Theoretische beschouwingen

The future of organized religion: Analysis of a taken-for-granted opinion*

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Introduction

It is these days a commonly accepted opinion that „organized religion”, or, the Church, has lost most of its relevance in modern industrial society. It is, in the eyes of some, not more than a kind of social club, as in the case of various Protestant denominations in the United States; others merely view the Church as an organization that provides individuals with the necessary rites of passage, namely marriage, funeral and baptism, and with a religious affiliation to be filled out on bureaucratic questionnaires. But that is, according to this opinion, about it. Traditional faith in God and the affiliation to one or another form of organized religion seem to lack all genuinely existential relevance (1). In his search for meaning and reality, plausibility and freedom, modern man, so it is said, has turned his back on the Catholic and Protestant Churches because they are in his experience too traditional and too petrified, or in sociological terms too much institutionalized. This opinion, it might be added, is held by people within and outside the Church, by laymen and by members of the clergy. As a result, contemporary criticism of the Church and its leaders is not primarily concerned with matters of doctrine and theology but with its institutionalized nature and its authority structures. This is particularly true of the Roman Catholic Church. The opinion is widely spread that the Roman Catholic Church, as an organized religion par excellence, presents an odd anachronism. Many a modern man, inside and outside this Church, wonders why its functionaries continue to perform their roles in loyal obedience to a tradition which so

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obviously seems to be obsolete. The Pope in Rome, Paul VI, with his stubborn defence of the ecclesiastic tradition and the authority of the Holy See, is the prime target of our modernistic amazement and amusement. Catholics and non-Catholics alike are fond of calling him an arch-conservative who tries to halt the *aggiornamento* initiated by Pope John XXIII. Within the Roman Catholic Church, in particular among the younger clergy in North-Western Europe and North America, Paul VI is defied as the authoritarian ruler who has set the clock back and strides against the tides in order to maintain the power of his medieval position. In a time in which the terms „modern” and „progressive” are equalled with „good”, the terms „conservative” and „traditional” with „bad”, Pope Paul VI ends up to be the victim of this piece of modern logic: he is the cold calculator who defends his institution for any price, while radical priests and seminarians revolting against celibacy and calling for democratization of the Church are bound to be the defenders of humanity. The moral conclusion, usually drawn without further reflection, is that the Pope thinks of power only, whereas his modern priests are out to humanize the Church and the world.

If sociology is the critical discipline it claims to be, it should be suspicious of every common-sense opinion and subject each notion, whether „progressive” or „conservative”, „radical” or „reactionary”, to doubt and objective analysis. This paper then is an attempt to scrutinize the above-mentioned common opinion about organized religion in general and the role of Pope Paul VI in particular. In the light of sociological analysis, the rationale of this opinion appears to be doubtful, to say the least. It is a typical product of the modern ideology that „progressive” is good, „conservative” is bad. These categories „good” and „bad” are not merely meant in political terms but seen as equivalents of „moral” and „immoral”, „human” and „inhuman”.

I will try to show in the present paper that, in view of the possible future developments of our society, the role of Pope Paul VI and the relevance of organized religion could be assessed quite differently. I am not interested in proving that the common opinions about organized religion in general and about Paul VI in particular are wrong. These and similar opinions are based on rather emotional ideological commitments and, as experience teaches, such commitments cannot be debated rationally. It is also not my intention „to defend” the Pope against his critics, since such a defence too, if it is to be effective, would have to leave the perimeters of sociological analysis. I rather propose to theoretically construct a sociological argument that runs counter to the previously mentioned opinion about organized religion. This theoretically constructed argument, it must be emphasized, is
not meant to be "true" but serves as a heuristic device by which a commonly
accepted opinion, which is believed by many to be true beyond reasonable
doubt, is debunked and proved to be doubtful.

