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The Church in Crisis: the Prophetic Dimension – *Quo Vadis: Prophecy or Fantasy*

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The Church in Crisis: the Prophetic Dimension

– *Quo Vadis: Prophecy or Fantasy*

V.J. McBrierty and D.M.D Murphy

The relationship between Church and State has been an issue of much debate throughout the ages. In the 1950s Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) argued that ‘the church must be reminded that it is not the master nor the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.’¹ In today’s increasingly secular world, the rejection of spirituality should come as no surprise since it advocates the suppression of humanity’s age-old alternative source of direction and guidance through religious belief in a higher power, an inherent aspect of humanity since time immemorial, leaving the secular power base unchallenged. The recent publication, ‘The Great Reset’, co-authored by Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret, vigorously promoted by The World Economic Forum of Davos, Switzerland, focussed upon a ‘new world order’ in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic. Their deliberations are totally secular.² [Professor Renato Cristin considered that ‘the loss of the religious dimension (and therefore the disappearance of the sense of the sacred) is an outcome of secularisation that not only affects the Church and the faithful in the strict sense, but also produces a nihilistic secularism that damages the entire Western society, even in its secular institutions and civil structures ... and paves the way for a de-Christianized society, deprived of a founding nucleus of western civilization, which is precisely the traditional

1 H. Hutyra, <https://www.keepinginspring.me/martin-luther-king-jr-quotes/>.

2 The proceedings of the 50th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), held in June 2020 are compiled by Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret in ‘*COVID-19: The Great Reset*’, Forum Publications, July 9, 2020.

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religious sphere.’³ The formation of this ‘new unified, secular, world order brings to mind the united effort to upstage God, in building the ‘Tower of Babel’ to reach heaven, as described in the Old Testament (Genesis 11:1-9). It, too, was an act of rebellion against God who, in response, generated confusion among the builders by the creation of multiple languages and dispersing them throughout the land.

The current Coronavirus pandemic crisis offers a timely *opportunity* to the Church once more to articulate and proclaim the Church’s fundamental Christian Anthropology which is vitally important both to combat this impending secular world order and to bring renewed meaning, direction, and hope into peoples’ lives. Towards this end, there is much to be learned from previous experience from within the prophetic dimension of the Church. The unchallenged advance of secularism, as is witnessed today, was foreseen in the Marian apparitions spanning four centuries,⁴ and in numerous spiritual visions and encounters, notably that of Pope Leo XIII in 1884 which predicted many impending harrowing events, portraying all the trappings of secularization on a massive scale, noting in particular that ‘advances in technology and knowledge would distract man and fill him with godless pride to turn him away from the basic truths and beliefs of creation.’⁵ Later, Pope Paul VI in 1972 noted that the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) should have heralded in a new era of positive renewal in the Church but such was not to be the case. Secularization gained momentum with a steady decline in belief and practice of the faith, in his words, ‘through some mysterious crack – no, it’s not mysterious; through some crack, the smoke of Satan has entered the Church of God. There is doubt, uncertainty, problems, unrest, dissatisfaction, confrontation ... The Church is no longer trusted. ... doubt has entered our conscience. And it entered through the windows that should have been open to the light.’⁶

In 1947, the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen gave what turned out to be one of the most accurate, detailed and profoundly disturbing prophesies on the future of the Church:⁷

3 R. Cristin <https://edwardpentin.co.uk/italian-professor-the-talian-Philosopher>:

4 J.A. Esteves, ‘*Fatima at 100: a history of the Marian apparitions*’, 19 April, 2017.

5 C.J. O’Malley, *The Great White Shepherd of Christendom: His Holiness Pope Leo XIII: His life, poems, encyclicals, and public documents*, J.S. Hyland & Company, Chicago, (1992).

6 Pope Paul VI. <https://aleteia.org/2018/07/06/what-did-paul-vi-mean-by-saying-the-smoke-of-satan-has-entered-the-church/Read>

7 J. Pronechen interview in 2019 regarding the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s revelations in 1947 about the future of the Church. <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/fulton-sheen>.

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‘We are at the end of Christendom, not Christianity or the Church per se, but Christendom that is economic, political, social life inspired by Christian principles Men have no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times: Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world. Mediocrity and compromise characterize the lives of many Christians. We are influencing the world less than the world influences us. The great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on Basic dogmas of the modern world are dissolving before our very eyes. Replacing them are the assumptions man has no other function in life than to produce and acquire wealth. The idea man is naturally good and has no need of a God or a Redeemer to salvage him from guilt, because progress is automatic thanks to science-education and evolution which will one day make man a kind of a god; and the idea reason isn’t for discovering the meaning and goal of life, namely the salvation of the soul, but merely to devise new technical advances to make on this earth a city of man to displace the city of God. His most profound observation was that: *The conflict of the future is between the absolute who is the God-man and the absolute which is the man god, the God Who became man and the man who makes himself God, brothers in Christ and comrades in anti-Christ.*’

Archbishop Sheen also predicted the sharp fall-off of practicing Christians: ‘Our quantity indeed will decrease, but our quality will increase’, as subsequently endorsed by Cardinal Ratzinger in 1965.⁸ Then shall be verified the words of Our Master: ‘Whoever does not gather with me, scatters.’ (Matthew 12:30) ... Every now and then in history, the devil is given a long rope, [stipulated in Leo XIII’s vision as 100 years]. God has His day, but evil has its hour when the shepherd shall be struck and the sheep dispersed. God will not allow unrighteousness to become eternal. Moral truth is vindicated by the ruin that follows when it has been repudiated. Adversity is the expression of God’s condemnation of evil, the registering of Divine Judgement ... Catastrophe reveals that evil is self-defeating; we cannot turn from God without hurting ourselves. How shall the strong and weak trees be manifested unless the wind blows?’

