

Wojciech CHUDY

THE QUESTION ABOUT THE POPE'S DIVISIONS RENEWED

When Churchill met Stalin in Moscow in 1945, they talked about the distribution of allies and adversaries in the context of the approaching end of the war. Apparently, when Churchill mentioned the name of Pius XII, Stalin is reported to have pouted his lips and asked: "The Pope? And how many divisions has he?" The question has passed into history as momentous.

In 1994 this question seems to have become again thematic with the approach the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. It suddenly seems to keep recurring, posed in the various languages of the world.

Here are some examples.

In its issue No. 37 the Austrian weekly "Profile" places on the cover an unfriendly caricature of John Paul II, hovering over the globe and accompanied by a question: "How mighty is the Pope?" Inside the issue there is a bloc of texts critical of the activities of the Holy Father in the contemporary world. In its list of contents the bloc carries the title: "The Pope's Divisions."

In a dispatch from Cairo the Polish daily "Gazeta Wyborcza" of 9 September 1994 (No. 210) on page 1 quotes the words of the Egyptian Minister of Population and Social Security, Maher Mahran: "Does the Vatican rule the world? We have not come here to yield to dictates. We represent over 5 billion people rather than the 190 persons living in the Vatican." The title given to this dispatch by "Gazeta Wyborcza" is: "5 Billion against 190."

The Polish weekly "Forum" reprints news and articles from foreign press. In issue No. 39, on pages 6-8, several comments about the Cairo Conference are covered by a common title: "The Pope's Divisions." The article by Stephen S. Rosenfeld about the position of the majority in the United Nations Conference proposing the legalization of abortion, reprinted from "The Washington Post," contains the following sentence: "The practical realization of this proposal demands circumspection but there is no need to excuse ourselves."

These are merely examples that are at hand; and they are by no means the result of a comprehensive survey of the press.

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The principle formulated by the ancients — *Plus ratio quam vis* ("Reason is more important than force") — determines a norm which regulates inter-human relations. Usually it referred to social relations. In this context it says that the social relations which create a harmonious society must acknowledge reason as their foundation. Translated into the language of philosophy, one should say that these relations are then ratified by the good of man and the community. This is a reason for all social relations in general. In the international domain as well, the principle which demands that reason stand as the ground of all mutual relations between states and nations first of all on reason, that is, grounding this relation in values, is the same norm: *Plus ratio quam vis*.

The wisdom of the ancients is by no means a sign of idealism. The above principle does not call for the exclusive governance of ideas over social life. It does not say "Only reason, never force." The principle *Plus ratio quam vis* implies a realistic knowledge of the society in which an element of force (for instance to defend social order) must also be present. However, reason is to precede force; it must always justify it and motivate its necessary application.

The principle *Plus ratio quam vis* determines the border between two constant attitudes continually clashing in the history of man and humanity. On the other side of this border there rules the principle: "Power is more important than reason" (*Plus vis quam ratio*).

The fight continues. Two armies are involved in it. One of them consists of those who believe that community, politics, and, ultimately, all history, have meaning only in so far as they are rooted in values; or, putting it differently, in so far as they have their good reasons. The other army consists of those who, strictly speaking, believe that history has no sense, while social relations, including political life, are determined by force; the force of the military, of money, of the majority, etc.

It is not difficult to guess which army is more numerous. History seems to show that the primacy of force usually prevails. This bloc had its leaders; they included Genghis Khan, Tiberius, Hitler and Stalin. It also had — and still has — its theorists; Machiavelli, Lenin and Mao are the greatest of them. It also has its victims. This attitude is not a purely intellectual construct. Its aftermath is to be seen in battlefields, concentration camps and gynaecological clinics — a hecatomb of annihilated human beings.

The fight is going on, and to express it thus is not mere rhetoric. The battle for real meaning, real values and real human life continues.

On the stage of "great history" there are few victories for the "army" fighting against force on behalf of the primacy of reason. Nevertheless, some instances of such examples can be indicated. One of them is the episode (mentioned in the editorial of the current issue of "Ethos") that occurred at the end of World War II, when the government of tiny Liechtenstein saved a captive group of Cossack soldiers who had fought in the ranks of the *Wehrmacht* during the war from repatriation and the revenge of the Soviet Union.

Another example of the primacy of reason over force in history is the Warsaw Uprising, whose fiftieth anniversary is celebrated by Poles this year. It may seem a shocking example, but it was a victory in spite of the defeat. Let me explain this by means of an anecdote. Władysław Bartoszewski, a historian of the Uprising, gave a lecture in the United States many decades after the war. After the lecture a young American asked him a question very well known in post-war Poland: What was the sense of starting the Uprising when in military terms it had no chance to succeed, was politically ineffective, and its easily predictable effects involved great losses of the population and a completely ruined city?

Bartoszewski answered: Yes, indeed, it was so. But, do you know, we were right then. Reason was on our side and we could not avoid starting the Uprising.

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Some ask about divisions, others — about reasons. The former are more numerous (especially lately). But the latter obstinately claim that, in spite of everything, reason will win.

Translated by *Leszek Kolek*