At this point, I must emphasize that I do not belong to the Roman Catholic
Church, nor to any other Church, denomination, or sect. Thus, I have no
direct ideological interest at stake in the present discussion. If there is an
ideological commitment at play, it is a sociological one: as a sociologist, I
doubt in principle all taken-for-granted opinions, whether "progressive" or
"conservative", "radical" or "reactionary", and the opinion that Pope Paul
VI is a hopelessly autocratic and conservative figure happens to be one of
them. After he made his decision on the issue of birth control, one could
overhear remarks like "how could he ever do a thing like that?", or "this was
one of his greatest errors", or "he is, of course, only out to save his totalitarian
power", etc. etc. In short, there was the almost universal conviction that his
decision was wrong. In view of the problems of an ever expanding world
population, this particular decision was above all seen as an inhuman act
caused by institutional rather than human considerations — as if these two
are mutually exclusive! Nobody seemed to be able, to be willing, or to have
the courage to interpret the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" from another point
of view. Everybody was so afraid not to be "progressive" that even the
thought of an alternative assessment could not come up at all. Everybody
felt good as the champion of humanity, defending mankind against the
inhuman Leviathan of Rome. No newspaper editorial, incidentally, missed
this chance.

My interest in this paper is not a religious one but happens to be purely
theoretical. Discussing Pope Paul VI and the future of organized religion,
one has the opportunity to examine critically a widely spread ideology of
progressiveness. I am not interested in the question whether this ideology is
right or wrong, necessary or destructive. I also know that the Vatican as an
institution is old-fashioned. The purpose of this paper is exclusively to con­
front a commonly accepted and taken-for-granted opinion with a theoretic­
ally constructed alternative — a hypothesis about the future of organized
religion which is founded upon some sociological considerations and obser­
vations. Most taken-for-granted opinions stick to the here-and-now. It is
adamant, I think, to view the problems of contemporary religion in the light
of future developments of our society, thus transcending the myopia that
all too often is playing tricks on modern man.

The reader may take what follows seriously but is asked to bear in mind
that each hypothesis about the future is always heavily imbued with elements
of playing. In this time of rather humorless ideologies, it is good to keep in mind that the hypotheses constructing scientist is both *homo sapiens* and *homo ludens*. Even if the reader decides, at the end of this paper, that its author was more playful than wise, it will have served its goal.

After a sociological discussion of the place of religion in the social structure of modern society, we will discuss the anti-institutional mood of modern man. The hypothesis will then be introduced that this anti-institutionalism, of which the taken-for-granted opinions about organized religion are part, will have to return to some form of institutionalism. The consequences of this return for organized religion are analyzed and related to the present reign of Pope Paul VI in Rome. Throughout this paper, it will be clear by now, Pope Paul VI is being used as a testcase for the problems that stand at discussion.

*The institutional isolation of religion*

Religion in contemporary society has been isolated into a particular clearly discernible corner of the social structure. The concept of religion today connotes a particular institution, the Church, with its own form of organization and its own belief system, the Christian Faith. A religious person is, consequently, generally viewed as someone who goes to Church on Sundays and ad hes, more or less strictly, to the doctrines of his faith. Secularization is then identified with a statistical decline in Church membership and with cognitive doubts as to the truth and relevance of Christian Faith, Jewish Faith or any other faith. That means, in modern consciousness, religion occupies but a small corner of the meaningful universe. Even if we are faithful members of a Church, our daily actions, thoughts and feelings are only feebly related to and influenced by it. Religion, one might conclude, is no longer dominant in industrial society but structurally restricted to a particular institutional sector. It occupies only the fringes of modern consciousness. Even atheism as the negation of religion is no longer the burning issue it has been not so very long ago. To many of us, Bertrand Russell's denunciations of religion sound as archaic as the sermons of a fundamentalist preacher.

In view of this structural isolation of religion, one can admittedly concede that organized religion has become obsolete. However, it is questionable whether this obsolescence will last. Before we come to any conclusions, we must first examine the institutional isolation of religion in further detail.

The isolation of religion within the contemporary social structure is a
rather new phenomenon, function of the process of modernization. In pre-industrial societies, such as tribal societies or medieval Europe, religion is the predominant institution. It is the very heart of the community directing all of man's consciousness. In these societies religion is experienced as a sacred power, penetrating throughout all of the profane world, providing it with meaning and order. Actually, rather than being an institution, religion in this pre-modern environment is an institutionalizing force which creates cosmos out of chaos and prevents society from relapsing into this primordial chaos (2). In the Middle Ages, Christianity functioned as an overarching meaningful „umbrella” from which each individual obtained his identity deductively. Despite numerous political and theological conflicts, this society seemed to constitute a Corpus Christianum, ruled by the Pope as Deputy of Christ and the Emperor as the defender of the Holy Christian Faith. Here, as in all pre-industrial traditional societies, nothing could be done, conceived, imagined, or experienced without some religious overtones. In sum, religion was not part of the social structure but its very essence or „soul”. It is to this set-up that Durkheim's controversial sociology of religion applies perfectly, because in his gods pre-modern man indeed worships his institutions!

