

"DESUPERNATURALIZED CHURCH" would lead to disaster

BY FATHER PAUL CRANE, S.J.

In order to know what the future holds for the Church, it is clearly wise to try and discover what confronts the Church today. The answer will prove disturbing to many Catholics who see the present confusion as no more than the 'Dead Sea Fruit' of a number of unrelated aberrations. Once these are lived down, they imagine that all will be well. 'En passant' I would remind these people that things do not settle down by themselves. They are there to be settled down, under God, by ourselves.

Meanwhile, I think that those that think along these lines are wrong. They should have seen the present aberrations as symptoms of what is emerging, in fact, as a systematic alternative to the Catholic Faith and life. What confronts the Church today is a new body of belief and moral practice, propagated from within the Church by those who call themselves Catholic; in fact, a New Religion, a New Faith, not in God primarily, but in Man.

For the most part you will find these reshapers in the ranks of priests and religious. The betrayal is there, not very often as something deliberately conceived and willed in itself — this frightfulness can be reserved safely for a few, some of them at the heart of things in the Church today — but by way of an inevitable reaction to the Old Church that comes to those — often gradually and in subconscious fashion — from whose lives any real sense of the significance of the supernatural, of the richness of Grace in their own lives, of the Church's essential mission as the carrier to men of the New Life of Grace, has long since faded. Secularist in all but name, the naturalness (I can think of no better word) that has overtaken their lives finds expression in dissatisfaction with what they think of as the restrictiveness and exaggerated other-worldliness of an essentially supernatural

Church. The temptation that follows and to which many have yielded is to reshape doctrine and morals within the Church to suit the prevailing naturalness. Out of this comes the endeavour, which continues today, to rebuild the Church anew in man-made and man-centered form; if necessary, a Church desupernaturalised and graceless in all but name, one from which the supernatural is steadily being peeled away.



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If man is to reign supreme in such a Church, as must necessarily be the case, its first task must be that of assisting directly his fulfilment as a human person. This means that response to the naturalness of his outlook and inclination is viewed as its primary duty; which means that doctrinal and moral teaching must be adjusted — whittled down — to suit his mood. Change will mark such a Church because his mood is constantly changing. This is known as progress; an obvious sign of health in such a Church because of its constant response to the human condition. In a man-centered Church, there can be no room for anything judged to block or hinder that process of self-fulfilment, which is seen as man's primary task and the first duty of a man-centered Church to promote. Hence, there can be little

place in such a Church for Authority, still less for that which is divinely appointed, for the Divine, suited to man, takes second place in such a Church. In place of Authority, there is set the inviolability of what is called conscience, but is in fact no more than private judgment. Hence, the persistent and growing growl against the present Holy Father and the memory of that great Pope, Pius XII, both of whom are contrasted unfavourably with "Good Pope John", who is pictured (quite wrongly) as opening the way to the man-made and centered Church, by contrast with Pope John Paul II, who is represented (rightly enough, in fact) as slamming the door in its face.

Hence the pressure on the Catholic Church to join the World Council of Churches, embracing thereby its creed of Secular Ecumenism, which defines as a follower of Christ anyone — Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim, as well as Christian — who extends a humanitarian gesture to his neighbour, opens its door to all religions and has for its ideal a New World Church with the Holy Father, if necessary, its equivalent of a General Secretary, presiding benignly over its arid and rootless cosmopolitan humanitarianism. Hence, too, the pressure on the Catholic Church to plunge itself into every kind of humanitarian venture, irrespective of its origin, content or destination; above all, those that have the approval of the secular establishment of the day such as, for example, meeting the needs of the famine-stricken in Ethiopia, assisting with the distribution of relief to the families of striking miners or working for the preservation of whales. None of these ventures are evil in themselves, on the contrary. What is wrong — an indication of the extent of the contemporary drift in the direction of a man-made Church — is the attachment of essential priority to these operations; the underlying thought, these days, that the