In the following year (1948) Archbishop Sheen expanded upon his thoughts on the future of the Church and arrived at the alarming conclusion that: ‘[Satan] will set up a counterchurch which will be the ape of the [Catholic] Church ... It will have all the notes

8 Patrick Madrid, radio interview with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (2016. <https://youtu.be/1f1dWbn3lgI>)

and characteristics of the Church, but in reverse and emptied of its divine content: *a brotherhood without the fatherhood of God.*' He reasoned that the envisioned new church will masquerade [as a parasite] on the established Church to attract followers with all the cunning of a fallen angel who, in the words of Our Lord, 'will be so much like Himself that he would deceive even the elect: His will become a new religion, disbelief in God without a Cross, a liturgy without a world to come, a religion to destroy a religion, or a politics which is a religion – one that renders unto Caesar even the things that are God's. It will be a mystical body of the Antichrist that will in all externals resemble the mystical body of Christ.'⁹

As to the future, he argued that, as bleak as things may be, 'never has there been such a strong argument for the need of Christianity, for men are now discovering that their misery and their woes, their wars and their revolutions increase in direct ratio and proportion to the neglect of Christianity. Evil is self-defeating; Good alone is self-preserving. Christians must realize that a moment of crisis is not a time of despair, but of opportunity. The more we can anticipate the doom, the more we can avoid it. Once we recognize we are under Divine Wrath, we become eligible for Divine Mercy. The Christian finds a basis for optimism in the most thorough-going pessimism, for his Easter is within three days of Good Friday.'

The Church today: Is the church today in transformation as predicted – is it prophesy or fantasy? Are we in the process of replacing established dogma with *brotherhood without the fatherhood of God*? Is there a danger that the prevalent view on global socialism, which ideally should be Christ-like, might be influenced, – or even high-jacked, as occurred with the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council – by 'any form of anti-capitalist, socio-economic projects, some of which are advanced in *The Great Reset*, that will gain momentum as is evident in the emerging theory of a "communal economy"?

The current relationship between the Vatican and Communist China, outlined in the Sino-Vatican concordat signed in Sept. 22, 2018 and renewed in September 2020, ostensibly sought to regularise the position of the Catholic Church in China. It was stipulated that the Vatican and the Communist Party of China would 'cooperate in the selection of bishops (who will be ultimately and formally appointed by the pope) of a united Catholic Church'. In the event, the outcome was to dispense unilaterally with such guarantees, and replace them with a draconian series of laws, announced in May, 2021, which typically 'required clergy

9 Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West*, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, (1948), pp. 22-25.

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not be subject to the domination of foreign forces, unauthorized acceptance of appointments by foreign religious groups or institutions, and other acts that violate the principle of religious independence and self-management within China.’¹⁰ The earlier, albeit reluctant, tolerance prior to the agreement has been replaced with a policy of oppression, fulfilling the worst fears of Pope Pius XII who commented in 1954 on challenges to the unified church in his episcopal letter, *Ad Sinarum Gentem*.¹¹ The underground church in China has now been replaced by a church subjected to the norms of oppressive communism which are anathema to basic Christian values.

What then is the remedy? At the institutional level, the Church must reassert its mission defined in the principles of social doctrine cited in Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in Pope John Paul II’s encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus* and in the Church’s comprehensive *Compendium of Social Doctrine*. The scriptures encapsulate the inspired word of God and are the fundamental spiritual compass in our journey through life. Particularly relevant passages in scripture include:

‘I [Jesus] am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ (John 14:6); ‘Evangelise all nations to the end of time by teaching everything that is contained in the Scriptures. – Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age’ (Matthew 28:18-20).

Reference to all Christian believers is also particularly relevant in the prayer of Jesus for Christian unity:

‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (John 17:20-21).

At the *personal* level, Jesus’s time on earth provides the most prescient metaphor for our approach to life, particularly in times of

10 Jules Gomes, ChurchMilitant.com, May 25, 2021

11 Pius XII *Ad Sinarum Gentem*, Encyclical Letter, Pope Pius XII.

adversity. The *Crucifixion* as the cornerstone of the Christian faith demonstrated the extent of God the Father's love for us when he gave his son over to such a cruel death for our redemption. It also emphasises the importance of penance and suffering in our daily life as a form of divine currency to pay for our own sinfulness and, along with Christ on the cross, to expiate that of others. The fact that Christ was crucified between two convicted thieves delivers further important insight into our relationship with God the Son. According to the apostle Luke, 'One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God,' he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong ... Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responded: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke:23:39-43)'. The first criminal demanded a response from Jesus on his own terms; the second criminal approached Jesus in all humility and asked for his compassion and help – the recipe for justice in one case and mercy in the other, the two facets of God the Son in assessing the choices in which our free will have steered us through life. A *second* direct source of guidance is found in the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in her pleading for increased prayer and penance, in particular the rosary which encapsulates the key elements of our faith. She, too, stressed that our redemption through faith is invariably bracketed with the suffering experienced by Christ on our behalf. Archbishop Sheen advised all Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, that the world is serving your souls with an awful summons, the summons to heroic efforts at spiritualization. He urged all to pray: 'We may not be able to meet in the same pew – would to God we did – but we can meet on our knees ... The only one path out of the chaotic conditions is spiritual, through prayer.' Thus, it is through recognizing the nature of the sources of the secularization that is spreading throughout the world, and praying for God's intervention, and cooperating in his salvific mission, that Christ's mission on earth will ultimately succeed.