During the process of modernization religion, together with other sectors, has been subjected to a general structural differentiation. Because of its rapid growth, modern society had to become pluralistic, differentiated according to various rather autonomous institutional sectors. In pre-modern societies, religion, family and education constitute a powerful triad, often functionally differentiated but yet experienced as essentially related sectors of private-public life. They were kept together by traditional values and attitudes. In industrial society these sectors have been „torn apart”. They are three rather autonomous institutional sectors each of them with different values and attitudes. In fact, all sectors of modern society have their own sets of functions and exert their own brand of control and „jurisdiction” over the individual (3). To wit, the primitive experiences his being father in a family, member of the tribal council and warrior in a war party as three parts of essentially the same identity, whereas a young man in modern society has a very hard time to see any existential relations between his roles in the family, the university and the army. These three sectors constitute to modern man three relatively isolated and autonomous institutional „worlds”, each with their own code of behavior and contents of meaning.

This institutional isolation of religion in the social structure of modern society bears some far reaching sociological implications. The Church is no
longer the sole meaning creating agency. It lost its monopoly and has to engage in acts of competition. We must distinguish two forms of competition. Firstly, institutional religion itself has become pluralistic after the Reformation. There are now many churches, denominations and sects, competing on a kind of religious market. Peter L. Berger gave a very enlightening analysis of this situation, rightly viewing the ecumenical movement in this perspective (4). It is without question that this market situation has given rise to rather dramatic forms of religious relativization. However, there is a second form of religious competition, namely between organized and non-organized religion. Pluralistic society, as Berger has always emphasized, offers the modern individual many choices as to the construction of his identity and the satisfaction of the need for meaning. Institutionalized and organized religion is no longer the sole provider of meaning and has to compete with various other "meaning constructors" such as popularized sciences, political philosophies and ideologies (particularly strong nowadays), arts, drug cultures, etc. etc. This entails a relativization of any form of organized religion, including the Roman Catholic Church which for historical reasons has by and large escaped the first form of relativization (i.e. the one caused by internal competition). This second form of relativization, it must be stressed, bears the seeds of new forms of religiosity and thus the features of a counter-movement to secularization. This religiosity is of an emotional and subjectivistic nature, hardly organized and generally rather irrational. It is an "invisible religion" (T. Luckmann (5)) carried by a profound anti-institutionalism. Its social locus is among members of the younger generations and their peculiar "spirit of protest" (6).

Still another aspect of this institutional isolation of religion needs to be mentioned. As part of the social structure of modern society, organized religion shares the increase of bureaucratization which universally has been the heart of the modernization process. Bureaucracy, as is known, has spread a rather uniform web around pluralistic society. This has paradoxically counteracted the differentiation of modern society. One can observe this uniformity very well in organized religion. Peter L. Berger, for example, claims that the theological background of the functionaries within religious organizations has no impact whatsoever on their functionality: "The requirements of bureaucracy override such traditional differentiations of religious leadership as 'prophet' versus 'priest', 'scholar' versus 'saint', and so forth. Thus, it does not matter very much whether a certain bureaucratic functionary comes out of a Protestant tradition of 'prophetic' ministry or a Catholic tradition of 'priestly' one — in either case he must above all adapt himself
to the requirements of his bureaucratic role" (7). This bureaucratic uniformity, we may add, transcends the boundaries of institutionalized religion. Bureaucrats can everywhere easily transfer from one institutional sector to the other. It is, for instance, not uncommon that a bureaucratic functionary switches from an ecclesiastic hierarchy to an administrative position in a college or university. Similarly, without much difficulties a typical bureaucrat like Robert McNamara could change his position in the auto industry to a position in the government and move from there to the world of higher finances. This bureaucratic uniformity contributes naturally to the rationalization of our society. It is important to realize that organized religion has been bureaucratized to a considerable degree and thus shares in this increase in rationalization.

