

V. - Man great.

They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues walk on the earth.

PSAL. 73:9.

AGAINST the: Great is the Prophet! which still resounds loudly which still resounds loudly in the land of Islam, the Pro Rege, the: Great is our King! in the Christian land is increasingly dying away. And not only did it die away in the circles that set the tone for public life, but it faded away, albeit for other reasons, also painfully among the professed. The atmosphere of Religion, see our previous article, shows on the thermometer of religious life a decline in inspiration and glow. The modern spirit of the times, compared with the spirit of earlier centuries, has deprived religion of its prominent significance. Religion still receives a tribute from the modern spirit, but from afar. Just as there is a group of artists among the masses, the existence of a certain group of pious and mystical people is also honored; but to the powerful flow of life these small groups are incidental. It is true that Religion still exerts a certain moral cleansing influence on the public, and wins the first prize in relieving all kinds of distress, but the Art group also exerts a seductive influence on the masses in its own way; but both Art and Religion are secondary influences on the spirit of the age. The gust of wind that drives the stream of life and determines its direction is now coming more and more from the side of material interests, from the side of the intellect, and from the side of technical nature management. The heroes of religion are found in the days of martyrdom; the highest glory of art in every field is found in Dantes and Shakespeares, Michael Angelos and Rubens; the heroes of the modern spirit are the great philosophers, the powerful physicists, the magicians with instruments and electricity.

That turnaround in the state of affairs must be clearly seen. Whoever wants to live powerfully and exercise power over life must begin by understanding the basic outlines of the life of his time. These basic lines are not religious; rather, a certain anti-religious tendency is mixed into the type of life of our time. An anti-religious tendency, arising partly out of enmity against God, partly out of enmity against the "fines", but more especially wrought upon the face of our century by the intention to cut off forever the return of the rule of religion.

However serious and sad this phenomenon may be, can we not explain the cause of it?

Or does it not strike one as striking how, in comparison with the previous century, mankind as mankind has risen in power and might, in knowledge and ability, in control and submission of natural power, from the dwarf he once was, to a giant, and that not with slow growth, but as if with sudden thrust and jolt? There is simply the contrast between man and the world that surrounds him; and is it then disputable that man, right up to the heart of the 18th century, was still almost a martyr to nature, if you compare what was then the dominion of nature with what man has achieved in the second half of the 19th, and already in our 20th century?

Our power, our dominion over nature and its forces has increased more than tenfold in less than half a century. Whereas before the powers and forces of nature a certain feeling of minority and weakness prevailed in man, now he stands before that same nature with a magic wand in his hand and knows that with that wand he can conjure it. The fear of the past has faded; and a sense of strength that is forever giving way to overconfidence has taken its place. Triumph after triumph mankind has won over the resistance of natural forces. Formerly its plaything, he now feels himself its master. For not all natural forces are yet subdued at our feet, but the triumph so far won has been so decisive, so comprehensive, so constant and still going on, that the supremacy so far won is also a prophecy of coming triumphs. Man feels ahead of time that his trophy will soon be a complete one. This continues in all areas. Each year that passes surprises us again and again with the profits made and discoveries made. And the fruit, the blessing of this permeates the whole composition of social life. Man and woman, young and old, rich and poor all benefit from it. Everyone enjoys it. A completely different awareness than before has penetrated all walks of life. And even those among the confessors, who view this restless progress with sorrow for the consequences, use the advantages that this new situation offers just as much as others, and, willingly or unwillingly, they too undergo the overwhelming influence of it in their inner consciousness.

This change in the state of affairs cannot but have a partial effect on the state of religion. Even if we do not admit Schleiermacher's statement that religious awareness is a feeling of absolute dependence, it is nevertheless certain that the feeling of dependence on a higher power has always been one of the most powerful factors in religion. The dependence on God Almighty was most pervasively felt in the supremacy of nature in our human existence. Epidemics, sickness and death, shipwrecks and floods, lightning and earthquakes, beating of crops, destruction by vermin, cramping by cold, scorching by heat, violence of distances, - all these gave a sense of powerlessness and embarrassment; 'and as often as the need grew, there

