

Madiran – Proposition VII

December 12, 2020

Part V is not the easiest of the six Parts of the 1968 book of Jean Madiran (1920–2013) on *The Heresy of the 20th century*, because it deals with the Natural Law, which is a difficult concept for modern minds to grasp. And this is because God the Creator is both the writer of the Natural Law and He Who implants it in all His various creatures, and the Great and Good God is a closed mystery for a large majority of modern minds. However, it is for Madiran so important as a means of getting at the 20th century heresy that he makes it the centre of the last of the seven Propositions which he culled from the writings of Bishop Schmitt of Metz in France to give some form to an otherwise formless heresy. Here it is –

7 Natural law is the expression of the collective consciousness of mankind. From which it follows that there is no moral objective natural law promulgated by God and inscribed in the heart of man.

Bishop Schmitt's reason for denying the existence of any such divine law in men would seem to have been that it made man's social life too mechanical, as though the solutions to all of men's social problems could be read off it as from a manufacturer's hand-book. But the hand-book of God for man fully allows for human liberty even in society, whereas the denial of natural law, says Madiran, founds right and wrong no longer on objective divine law but on subjective human conscience, ultimately no law at all. Man is free and responsible, but he is not free to make his own laws. And the Church's social teaching certainly starts out from God's natural law, but to be applied to the immense variety of new concrete situations as in our own time, it needs a great deal of work, such as Pius XII accomplished in his time.

Moreover, with no natural law or order in man, how can there be anything supernatural any more? (What nature is there to be above?). There can be no more 10 Commandments (which express the natural law); no more charity, (which is the beginning and end of the ten Commandments); no more natural religion (constituted by the natural law); no more social life (which presupposes natural justice); nor Christian life (which presupposes natural virtues); and so on and so on. In fact if there is no natural law, all notion of a Christian society becomes impossible, either as society or as Christian.

Objection: All good law is clear and certain. But if natural law requires such elaboration then it cannot be clear or certain. Therefore it is not good law. Reply: In its absolute basics – “Do good, shun evil,” natural law is clear and unshakeable. In everything deriving from those basics it is not so clear for us human beings, and it can be shaken or contested, but it is clear in itself, as when for instance a good judge digs justice out of a confusing court-case. Natural law is known to us from inside us by reason, and from outside us by revelation, for instance the revelation of the 10 Commandments to all men by Moses.

In the third and last Chapter of Part V of his book, Madiran presents the spiritual consequences of the denial of natural law which he has attributed above in P7 to the 20th century heresy. The result in the individual Catholic is that he strays far from a true understanding both of the Christian life and of how far his own life is from it. He no longer has any idea of the absolute necessity of supernatural grace to live a Christian life. He thinks that by his own strength he leads a decent life, yet from that life the Commandments 1 to 4 have vanished, 5 and 7 may still be alive, but 8 is weakened and 6,9,10 have often also vanished. Yet by a sentimental love of neighbour, disciplined by no objective law, he thinks he is fulfilling Christ’s command to love one another as Christ loved us, so he is satisfied with himself. In which state,

says Madiran, he cannot be saved. No wonder such a man calls for “a change in the very concept of salvation brought by Christ” – and we have come full circle, back to the first of the seven Propositions in which Madiran summed up the 20th century heresy.

Kyrie eleison.