

Fr. Perozich comments —

I believe that this article is in translation from Italian. It does not read with the clarity that many English written articles offer.

It is an analysis of the current state of the Roman Catholic Church in which I read that:

- *God is not central in His creation and guiding of the world*
- *The Church does not always propose God to the world*
- *The Church's agenda is determined by the modern culture*
- *The Church's leaders do not hold to the tradition passed to her.*
- *Holy Church is not offering salvation and transformation*
- *United to the world, the churches are now empty of people.*
- *Personal rights and entitlements rather than duties now rule.*
- *The individualism of the world infected the church's thinking.*
- ***“the obligatory themes of the Church's agenda were those imposed by the new culture and the new anthropology: contraception, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, the homosexual condition, women and the feminist question, the nature of the priesthood and ecclesiastical celibacy.”***
- *Synodality seems to try to adopt and reconcile these in 2021.*
- ***“‘Quaerere Deum’ - to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences.”***
- ***“Christianity in the ancient world thus went from the stigma of “exitiabilis superstitio,” a deadly superstition disagreeable to all, to the recognition of its full plausibility as the religious and cultural foundation of the empire re-founded by Constantine”***
- *The small church confronted the world and established God and Christianity as its foundation.*
- *The sexual and material revolution has supplanted this.*
- *Holy Church needs to return to her roots and show God to the world.*
- ***Hence the importance of keeping the Christian heritage intact, in order to be able to critically re-propose it in the modern empire, and to regenerate it. From the teaching of the first Christians and the Fathers of the Church.***

There Is Also a Vaccine for the Virus That Infects the Church

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CHIESA E SECOLO

DOPO LA PANDEMIA

ANAGNI, SALA DELLA RAGIONE

SABATO 27 NOVEMBRE - DOMENICA 28 NOVEMBRE 2021

[The following text is the talk Sandro Magister gave at the study conference held on Saturday the 27th and Sunday the 28th of 2021 in Anagni, in the Sala della Ragione, at the initiative of the

Magna Carta Foundation, on the theme: “The Church and the secular after the pandemic.”]

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THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD OR IN THE HERMITAGE

by Sandro Magister Anagni, November 27 2021

Between the Church and the secular, after the pandemic, it is the latter that is winning, as expressed by the very word **“secularization,” which is advancing inexorably while the churches are increasingly empty.** But the onslaught comes from a long way back, at least from the years of Vatican Council II, in lockstep with the eclipse of the conservative paradigm throughout the West.

Conservative culture supports the primacy of *duties* rather than rights, the prevalence of supra-individual concepts: nation, family, tradition, religion, to which the individual must adapt and perhaps sacrifice himself. It was inevitable that **the eclipse of this culture would also overrun the Church,** as a hierarchical structure made up of identity-conferring precepts and ceremonies, forged as a consolidated “Roman Catholicism” by the councils of Trent and Vatican I. Already in 1840 Alexis de Tocqueville saw the growth of democracy in America making an impact on religions based on precept and ritual, pared down to “a band of fervent zealots in the midst of a multitude of unbelievers.”

This prophecy of Tocqueville’s seems to give a glimpse of that **“Benedict Option”** which was recently proposed to Christians to counter the spirit of the time, bringing the conservative paradigm back to life in new and alternative forms. But the pandemic has also crumbled the solidity of this resistant and militant Catholicism, where between anti-vax and pro-vax

there is war without quarter, and the division is not over a therapeutic agent but touches on key issues.

To better understand what is happening today, however, let's go back and begin from the years of Vatican II, following the reinterpretation of this made by the historian **Roberto Pertici**.

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That Council was being celebrated just as the new individualism, especially of women and young people, was sweeping over the Church and even disrupting it from within. Paul VI did not want to write any more encyclicals after "Humanae Vitae" was contested as backward by entire episcopates. It is no coincidence that from then on **the obligatory themes of the Church's agenda were those imposed by the new culture and the new anthropology: contraception, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, the homosexual condition, women and the feminist question, the nature of the priesthood and ecclesiastical celibacy.**

The pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI set out to save the best fruits not only of Vatican II, but also of the Enlightenment, against the increasingly individualistic, relativistic, and ultimately nihilistic drift of the new culture. There was something "Kantian," as well as of Christian probity, in the absoluteness of moral principles and in the centrality of reason preached by Joseph Ratzinger.

It should suffice to cite a few lines of his **speech** delivered on April 1 2005 in Subiaco, at the monastery of Saint Benedict, a few days before he was elected pope:

"Christianity [...] has always defined men, all men without distinction, as creatures and images of God, proclaiming for them, in terms of principle, although within the imperative limits of social ordering, the same dignity. In this connection, the Enlightenment is of

Christian origin and it is no accident that it was born precisely and exclusively in the realm of the Christian faith, whenever Christianity, against its nature and unfortunately, had become tradition and religion of the state. [...] It was and is the merit of the Enlightenment to have again proposed these original values of Christianity and of having given back to reason its own voice. In the pastoral constitution, On the Church in the Modern World, Vatican Council II underlined again this profound correspondence between Christianity and the Enlightenment, seeking to come to a true conciliation between the Church and modernity.”