Church is not *really* the Church unless she is seen as attaching *essential priority* to the undertaking of these operations. Hence again, the opposition to papal attempts to check the spread of liberation theology, which finds the truth of the Church in an exclusive option for the poor as the only *true* people of God and sees the Church's *true* role *solely* as one of participation in the struggle for their material betterment; an *essentially* earthly goal which finds culmination in an *essentially* earthly paradise. What, then, of the Fall of Man and Redemption? They have no significant place, if any, in this scheme of things. Yet, already, the earthly struggle for an earthly paradise is the goal of the popular or people's Church, which proponents of liberation theology are at work building up in many areas of South America. It stands in contrast to the Old Church, which had its failures in the past; but which remains, nonetheless, the one, true Church, founded by Christ Our Lord, not *primarily* to engage in social work or revolution, but to bring the New Life of Grace — the means of Salvation — to all men. What I call Naturalism has killed in too many priests and religious any real and lasting recognition of the significance of the supernatural in their own lives and in the life of the Church. To it, I fear, their assent is at the best notional, not real; their primary task being spelt out in pastoral, which too often means for them no more than social terms; which — again, too often — comes to mean social work for its own sake, seen as an end in itself; the be-all and end-all of their priestly or religious existence. This is disaster, and not only for themselves.

Let us consider another angle of naturalist or secularist thinking. Clearly, if man's task is personal self-fulfilment, there can be no room in the doctrinal teaching of a man-centered Church for the doctrine of Original Sin, precisely because this is seen as denying the possibility of personal self-fulfilment, which, of its very essence, must be unassisted, if it is to be personal. Instead, Original Sin is referred to nowadays by the naturalist (secularist) theologians as no more than "the difficulties of the human condition". Personal sin, too, goes out logi-

cally, in accordance with the naturalist view that identifies evil-doing with the immaturity involved in unaided naturalistic progress towards human self-fulfilment. In its place, we are confronted (and "comforted") with "social sin" — the pressure of structures (largely capitalistic) hostile to human progress and fulfilment. Logically, again, there is no room in this scheme of things for the Redemption, within a Church that denies Original Sin and makes a God of progress. Neither is there room for a Redeemer, but there is plenty of room for the reintroduction into the teaching of such a Church of increasingly discarded evolutionary theories as offering an entirely satisfactory explanation of the origins of man (which is nonsense).

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Man's creation by God, Original Sin, his Fall and Redemption, the divinity of the Redeemer Himself, the New Life of Grace, which the Redemption brought to all men, the Church's central and essential mission to extend that Life to all men — all these have been downgraded, discounted, even denied, in support of self-fulfilment as the primary reason for and essential task of the New (man-made and man-centered) Church, which is the goal of so many desupernaturalised clerics and religious today. These have lost their way because they have lost sight of God as the focal point of their lives. With this goes any true and lasting sense of their total dependence on Him. They are no longer devoted to the Church as they once were, seeing her as true to herself and to God when she stands in unflinching and total acknowledgment of man's total dependence on His Creator. What you are left with at the end of the day is a man-made husk of a Church, emptied of supernatural content, devoted to no more than the humanitarian betterment of the human condition. Evidence of this increasingly naturalis-

tic trend will be found in many contemporary catechisms, catechetical sheets, Sunday-Mass sheets, courses of Religious Instruction for adults. The interested reader has only to get hold of some of these and study them for himself. Thus is the naturalistic, desupernaturalised poison spread. In these same sheets and course-books, he will find too, far too often, a type of sexual instruction, naturalistic in tone, divorced from the moral teaching of the Church. Progress, say the progenitors of this kind of teaching, demands that the young should be freed from sexual, along with every kind of inhibition, in the interests — here we go again — of their own personal self-fulfilment. They should be allowed to run free in matters of sex, as in all other matters; finding God in their own way, liberated from the doctrinal and moral shackles of the Old Church, which may have been right in its day, but is now completely out of date; out of touch with the needs of modern man; resistant of change; stagnating; dead. So, they would bury her.

To which I can only say this: We shall see who dies first, the man-made husk, held out to men today as, at one and the same time, the acme and the outcome of their hopes; or the One, True Catholic Church founded by God, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to bring New Life and, with it, Salvation to mankind. My own choice has been made a thousand times. Nothing will ever shake me from it. Confidence rises as I take note of the increasing number of Catholics who share this choice of mine, not because it is mine, but because it is a choice that every Catholic must make simply because he is a Catholic. And it is important these days that every Catholic should know what his Church and he himself as a member of that Church is up against; not an unrelated cluster of aberrations, but the promotion within the Church of a pattern of dogmatic and moral propositions closely intertwined and representative of nothing less than an alternative Faith. This is what must be resisted at all costs.

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