According to Max Weber, the rationalization of religion is not merely a function of the rationalization of modern society at large. On the contrary, rationalization, he claims, is inherent in all forms of monotheism and developed particularly strongly within the inner-worldly asceticism of Protestant (Calvinist) ethics. Weber then points at an "elective affinity" between this religious rationalism and the growing secular, mainly economic, rationalism of the post-medieval world. Rather than one being causally dependent upon the other, the two have mutually reinforced each other, causing the peculiar configuration of Western capitalistic, bureaucratic and rational civilization. An important tenet in Weber’s sociology of religion is that this increase in rationality has contributed to all kinds of irrational forms of religiosity (8). This point deserves further elaboration.

The anti-institutional mood

Weber and Simmel were both interested in the consequences of the rationalization of modern society for the individual (9). They saw a paradox relationship between modern society and the individual living in it. On the one hand, the structures of industrial society seem to grow ever more autonomous vis-à-vis the individual, demanding a functional attitude on his part; on the other hand, the modern individual in his turn tends to withdraw into the private sphere and the world of dreams and emotions (10). Privatism and subjectivism are attempts to confront the societal autonomy of abstract structures by an individual autonomy in which emotional experiences are accorded a higher human status than traditional norms and values. In sum, the established institutions are equated with alienation whereas the free-
floating emotions of the private small group and/or of the individual’s subjectivity are experienced as authenticity. This then is what I mean by the anti-institutional mood. It found its first expression in Hellenistic gnosticism, emerged again in the declining Middle Ages in the vagantes, was predominant in nineteenth century romanticism, and is presently vigorous in various brands of existentialism and the different though related life styles of youth sub-cultures. Throughout the history of his civilization, Western man seems to have been weary of tradition and institutions quite regularly. Invariably, the complaint about alienation and the search for authenticity accompany such recurrent periods of institutional malaise. Each time, we may add, emotionally rebelling man seems to think that his anti-institutional mood heralds a new era with a new type of man. In the past, however, this was never really the case.

In such periods of institutional malaise, voices usually arise calling for institutional revitalization. Attempts, for instance, to reinstall a state of organic community (for which the tribal set-up or a romanticized medieval society stands model) are made but usually doomed to remain artificial and reactionary (11). More successful than these dreams are the various sentiments of nationalism which easily lines up with socialism because of the latter’s anti-institutional critique of the status quo. However, as yet these movements are presently too dispersed to become as dominant as they were during the thirties in Europe. The romantic anti-institutional mood seems to crystallize rather in a withdrawal from the public into the more private spheres of life, from the „objectivity” of social structures into the emotional abodes of individual subjectivity. It is claimed that meaning, freedom and a sense of utter reality can be experienced in marihuana and LSD, in rock music and Indian philosophies, and last but not least, in thoughtless political activism. The latter is only seemingly more extravert and rational: to the bulk involved in activism, political rhetoric and activities are just elements of a general desire for a vivere pericolosamente. The modern anti-institutional mood is designed to blow the modern individual’s mind and he will call it a liberation from the textures of „objectivity”, from the structures of a „straight” style of life, and above all from the traditional boundaries of logical and scientific thinking. In the grips of this anti-institutional mood, the modern individual is free to plunge into the various fads and fashions of the occult, no longer restricted by traditional norms and values, by the controls of old institutions. We have all seen it before in history, but the modern individual is sufficiently educated by his technological society in a kind of anti-historical myopia to cling to the
utopian belief that he is an early representative of a totally new type of human being.

Meanwhile, within this anti-institutional mood all kinds of religious notions have emerged again. Indeed, secularization as a process of rational "disenchantment of the world" (M. Weber) is countered these days by the rise of a rather emotional kind of religiosity. New certainties are being sought — determinations not of a rational-scientific or bureaucratic nature but belonging to the world of irrational and occult experiences. Astrology, witchcraft, occultisms of sorts, and other intoxications which many of us thought to have been buried in the backyard of Western civilization long ago, suddenly pop up again and are supposed to satisfy the need for intoxicating meaning in a world that seems to become increasingly meaningless and abstract. These sentiments are often combined with political fanaticism founded more on a Nietzschean will to power than the Marxian yearning for the communist "realm of freedom" with justice for all. In short, "new" gods emerged in industrial society who, if looked at more closely, appear to be rather worn out and sometimes even stale. They are, however, exotic in the frame of reference of modern abstract and rational society and thus serve their purpose.