As well as the final paragraph of his memorable **speech** of September 12 2008 at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris:

“Our present situation differs in many respects from the one that Paul encountered in Athens, yet despite the difference, the two situations also have much in common. **Our cities are no longer filled with altars and with images of multiple deities. God has truly become for many the great unknown.** But just as in the past, when behind the many images of God the question concerning the unknown God was hidden and present, so too the present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him. **‘Quaerere Deum’ - to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences. What gave Europe’s culture its foundation - the search for God and the readiness to listen to him - remains today the basis of any genuine culture.”**

With Pope Francis, however, all this has been set aside. **The dismantling of “Roman Catholicism” - effectively**

perceived as a foreign body by the dominant culture - is supported by him in the name of a new form of a vaguely “synodal” Church. “Brothers all” is the emblem of this pontificate, its priority, but without God anymore, as in the observations made upon the release of the **encyclical bearing this name by the renowned philosopher **Salvatore Natoli**, a non-believer but very attentive to the religious dimension. A brotherhood in which the man Jesus simply “showed men that only in their mutual self-giving do they have the possibility of becoming ‘gods’, after the manner of Spinoza: ‘homo homini deus’.” It is no surprise that in the solemn appeal signed last October 4 by Pope Francis together with the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, Moscow patriarch Kirill, the grand imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and other religious leaders in the run-up to **the Glasgow conference on climate change, in its five pages and 2350 words there is not even one occurrence of the word “God.” Nor of the words “creator,” “created,” “creature.” Nature is defined there as “a vital force.”****

With Pope Francis, the Church has resumed its support of the “dérapiage” [*skid*] of post-modernity, insisting on political issues such as ecology, migration, the new forms of poverty, which post-modernity willingly delegates to the Church, which it perceives as one ethics agency among many.

But a surprising tendency also characterizes some sectors of intransigent Catholicism today. Which in the name of freedom are contesting the vaccination requirements imposed, according to them, by a worldwide biotechnocratic dictatorship. But **they do not see that in reality they are handing themselves over body and soul - as in the pointed critique of Professor Pietro De Marco - to “a lovable libertarian dictator” who “grants, indeed legitimizes, all private freedoms” and thereby dissolves not only the Christian conception of**

politics and the state but the idea of birth, procreation, death, free will, in a word the very idea of man, far removed from that of the Bible, as masterfully brought to light by what is perhaps the most beautiful **document** produced by the Holy See in recent years, signed by the pontifical biblical commission and entitled “What is man?”

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From all this one gathers that it is not an episodic but an epochal challenge that Christians are called to face today. A challenge similar to that of the Christians of the first centuries, back then as well a small minority in the context of a culture and society that was foreign, if not hostile.

The temptations back then were also similar to those of today. The first was to conform to the dominant cultural models. The second was to become closed off against the outside world, in a sort of entrenchment. The third was to escape, either collectively to a new homeland, a “promised land,” or individually with a “flight into the desert.”

But the Christians of the first centuries did not yield to any of these three temptations, except for yieldings or entrenchments from time to time that were contested and defeated within the Church itself. There was in fact a fourth mode of relationship that a minority group could have with the world that was encircling and besieging it, and that was to **enter into a strongly critical relationship with it and to exercise a cultural influence on society, which in the long run could bring about a crisis in the general structure.**

And indeed this is precisely what Christianity was able to achieve over the course of a few centuries, as brought to light by patristics scholar **Leonardo Lugaresi**. Those Christians gave rise to a real change of cultural paradigms - worldview, models of behavior, forms of expression - little by little acquiring a less

marginal position in the public sphere and affecting it to a growing extent.

Christianity in the ancient world thus went from the stigma of “exitiabilis superstitio,” a deadly superstition disagreeable to all, to the recognition of its full plausibility as the religious and cultural foundation of the empire re-founded by Constantine, with no need in the meantime for Christians to become the majority or even a large minority of the population. It is estimated that at the time of Constantine Christians accounted for no more than 15 percent of the empire’s citizens.

And today? In his 1998 novel “Les particules élémentaires” Michel Houellebecq identifies in the history of humanity what he calls “metaphysical mutations,” meaning **radical transformations of the collective visions of the world. He sees one of the first of these precisely in Christianity’s assertion of itself in a Roman empire that was nonetheless at the peak of its power. A second in the dissolution of the medieval regime of Christendom at its apogee, with the gradual domination, up to our own day, of materialist culture with its sexual revolution.**

The proponents of hypermodernity are convinced they have the world in their hands. Who knows, however, whether they are like the pagans of the late empire or the scholastic philosophers of the early modern age, unable to see that there can come even today, as back then, a paradigm shift, a new “metaphysical mutation,” a decisive vaccine.

It is not in fact a matter of course - Pertici has written in **commenting** on Houellebecq - that the one-way march of history is inexorable, as in the thinking of the progressives, including Catholics, nor that the era that began with the “metaphysical mutation” leading to the present de-Christianization is to last forever. The complete deployment of today’s dominant culture could lead to a new rupture.

Hence the importance of keeping the Christian heritage intact, in order to be able to critically re-propose it in the modern empire, and to regenerate it. From the teaching of the first Christians and the Fathers of the Church.