manifested in all circles an inclination, a need, an urge to seek relief from a higher grace. The sick person's prayer was never more heartfelt than when the doctor proved powerless. Epidemics immediately populated the houses of prayer. In case of a shipwreck one saw the roughest Janmaat kneeling down. When there was an earthquake, the first thing to do was to go to the church. Necessity always taught us to pray. And in nothing so much as in the feeling of permanent minority in the face of nature, and in the possibility of new imminent danger, did Religion find its powerful support. Now add to this the abuses that resulted from this supremacy of nature in human coexistence, the constant wars, the ever-recurring famines, the rapacity and murderous lust that had free rein, the dangers of fire, riot and mutiny, and you understand how, in an earlier society, the little person lived in constant worry, from one day to the next, and was continually plagued by a gloomy foreboding of what tomorrow might bring. And all this maintained a sense of smallness in general popular opinion on the one hand, and on the other hand an urge to seek help and salvation from Him who, more powerful than both nature and man, could offer help in distress and rescue in danger. Hence the general religious character that once characterized life, the stamp of religion, with its days of thanksgiving and prayer, which was imprinted on all public and special life.

Now we are understood here. Pure Religion thrives on holier roots than those of need and anxiety. It arises from the activity of the Holy Spirit. And now as in the days of our fathers, the hidden contact with God, for those who know Him, has its origin in a special effect which has emanated from God on the souls of His elect. But it must never be forgotten that Religion has two spheres. It always has a very particular character among true devotees, and is so similar to Art that both, Religion and Art, in its higher, purer expression, never originate except from inspiration, and that inspiration, too, in both Religion and Art, never worked except within a limited circle. But this is only the one sphere; that in which Religion shines with its full, pure brilliance. Next to it, or rather around it, extends a second, much more comprehensive sphere, which may not penetrate to the core of the soul, but which is nevertheless indispensable and of great importance. In this wider sphere of Religion, its impulse goes much less deep, is much less constant, and hangs much more in the external. This sphere forms, as it were, the court of the holy temple. And precisely because in this court the spiritual conditions and perceptions, the core of holiness, and thus the sense of guilt and sinfulness are less pervasive, in this second sphere Religion is driven much more and much more strongly by the sense of dependence, by the need for salvation and relief from the

ordinary necessities of life, and by the moral effects that Religion has for individuals, for families and for society. Between these two spheres of religion there is the difference that the first, which reigns in the sanctuary itself, retains its own power and character through the ages and under all circumstances, while conversely, in the sphere of the court, the stream of religion rises and falls as need rises, and falls as need is removed. Those who live in the first sphere, in that of the Sanctuary, pray always and all the time; in the second sphere of the Sanctuary prayer fades away or passes into idle clapping when everything is going well, only to become more intense, more sincere and more robust when the need arises again.

The result of this we see before our eyes. In the small circles of the pious, Religion suffered almost no damage. In the sanctuary it is still what it always was; and however high man's power over nature and the order of life may have climbed, the intimate, spiritual mystery of Religion remains in this small circle what it always has been: a walk with God, an entry into His holy communion, a life in His hidden intercourse. But things were very different in the sphere of the forecourt. There is less need now, therefore less prayer. There is less powerlessness with an increasing sense of strength, and therefore less need to seek help from God. Awareness of one's own strength keeps one from turning to the Strong God. In the event of unexpected, sudden and poignant need, the old consciousness does return, but it no longer has the old meaning, and it disappears as quickly as it appeared. One feels less dependent, and therefore no longer knows the urge to honor and invoke the Almighty.

And do not say that this sinking of the feeling of dependence, this sinking of the feeling of need for supernatural salvation, may affect the people of the world, but that it does not affect Christ's Church, for you are mistaken if you imagine that this feeling of smallness, helplessness, helplessness and dependence would not be an integral element in all religion. Read your psalms, read your prophets, read your Gospels and each time you will find the keynote again: "I have committed myself to God in my distress, I have found my high refuge in Him, I trust in Him completely, the Lord whose work I will praise. Ask the most pious of pious people, and they will confess to you, to the last man, how in their own lives they have been compelled to look up to their God by nothing so much as by that feeling of deep dependence. The child that learns to bow its knees for the first time knows no other religion, and can know no other religion, than the one that rises from this feeling of deep dependence. Here, too, first is the natural, and then the spiritual. Even though a spiritual influence of God may have preceded the child's inner life, and may have