However, and this is a crucial point for our discussion, these gods have to remain exotic in order to satisfy man's irrational demands. That is, they have to remain outside institutional patterns and their inherent relativism. They may not routinize but ought to be ultimate, absolute, final in the experience of anti-institutional man. Or, to formulate the same in native jargon, these gods have to remain "far out". The simple question then arises how far out the anti-institutional mood possibly can go? Is there not a saturation point at which man must discover that his anti-institutionalism has its limits? Is there not a moment in this whole development at which the pendulum has to swing back to some sort of acceptance of some sort of institutions and some sort of authority and control? We will discuss this next.

*The human need for institutions and tradition*

It is a simple fact that man needs institutions for his survival in nature. Institutions, in other words, are not just a cultural luxury but a biological necessity (12). Since we lack the biological equipment needed for survival, we have to construct substitutes that may shield us from the dangers confronting all living forms in nature. The "back to nature" programme of Rousseau
and fellow romantics, if taken literally, would deliver man to his natural environment in utter helplessness and to the chaos of his own unco-ordinated drives and instinctive residues. Man’s nature is not structured and determined, as is the case with all animals, but he has the capacity to construct a “second nature”, culture, with built-in structures and determinations. Thus, man is to a certain extent detained by his institutions but this detention is self-inflicted, can be changed if necessary and is biologically determined only to the extent that he could not survive without it.

Our thoughts, emotions and actions depend on institutions. *Human life without institutions is like language without grammar and syntax.* Grammar and syntax do limit our linguistic and conceptual creativity since they impose on us a traditional structure that molds our expressions. But they are simultaneously the field in which we are enabled to communicate with each other. Even poetic creativity depends to a certain extent on grammar and syntax. Admittedly, modern poetry often distorts these perimeters of language in order to set free the forces of creativity experienced by the poet, but it can do so only because there is something to deviate from. If, for the sake of argument, this deviation would routinize into a normal form of linguistic intercourse the poetic creation would wind up to be ordinary language again from which the poet would have to deviate again. If, on the other hand, everybody in daily linguistic intercourse would follow the poet’s device, we would end up in linguistic chaos and bring human communication to an absolute end. We would just stammer senseless signals without communicating any meaningful symbols. If such a situation would ever arise, stuttering and stammering human beings, we may be sure, will get together and search for a new grammar and a new syntax. In sum, the meaning of language is totally dependent on the traditional structures of grammar and syntax. These structures may be felt as inauthentic and may limit our feelings of freedom, but we simply need them in order to make sense. There is enough leeway to play with them — in poetry or in linguistic humor — but we can never forsake them. We can also change them in attempts of language renewal, but we cannot abolish them. The modern individual may experience his daily language as meaningless but in order to have meaning at all he still has to stick to its grammar and syntax.

This entire argument, it seems to me, can be applied to the institutions of society. Indeed, they are the grammar and syntax of our actions and interactions. They are the perimeters of social life. As traditional or abstract as they may be, they are the only possibility for man to experience social meaning at all.
The artist, the poet, or the religious prophet have brought new experiences to man by transcending or even sometimes abolishing institutional perimeters. Institutions can admittedly become the containers of stale traditions and thus stand in need of renovation or perhaps even revolution. The creative charisma of religious, artistic or political leaders is usually the force that brings such changes about. But this charisma remains always dependent upon two conditions: it has to maintain some form of contact with the established meanings of social life lest it cuts itself off from moral and material support, and it has to remain rare, in that not just everybody can become a charismatic leader. Isolated charisma is doomed to fade away in powerlessness, while charisma as a general style of life would deliver human civilization to the chaos of subjective meanings and thus prevent any form of intersubjective communication. In sum, absolutistic charisma that does not accept any institutional relativity is self-defeating.

The contemporary anti-institutional mood is, as we saw, founded on an emotional search for subjective authenticity and may, if driven to an extreme, deliver modern civilization to a general but escalating process of desintegration. There is, however, one element that precludes such a pessimistic conclusion. In his search for absolute meaning, total freedom, and utter reality, the modern individual will, sooner or later, discover that he has not enough of the charismatic artist in him to be stimulated from within only. If man places himself outside the influence of traditional institutions, he will have to rely on his subjectivity, from where he expects creative stimuli. Soon enough, however, a feeling of emptiness and dreariness will get hold of him. It is illuminating that the anti-institutional mood has to rely on artificial stimulants in order to get „turned on“. Durkheim always emphasized that man’s fullness is the result of his institutions, that outside their reach he is doomed to decline to emptiness and mediocrity. Indeed, it is a piece of Durkheimian wisdom that man runs empty if he cuts himself off from his institutional environment and the sources of tradition, just as he will relapse in infantile stammering if he refuses to apply the grammar and syntax of his language.

