

# *The Double-View of the Church*

---

---

*Hans Waldenfels, SJ*

*Professor Waldenfels took these notes after reading Professor Peter Paul Saldanha's article "The successor of Peter for Unity and Communion" in Tripod, No. 165, Summer, 2012.*

## **A View from the Inside**

The summer 2012 issue of *Tripod* discussed the arguments offered in favor of the illegitimate ordinations of Chinese bishops, and rejected them:

- The ordinations contradict the basic structure of the Catholic Church which is hierarchically built around the college of bishops under the leadership of the Roman Pontiff.
- The position of the Pope has been defined by the decisions taken in the two Vatican Councils and as inserted in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.
- St. Peter's role inside the early Church was recalled, and certain historical allusions have been rejected as misunderstandings.
- The arguments justifying the episcopal ordinations without papal approval have been rejected because a) they violate the inner bond of the bishops with the Universal Church and b) they are not allowed by the valid legal regulations of the Church.
- So far the arguments serve for clarifying the present situation. However, the arguments suffer from the fact that they are presented from a merely inner-Church position, which in their intrinsic argumentation are convincing only to the members of the Church.

## A Double View

We are living in a period of pluralism. With regard to the Church we have to admit that – independently from a theological or canonical point of view – there exist two ways of looking at the Church: a view from the inside and a view from the outside, the view of the believer and the view of the unbeliever or outsider. Unfortunately unconsciously quite a few Christian faithful being ordinary citizens, too, contemplate the Church both from the inside as well as from the outside, according to the situation they are actually living in, so that there are times where they judge the Church also from the stand-point of the general public – with the result that a double-view of the Church exists in one and the same person.

- *From the view-point of the Catholic faithful* the Church is of divine origin and was planned to be the communion of people gathered by the Word of God in the name of the risen Christ and His Spirit. It is the community of Christian faithful throughout the world under the signs of unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity.
- *From the point of view of an outsider* the Church is *one* organization (among others) in human society managed in many ways according to the rules of human society and is developing and organized. Moreover, human society has to be seen, as it evolves amidst the variety of nations and cultures, political and economic systems and their governing boards.

## The Question of Authority

Undoubtedly the relationship between the spiritual and political or worldly powers and authorities has changed throughout the history of Christianity. The relation between Pope and Emperor, and later on with other world leaders has never been completely free of tension. In modern age most of the time the Church has had to struggle for independence and free development.

In the western world the relations between church and State were settled by contracts, or so called “concordats,” made between a State and the Holy See, and after the Reformation, also between a State and the Protestant Churches. The main reason was that the Church, also in its divided forms, played a very positive role in the fields of education and social care. Consequently, it was not only to the benefit of the Church, but even more to the benefit of the State and the general public to elaborate ways of cooperation.

In the course of time, the public atmosphere was determined sometimes by positive collaboration. But in more recent times, however, especially in parts of the world where Christians were in the minority or where anti-religious circles seized power, the social atmosphere witnessed disrespect, persecution, suppression and even hatred. One of the roots for this was certainly the appearance of forms of radical atheism and the evolution of anti-religious attitudes. In such a situation the religious authorities had almost no chance to exercise power whatsoever.

### “A Secular Age”

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor describes the transition of the Middle Ages to Modern Times in the following way: “The change which I like to determine and to reflect upon is the change of a society in which it was practically impossible not to believe in God, to a society in which even for very religious people this belief is only *one* human possibility among others. ... The belief in God is no unalterable presupposition any more. Here we are facing alternatives.” (*Ch. Taylor, A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 2007).

My point now is this: It is not enough to elaborate only the intrinsic ecclesial or ecclesiological arguments. As the Church for centuries insisted on the importance of philosophy for theological reasoning, we have today to deal with the presuppositions behind the hostile attitudes taken by certain governments against the Church and religion in general.

After all, we are living in a global situation which calls for freedom of religion, thought and speech and a peaceful

juxtaposition and cohabitation between people of different nationalities, races, religions, and other *weltanschauung*. This implies that States have to understand that by nature they are not permitted to govern in a totalitarian way, which allows them to suppress free thinking, free organizing and free decision-making in questions concerning the management and internal life of non-governmental organizations.

In a time when for the benefit and peace of all, nations are bound to acknowledge and to foster ways of international cooperation, it cannot be forbidden that religious organizations with an international and global outlook regulate their own affairs without political interference. It shows a lack of trust and understanding, if certain governments counteract the expectations, which people all over the world are harboring.

### **Call for Freedom**

It cannot fit modern thinking if Christians have to flee from their home-countries because they feel hindered in the free exercise of their religious convictions, like the Christians in Iraq or the Copts in Egypt, or because certain Arabic countries decline permission for building Christian Churches – a permission which as a matter of fact is granted to other religious communities in the USA or Western European countries, as soon as it is demanded.

Religions call for independence and autonomy, self-management and freedom, but that means freedom from political interference, not from union with their interior fraternities and from communion with them. In fact, it cannot be the task of political authorities to regulate the inner affairs of religious communities. Mutual respect is the inner core of peaceful coexistence.

After all, it is a game of win and loss. Countries can gain a great number of self-confident and satisfied citizens who are proud of belonging to their home-country. They can also lose their international reputation of having a flourishing economic situation and advanced technologies, but they come at the expense of suppressing free public opinion, free conversation and exchange,



and free actions in accordance with one's own insight and conscience.

Christians are taught to know: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Cor 3:17) Chinese Christians would rejoice if true freedom would flourish in their beloved homeland, too.