

## Chapter Six: **Judgment Without Evidence**

*NA sad condition of the times is this: in civilized Europe, where in the nineteenth century an alleged freedom of conscience is highly extolled, and particularly in those European countries in which this liberty is most solemnly proclaimed, not merely the clergy, but all Catholic peoples, in the name of that same liberty, are reduced to the harsh alternative of choosing between the observance of the law like apostates or the holy disobedience of martyrs.*

— La Civiltà Cattolica, ii, 11, 1855, 336

Catholic counterrevolutionary thought has been convicted of intransigence by people who have no rational grounds for convicting anyone of anything—but who nevertheless hand down unproved judgments with wild abandon. But the Revolution, despite its claim to rest upon a rational foundation, is truly guilty of intransigence. It can be shown to express a blind, fideist position in the name of which it refuses to submit itself to any fundamental criticism whatsoever. Indeed, manifestations of its revolutionary intransigence can be adduced by the score—and by people who do have a philosophical and theological ground from which to make such judgments.

We have seen that the blindfold the Revolution puts on men's eyes has also had its effect on Catholic peoples. It has made them gradually willing to accept the very errors that Protestantism and the Enlightenment encouraged at the beginning of the revolutionary experiment. But they have accepted these errors with one tragic difference. The original Protestant reformers and *philosophes* did not necessarily want the consequences of the ideas that they were often carelessly or half-consciously preaching. Modern-day Catholics, on the other

hand, have all these results before their eyes, still stubbornly embrace the ideas engendering them, and deny the connection between the two in the process.

Hence, many conservative Catholics find no difficulty praising “traditional” American Protestantism and the “common sense” school of enlightenment thought, or extolling the redemptive mission of the United States—which Fr. John Neuhaus describes as the “first creedal nation”. (1) Fr. Neuhaus, the doyen of conservative believers, does not hesitate to label the espousal of such Protestant, Enlightenment, and national-redemptive concepts and creeds, a seizing of “the Catholic Moment” in history. The *Civiltà*, of course, would have identified such an embrace as nothing less than Catholic self-destruction.

Some of the highest authorities in the Church claim to show their commitment to “the dignity of the human mind” not by re-emphasizing the need to transform all things in Christ, but by lamenting earlier Church opposition to men like Galileo. Any yet such thinkers’ approach helped to usher in a reductionism disastrous to man’s true intellectual life and exalted role in the universe. “Philosophy”, Galileo told us, amply illustrating the closing of the western mind, “is written in the great book of the Universe, which always lies open. But we must first understand the language and the characters in which it is written. That language is mathematics;” i.e., mathematics alone (2).

Jacques Maritain, one of the apostles of the modern Church, started by condemning “social conditions which expose the majority of men to the close risk of committing sin, by requiring a kind of heroism from those who desire to fulfill the law of God”; conditions “which it is a duty in strict justice, unceasingly to denounce and to strive to change” (3). By the 1930’s he was praising these same

conditions as the basis of a serious Catholic polity and converting the future fathers of the Second Vatican Council to his changed way of thinking. He lived long enough to lament many of the consequences of having done so.

It is sad that one feels frightened today openly to bring *rational* criticisms against the Catholic embrace of a supposedly rational revolutionary world which actually does so much to close the human mind to speculative thought and the conviction that ideas have consequences. It is sad that the fideism which shapes the revolutionary outlook prevents Catholics from considering even for just one single moment, and even just as an hypothesis alone the notion that there may actually be some logical “revolutionary” connection between Protestantism, the Enlightenment, and modern nihilism and moral mayhem.

One would imagine that Taparelli’s ability to predict that revolutionary logic would soon lead to a nationalist debacle, abortion, and genetic engineering might give him tremendous credibility today. Conversely, one might presume that his opponents’ criticisms of such claims as absurd, obscurantist exaggerations might discredit them. Alas, the opposite is true. Taparelli is forgotten; his enemies have triumphed. The truth remains unexamined, because Protestantism despises Reason, because the Enlightenment limits thought to the willful individual weighing and measuring of data, and because American Pluralism considers all sound and solid judgment to be divisive and detrimental to “freedom”.

“But, oh! What a shame, what a crime, what a misery...”, Cardinal Pie once exclaimed, in a sermon whose lesson is equally applicable here, “for the Latin peoples to have become, as peoples, more impious than the heretic or the unbelievers” (4). This is high tragedy, the *Civiltà* would have agreed. For

Catholics had the evidence to judge otherwise, to judge correctly, and did not do so. This was high tragedy also because the Kingship of Christ over a society of free men was the Catholic birthright, and they exchanged it for a mess of pottage—for the kingship of men over a society of slaves.

On purely natural grounds, it may be said that the blindfold fixed by the Revolution upon its victims is now hopelessly and eternally fastened on Catholic eyes a well. But nature can be transformed by grace; and grace will, in fact, find some natural remnant ready to cooperate with it. What is essential for this to happen is for Catholics to cease their adulation of intellectual traditions that are not their own and can never provide a basis for the order that they crave. What is necessary is for them to begin to study the works of serious *Catholic* thinkers for guidance.

Grace can work with the natural wisdom of men like Taparelli d’Azeglio. Such men were true heroes of the Catholic Faith, more interested in Truth than in party platforms and parlor room debates. They were men of grace who loved nature, men of nature who loved grace; Thomists with a Platonist passion to help spirits soar out of the cave to universal truths; Platonists who insisted in rooting their lofty flights of intelligence and soul in the ground of everyday fact; counterrevolutionaries open to practical discussion—even with well-intentioned revolutionaries and non-Catholics— but always from the standpoint of a radical commitment to their Faith; Catholics longing for a revolutionary transformation of the Old Adam into the New, but all too aware of the obstacles to this most sublime of human changes. They are still pillars on which to base victory over the New World Order that the war against the Incarnation has created. Errors and misconceptions notwithstanding, their critique of the

essential problems of the Revolution is accurate and insightful. To use the words of Veillot about de Maistre: “it is necessary to place them apart, among the great men, almost among the prophets” (5).

Like prophets, the heroes of this book did not retreat before the difficulties involved in what they believed Catholic activists must do to allow God to help man live life abundantly once again. What had to be done—what has yet to be done—was to put off the revolutionary blindfold. That blindfold, as Veillot warned, is already very securely fastened. In the final analysis, it might only be capable of being removed “by the bloodied hands of martyrs” (6).

## FOOTNOTES

All journal articles are from *La Civiltà Cattolica* unless otherwise indicated. When more than one quotation appears under a given footnote, citations (again, unless otherwise indicated) correspond to the order of the text.

1. Fr. R.J. Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (New York, 1992).
2. From *Dialogues on the Two Systems of the World*, in the discussion by C. Dawson, *The Dividing of Christendom* (New York, 1965), pp. 60-61.
3. J. Maritain, *Religion and Culture* (London, 1931), p. 28.
4. Msgr. Pie, *Shall France Perish?*, translated by “A Secular Priest” (London, 1872), p. 33.
5. L. Veillot, *Mélanges*, xiii, 176.
6. *Ibid.*, x, 45-46.