It can be expected, I think, that modern man with his anti-institutional mood, will, sooner or later, realize that he cannot dwell in extra-institutional territory for ever. Some form of return to institutional values and norms and some form of reappraisal of tradition can be predicted. Such a renewed interest in institutional norms and values is not to be confused with backlash. Backlash is a reactionary move on the part of those who never dared to leave the relative safety of their institutional position and who see this position with its privileges threatened by the movements and changes in their society.
The renewed interest in institutions I am talking about, is rather a recognition of the fundamental limits of human nature by those who have searched for the Promethean absolute beyond the institutional boundaries of life. It is the insight that our institutional behavior, like our language, constitutes the means by which we can express ourselves, our wishes, thoughts, fantasies and sentiments in an indirect but communicable manner. It is, finally, the awareness that the ordinary bears the fruits of creativity, that freedom can only be realized within institutional structures, that the sources of our individuality are borne by the interaction with others. This is not an endorsement of mediocrity but the acknowledgment of a fundamental anthropological fact. Ever since Prometheus man has forgotten it, pushing his head against the limits of existence.

Religion is naturally the first sector in society in which this recognition of institutions is likely to occur. It might be expected that the previously mentioned „invisible religion”, so abundantly present in the various sectors of today’s youth culture, will gradually return to institutional patterns. Having dwelled in extra-institutional territory and its often sultry emotions long enough, religious man might eventually either create new institutional forms or possibly re-discover the Church as an institution in which freedom has always been surrounded by authority, and mysteries were kept in balance by tradition. It is my contention that the Roman Catholic Church with its venerable tradition based upon a balanced combination of mysteries and mysticism on the one hand, and institutional rationality and authority on the other, will function in the future as the haven for these religiously „displaced” persons seeking again for structures. Protestantism (in particular its Calvinist branches) is most likely too rational and austere for these individuals who search for a solid ground that can bear their rather emotional „natural” religiosity. The Church of Rome will find its strongest competitor in the Church of England, although the latter is culturally too much related to the Anglo-Saxon world and lacks the integrative strength of the papal institution.

In the light of this prognosis, one could judge the reign of Pope Paul VI in rather different terms than is usually done these days. To wit, the programme of aggiornamento swings with the pendulum while the alleged conservatism of the present Pope keeps the Church in its traditional place where it will be needed when the pendulum swings back! If the anti-institutional mood is not more than a momentary and fashionable reaction to an abstract society, if it eventually will return to some form of acceptance of institutional authority after extra-institutional territory has sufficiently been explored, one
may expect that the "invisible" religiosity so important to many members of the younger generations these days, will also return to institutional patterns. These patterns are either new structural arrangements, or the traditional structures of present organized religion. Again, if the second will be the case, the Roman Catholic Church stands the best chances of being the longed-for haven. Seen against the background of this prognosis, the commonly accepted opinions about Pope Paul VI and his institution need some drastic revisions. Let us try to formulate a few of these revisions.

**Pope Paul VI and the future of the Church of Rome**

Providing it does not swing with the tempers of our time, as so many of its "progressives" seem to profess today, the Church of Rome with its peculiar combination of "mystery" and "structure", kept together by a traditional hierarchy of authority, will again play an important role in the future. In a world ruled by countless meaningless corporations, this Church could then function as a corporate institution which provides the modern individual with meaning without yielding to short-term emotional fashions. However, as was said before, the possibility may not be ruled out that new institutional forms will be developed which are perhaps more suitable to man's emotionality than the Church of Rome. But these new forms, whatever they may be, will necessarily lack the eminent tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and thus encounter in it an almost unsurmountable competitor. We can, therefore, maintain our present prognosis about the future chances of this Church.

A second consideration must be added. In view of this prognosis, one is compelled to admit that the Church of Rome should not change too much or too rapidly. This does, of course, not entail that it should not strive for a certain flexibility enabling it to keep up with the changes of the time. Obviously, a medieval institution cannot function properly in a post-capitalistic society with nuclear energy and astronautic explorations. The difficult path between ossification and modernism, between thoughtless accommodation and reactionary traditionalism, can only be found in praxis though. Regrettfully, no exact blueprints can be offered for this very awkward problem of policy.