potentially borne the seed of true faith, the need for help, salvation and blessing remains at the forefront of the child's consciousness, even in the circles of the faithful. And so it goes throughout the years, sometimes into adulthood, until finally a higher urge awakens in the soul, and God Himself reveals His holy presence and enters into communion with the child in the form of the Holy Spirit. And even then, when that higher point of view has been reached, and faith has felt its wings washed out, in order to lift itself up to the Highest, the need of life, the embarrassment in worldly matters, the concern for the future or an emerging danger, still continue to inspire the wings of faith with new strength. Distress reveals sin. Discovering sin drives one towards grace. And thus, even in the Sanctuary the need of life and the deep sense of dependence again and again drives the soul closer to its God. The atmosphere of the forecourt still retains its own electrifying power, even for those who have penetrated into the sphere of the Sanctuary. Yes, only on him who is allowed to dwell in the Sanctuary does need, smallness and dependence exert their full influence. Christ's Church is not an assembly of only living believers. The Sacrament of infant baptism also recognizes the seed of the Church.

And so, until the end, the Church of Christ will remain a mixed body, and in that Church the Court will also remain distinct from the Holy of Holies.

The supremacy gained over nature and the orderly course established in our human life could not, therefore, remain without great influence on the Church of Christ. Even the inflicted have been affected by it, but especially the young, the growing generation and those who, even though they have already reached manhood, still remain distant, must be affected by the whole changed relationship in which we now find ourselves in relation to the forces of nature. Had our present-day generation lived in the 16th century, it would be in an entirely different religious position than it is today. And, vice versa, had the generation of then possessed our power over the forces of nature, their religious life would have been much weaker in tone than it is now in history before us. Man remains man. In himself he remains practically the same throughout the centuries, and what makes the difference between century and century are the very different influences that act upon him. That is why you are unfair to your environment if you attribute what now annoys you only to anger and wantonness, and explain what used to set the tone only by piety and devotion. So powerful a factor in life as powerlessness in the face of nature, or the supremacy which we have now won over it, could not remain without influence on the way in which religious life appears and presents itself.

We, who in our days may still cling to the faith of the fathers, become unjust to our less fortunate contemporaries if we see only evil in their lack of religion, and we cut ourselves off from having a positive effect on them if we do not make a serious attempt to see through and understand their lack of religion. In itself every opposition to religion is an evil of the soul, but this evil is naturally in every man's heart, and was also in the souls of former generations; and the question is, whether the influences which temper or promote this evil do not operate entirely differently now from what they did then.

And so now the question is posed, there can be no difference of opinion, whether the triumphs gained over the powers of nature and society by intellect and skill, by our knowledge and ability, had to bring about a complete change in the way of thinking, in the consideration of the world and life, and thereby also in the state of religion. Our dependence decreased; our power increased. Great forces of nature, which in the past overwhelmed and crashed down, have now been subjugated to us and placed in our service. Man works magic with them. All kinds of distress, which used to rain down, has now almost been averted and hardly occurs anymore. All kinds of remedies have been discovered for the need that still exists, and they are generally applied both to believers and non-believers. Through the mists that once darkened life, a bright ray of light has broken through. What ancestors did not know, has been revealed to us. Our eye sees through the microscope what they did not see, our arm reaches ten times farther than the arm of man in their days. Distances have been reduced, the separation of country and country has been abolished in every way by powerful communication. Scarcely a dam that resisted has broken through. We are spreading our wings to all directions, as never before. And how do you expect that those who do not know a higher grace, in this full awareness of man's increased power, will still feel the way their ancestors did, and be small under a need that no longer exists, or feel small and dependent because of a powerlessness that disappeared. As the course of events was once, it could not be otherwise than that feeling of deep dependence, which never had a deeper root in the masses than fear and anxiety, must be weakened in a generation that has conquered necessity and feels it can even control the future in so many ways.

So do not be fooled. This feeling of dependence, insofar as it had no other basis than the awareness of powerlessness and smallness, also suffered very serious damage in the circle of the faithful, and if you turn in yourselves, almost every one of us will have to testify that his inner awareness has also undergone a quite appreciable change. To convince yourself of this, take a look at an intimate

document from the days of our fathers, in which a man of that time recorded the sensations of his soul in this respect, and if you compare what was going on in him with the sensations of your own soul on this point, and if you search for the cause of this change, you will always come to the same conclusion, that it is due to the completely changed relationship in which we now stand in regard to nature and the needs of life.

This is the only explanation for the fact that the decline in the energy of religious life is a general phenomenon that occurs in all countries and among all peoples, and among Christians as well as Jews and Mohammedans, although to an unequal degree.