

For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory

Kilian and Robert McDonald An internationally recognized expert on ecumenism and author of numerous scholarly books and articles, Kilian McDonnell OSB is the founder in 1967 and president of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Collegeville. Fr Kilian is a consultant to the Vatican Council for Unity and engages in formal ecumenical dialogues with Lutherans, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and Pentecostals. He received his doctorate from the University of Trier. Robert McDonnell is Professor Emeritus of California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo and is currently on the professional staff of San Luis County department of mental health. The tension between charism and institution has been seen as the choice between freedom and law, danger and safety, conscience and authority, discontinuity and continuity. If one were going to give a quick response one might say that charism without institution is chaos, institution without charism is death. Therefore one does not choose between the poles of the tension; one chooses both. Other- wise there is no viable way of living a substantive, auto- nymous life in community, in continuity with the past, open to the future. The autonomous life is the mature life. It is sound psychology that maturity is not achieved by angry statements like, "This is me! Take or leave it. This is who and how I am, whether you like it or not, damn it!" On the contrary, what leads to maturity, to responsible adulthood, is the sensitive delineation of the other, achieved principally by listening. "What is/was it like for you? What is your experience?...Tell me more...." Paul Tillich remarked that "the first duty of love is to listen." The first word that St Benedict directs to a young man wishing to embrace the monastic life is, "Listen." This is one of the reasons why solitude even in a crowd of monks is so important, and why silence plays such a significant role in the monastic life. In inner solitude and silence we listen best. The skill of listening is mastered only after years of discipline. No one easily arrives at that balance of listening in a way that invites speaking, and speaking in a way that invites listening. Listening as a skill is difficult for individuals. For institutions, especially institutions rooted in a divine mandate, it is infinitely more difficult. And institutions do need to listen, especially if it is granted that an institution legitimately claims Christ's dictum "whoever hears you hears me." In this case, the peril of the institution not listening is immeas- urably increased. When institutions rooted in revelation do not listen to the voice of others, do not

respect the charisms of others, the results are disastrous, as ISTI knows so well. Indeed, when God truly speaks, we are faced with the nonnegotiable. When God's servant speaks God's word, the matter is not so simple, as the human filter, in this case, adds its own static. The issue is not the undoubted divine command. Rather it is the institution's identification, without boundaries, of what the institution commands with the voice of God. What such a stance may lack is sensitivity to the experience and charism of the listener in search of the divine. So the questions arise: How can one be true to one's own charism and also live with integrity and autonomy within the institution, with its order, norms, guidelines? What does the institution do with the inspiration and gift of individuals? One assumes that individual autonomy is a necessary component of institutional life. This seems to be what Pope John Paul II meant when, as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, he wrote: "The structure of a human community is correct only if it admits not just the presence of a justified opposition but also that practical effectiveness of opposition required by the common good and the right of participation." The issue is that of autonomy. But the sense of one's own personal autonomy is not, by itself, fully adequate to locating the appropriate intersection between independence and institution. Locating the crossing of paths is a collaborative task for institution and individuals. In locating the boundary, the individual charism needs both freedom and discipline. Not freedom today and discipline tomorrow, nor discipline today and freedom tomorrow, but both simultaneously. In determining the crossroads the institution is teacher, guide, corrector of excesses, and itself subject to criticism and review. If one is to avoid chaos on the one hand and death on the other, charism and institution must draw life from each other. Individual charism is essentially ordered to service, to the building up of the institution and humanity. An essential role of institution is to elicit and nurture charism. The charism is given to the individual, but not for the individual. Rather the individual is entrusted with the delivery of the charism, the service, to the institution and humanity. Hence, just as the institution needs to listen sensitively to the individual, so the individual needs to listen sensitively to the institution. In the case where both the institution and the charism claim a divine mandate, the balance between charism and institution is not absolutely even. The reason: institution is the primary context for charism. For example, the charismatic element not only belongs to institution, but belongs to it constitutively, belongs to the interior structure, giving it the movement of life. Charism is sometimes defined as that which brings the institution to disarray and self-doubt because it is thought of as the disjunctive, irrepressible element, creating discontinuity, challenging the institutional establishment from the outside. But charism is more diverse than that. If it can be a sign of discontinuity, it can also be a sign of continuity, both aspects belonging to

charism within the history of institution. As Oxford exegete, George Caird, points out, even the prophets belonged to the ongoing structure of the community, many of them belonging to the prophetic guilds, schools where they learned the skills of poetic meter and prophetic utterance. Elija anointed his successor Elisha. On the other hand, Amos vigorously denied standing in a prophetic succession, and protested that he never belonged to the prophet's labor union: "I was no prophet or prophet's son...the Lord took me from following the flock." The Lord took Amos directly from shepherding the sheep to the prophetic task without passing through the discipline of training by other prophets. John the Baptist thundered warnings to his contemporaries that those, in the face of divine judgment, who put their trust in physical descent from Abraham (that is, in being children of Abraham), will bring disaster upon themselves. God can raise up sons and daughters from the stones on the desert floor. In the epistle to the Hebrews the author points out that Jesus, named the great High Priest, could not claim that title if he had to rely on historical succession. Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, while his roots were in the tribe of Judah. In his person Jesus, belonging to the order of Melchizedek, who is without genealogy, without parentage, without succession, reinstates the priesthood. Jesus, standing outside the succession, becomes the source of the new succession of the priesthood. So, it is not so clear that charism stands only for freedom, challenge and disruption; and institution only for fixed norms, constancy, order. Consequently, suggesting that continuity represents only institution, and discontinuity only charism, creates a deceptive image. Or one could address the issue of freedom and law. The Judaeo-Christian tradition is marvelously expressed in Psalm 118 (119), which looks upon law as the source of freedom and delight. The commandments of the Lord are "exceedingly broad." "Having sought your precepts, I shall walk in all freedom." How does Jesus, from whom flows "the law of the Spirit," exercise authority in a way that safeguards freedom? A casual look at the Gospels will reveal how frequently the people were amazed, astonished at the authority with which Jesus spoke. This prophet is the "charism of God," who has no choice but to express it within the institution. Without doubt, he confronts the institution, but from the inside, in fidelity to it even when he brings it under judgment. Not one jot or tittle of the law will pass away without being fulfilled. Standing within a community with its own institutions, Jesus does not speak with the formal, legal authority of the community. Rather he speaks with the nonformal, nonlegal authority — if it is not prior to and beyond these categories — the authority of one who acts out an awareness that he is the icon of God. He came to reveal in muted form the fullness of God who dwells in "inaccessible light." He, who is the absolute nearness of God, has authority that is not derived but immediate. We, too, are personally astonished that he never invades others' freedom, even when he

speaks words of reproof, when he utters his "Woe to those who...." He in whom "dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily" never dazzles others into subjection, never overpowers with the full might of God's authority, of which he is the living image. He uses his authority to entice, to lure, to offer a choice, to invite others to enter the kingdom of God. Though in the end we will be judged by our choices — and the judgment may be severe — he respects our choice even when it is a decision for mediocrity, even a decision for undoubted evil to which he is opposed. Who would not be astonished at the power of this restraint, the discipline of this authority, the majesty of this sensitivity? In a word, Christians go to Jesus as the exemplar of how to live both charism and institution. This is a sacred trust and must be a covenant of mutual respect and reciprocal learning. Jesus is a model appropriate to those who identify with either charism or institution. Jesus is the model of the charism of God, exercised within the institutions he inherited, making it possible to replace chaos with order and law, and death with life and freedom. What demand does this model make of us? K&RM