Let us now draw some conclusions which run counter to the favored opinions held by liberals of sorts about the Church of Rome and Pope Paul VI. To begin with, it seems to be wise, in the light of the previous prognosis, to
not speed up the process of modernization within the Roman Church, because what we desire today may well be abhorred tomorrow. The aggiornamento, thoughtlessly applauded by many, criticized as not being radical enough by others, might have to be recalled to a large extent later when people search for institutional religion rather than emotional religiosity. Bringing the Church up-to-date is, of course, necessary, but one must be cautious not to accommodate to momentary fads and short-term desires.

The decision to celebrate the Holy Mass in translation is such a piece of aggiornamento which might just lie beyond the responsible. The vernacular deprives this ritual with its venerable tradition and international character, of its universality and of a great deal of its mystical content. Modernization has deprived the modern individual of historical awareness, has tied him up in the present where he is required to function as specialist. Institutional religion, on the contrary, has by its very nature always transcended the here-and-now. This universal aspect found its expression in the Latin mass. By using the vernacular, one deprives this ritual of its universality in which it had been understood throughout the ages and from Rome to New York and Canberra, well-nigh rendering it to meaninglessness.

Recurrent attempts to deprive the Pope in Rome of his dominant authority will be regretted later if they become successful today. Returning from institutional no-man's land, religious man will ask for the comforting awareness that his precariousness and fallibility are being borne by the hierarchic authority of the clergy. This authority, in its turn, is borne by the papal position which carries the weight of tradition and thus can legitimately claim to be infallible.

Similarly, the decision of the Pope to ban the birth control pill together with all other technical means must be „newly“ interpreted. At discussion stands, of course, not only the problem of birth control itself. Despite the Church's stubborn refusal to allow „technique“ (13) to appropriate all the dimensions of human life, the Pope might be presumed to be intelligent enough to see the rapid increase of the world population as a most alarming and baffling problem. At stake, however, is simultaneously the authority of the Pope, the power of traditional Roman Catholic morality, and the power of tradition in general over against the anti-institutional and anti-traditional mood of „modernism“. Tradition in a modernistic framework is viewed upon as an anti-human and alienating structure — the radical activist and the pragmatic capitalist are in agreement on this fundamental point. However, tradition might also be seen as a life-spending process, shielding the individual from the precariousness of his existence and linking him to
the experiences of past generations. The so-called ,,primitive” has known this always much better than his modern so-called ,,rational” brother. The issue of birth control was a testcase, and the Pope might well be praised later for his courage to stand up against the pressures of those who want to accommodate. He had the wisdom of a long range vision vis-à-vis a modern myopia which provides perhaps a feeling of liberation but does so for a short while only. Precisely because it has a long tradition, the Church of Rome has the ability to focus on the long range welfare of mankind rather than getting stuck in the tempers of the day. Pope John XXIII might have warmed our emotionality for the short period of his reign, but he has possibly damaged the human functions of his Church to a considerable degree. Pope Paul VI, on the contrary, is viewed today as the man who keeps the Roman Church in cold and authoritarian inhumaneness but in reality he might be saving some very important human dimensions which have fallen out of sight today because of the myopic anti-institutional mood prevalent in contemporary society (14).

We can easily continue the list. Celibacy, for instance, is a hot issue among young priests and romantic seminarians who rather marry than burn. The call for an end to celibacy, not new but certainly ,,typically modern”, is remarkably in tune with the contemporary emphasis on sexual consumption and the incapacity to understand the values of asceticism. Amazingly enough, this accommodation to the consumptive attitude of a technological society is professed by those who should guide modern man towards the kind of human life which increasingly seems to be endangered by our environment.

It is useful, I think, to view the call for an end to celibacy as a function of modern romanticism and existentialism. Simmel (15) once pointed out that the priest can only function as pastor if he maintains some measure of ,,impersonal objectivity”, if he brackets, as it were, his own personal feelings, thoughts and inclinations. Like the modern psychiatrist, the traditional priest can only function properly if he maintains some distance between his own individual personality and that of his parishioner. In order to create such a distance, the priest ought to be isolated, Simmel said, from what he called the web of group affiliations. Or, in modern terminology, a certain measure of ,,alienation” is needed in order for the priest to function effectively. Celibacy is the best way to achieve such an ,,alienation” and is the more adamant in a differentiated society like ours, because, as Simmel saw, such a society aggrandizes the aspects of individuality. Thus, the priest becomes indeed more personal and more emotionally involved if he abandons celibacy. But it can be argued that the abolishment of celibacy is almost
as dysfunctional for the priestly profession as the proposal that a psychiatrist ought to join his patient on the couch during his therapy hour, is for the psychiatric profession. Such a personally involved psychiatrist might, admittedly, give his patient some emotional satisfaction for the duration of the therapy session but after the hour is spent this patient is still facing his or her troubles. In the long run, this patient did not receive any help.

