effects (which are the triple concupiscence of which Saint John speaks of, in his first epistle) – and this is against all forms of naturalistic naivety; the necessity of grace, fruit of Redemption, which is the only remedy – but it is an all-powerful remedy – to triumph over those devastating effects; and the transcendence of an ultimate end which is not on this earth, but in Heaven.

Preaching this once more would be beginning again to “confirm thy brethren”³. The true Catholic faith would once again be proclaimed. It is the necessary condition for every supernatural life. It is also the indispensable guardian of natural law, which is

³ Luke 22:32

also divine, eternal and immutable in its origin, the necessary foundation to lead man to his perfection.

These three concepts can be summed up in a single ideal: that of Christ the King. He is the essence of our faith. He is the author of all grace. He is the author of this natural law that He engraved in the hearts of all men when He created them. The divine legislator does not change. He does not renounce His authority. Just as this law cannot be altered without altering the faith itself, neither can it be restored, without restoring to its divine legislator the honour due to Him.

To put it simply, we must not capitulate before this world, but “recapitulate all things in Christ”⁴. It is in Christ the King and through Christ the King that the Catholic Church has all the means to overcome the world, whose prince is the *father of lies*⁵. Through the Cross, He has already overcome him once and for all: “I have overcome the world”⁶.

Do you think that the Blessed Virgin Mary will have a special role in this victory?

Since this victory is a victory for Christ the King, it will necessarily be one for his Blessed Mother. Our Lady is systematically associated with all the battles and all the victories of her Son. She will certainly be associated with this one in a very special way because never before has there been such a triumph of so pernicious and subtle errors, that have caused such widespread and profound ravages, in the concrete life of Catholics. The proof of this is that among the most beautiful titles that the Church attributes to Our Lady are those of “Destroyer of all heresies” – she crushes the head of those who conceive them – and “Help of Christians”. The more definitive the victory of an error appears, the more glorious will be the victory of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

*This interview took place at Menzingen, on March 12th, 2021,
Feast of Saint Gregory the Great, Pope*

⁴ Eph. 1:10

⁵ John 14:30 & John 8:44

⁶ John 16:33