In sum, the Pope in Rome is confronted these days by an amazing near­sightedness — not in the last place within his own institution. He is deter­mined, almost desperately, to maintain the traditional role of Father who tries to show his rebelling teenagers that restrictions have to be imposed on desires and wishes in the present, in order to bear fruits in the future. Against all the modernistic oddities of our time, he has been determined to convince man that the absolute cannot be realized in this world by man alone. It might be expected that modern man will eventually discover this elementary human wisdom. He will probably do so the hard way. If this happens indeed, Pope Paul VI will be remembered as the rock that stood firm in a rough sea of romantic longings and short-term revolutionary desires. In that respect, he is right now fulfilling the function that he believes he has been called for.

Conclusion

If the anti-institutional mood, which became very manifest in today's youth but has spread out far beyond these limits over all of contemporary Western society, has accomplished anything it is the growing awareness that Western rationalism has not only produced greater efficiency and affluence but also basic human deprivation. The reactions to this range theoretically from Jacques Ellul (cf. his The Technological Society, 1954) to Herbert Marcuse (cf. his One-Dimensional Man, 1964), and politically from liberal criticism to radical activism and/or terrorism. Through all of these reactions, however, runs a whole gamut of attitudes, ranging from the non-rational (i.e. the incapacity to think and act rationally) to the irrational (i.e. the refusal to let rationality prevail).

If my previous prognosis is correct, some balance will come about in the future between rationalism and irrationalism (a balance which will limit the non-rational). This has far reaching implications for religion. Irrationally religious man will then search again for institutional rationality, without however allowing the latter to overwhelm him. For that reason, those institutions that will govern his religious life, may not carry too many
characteristics of bureaucratic efficiency and austere rationality, but they ought to carry nevertheless the features characteristic of institutions. It is precisely the Roman Catholic Church that is able to offer such an arrangement. Although an organized religion *par excellence*, the Roman Church has always claimed and believed to be a mystery that transcends the individual and his fallibility. Throughout its long tradition, this Church has indeed presented a curious mixture of institutional rationality and irrational mystique. Attempts to abolish celibacy, papal authority and other institutional and traditional elements that have been part and parcel of this Church throughout the ages, may stay in tune with contemporary desires but will deprive this institution of its fundamental paradox nature — a nature which might well be longed for in the future. If the Roman Church would yield to these liberal and radical forces, which base their opinions and plans on emotional desires rather than on a long range vision, it would easily end up, after the initial enthusiasm has settled down, being just another multinational corporation — modern, up-to-date, efficient, but meaningless. In contrast to this myopia, the Pope's stubborn refusal to abolish the traditional directives which transcend him and every other individual in this Church, might very well preserve a long range vision which only a very few of us can accept today but which might be gratefully remembered shortly or long after we have died.

*Notes*

1. This common opinion about organized religion, incidentally, is not completely covered by the facts. See for this the empirical material discussed by Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion in the Year 2000* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969).
4. Peter L. Berger, *o.c.*

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10. I have discussed this at greater length in my *The Abstract Society*.


12. After this paper was written I read Robin Fox, „The Cultural Animal“, *Encounter* (July, 1970): pp. 31-43. The following discussion is much in agreement with Fox's arguments. The main tenet of his paper, however, was already formulated by the German sociologist Arnold Gehlen before 1940. See Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch*. 1940 (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenaeum Verlag, 1962, 7th ed.).


14. The reader, hopefully, understands that I am personally not opposed to birth control techniques. I only try to debunk a commonly accepted opinion. Incidentally, I do believe that the Pope was driven by some sociological machiavellianism when he made his decision. While restating the traditional ban on all contraceptives, he actually stated his position on tradition and authority, probably knowing well that it could not really prevent people from planning their families, as seems to be the case indeed.