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THE "MINI THEOLOGIANs"

By RT. REV. MSGR. ROBERT J. SHERRY

(Adapted from THE PARISHIONER'S
HANDBOOK by Rev. John B. Fee)



Pope Paul VI

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Monsignor Sherry, is the pastor of a large parish St. Williams Church, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Before that he served as Chaplain in the U.S. Army for 2½ years and later for many years as Rector of the major seminary in Cincinnati, so he knows what he is writing about.*

MANY GOOD CATHOLICS are disturbed these days by the wild and irresponsible statements attributed to some "theologians." A student of theology is not a theologian by a long shot. Simple membership in a theological society does not make one a theologian; they are often only "tinkling cymbals and sounding brass".

A true Catholic theologian is an eminent specialist, a person of faith, of prayer, of distinctive intellectual ability, of mature scholarship, of sound and prudent judgment. They are few and far between. The rest are immature, self-styled theologians whose chief

aim seems to be to achieve some passing notoriety by making outlandish statements in the press or over the air. They do not realize that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Since Vatican Council II a new vogue has been born. Under the pretext or illusion that they share the "open-mindedness of Pope John XXIII" an obstreperous, articulate minority, has embraced and promoted a counterfeit freedom, a reckless and capricious disregard for orderly procedure, moderation and prudence. In a carnival spirit, these pseudo-intellectuals press on, adopting their own vocabulary of banalities to any far-out theory or hypothesis catching their fancy.

Some of the more familiar factors contributing to the current disorder and confusion existing in the Church today are:

1. Intemperate criticism of the "institutional church" by persons who have defected from the Church, or have changed from the clerical or religious life to the lay state, often for reasons that are

far from doctrinal. Their publicized criticisms of the Church frequently reveal their own failings and weaknesses.

2. Several pictorial, news-weekly and other secular publications which regularly present sensational and eccentric persons and attitudes as representative of the post-Council Catholic.

3. Occasional radio and television programs, especially of the guest and interview variety which obviously search out and assemble dissident, defiant loud-mouthed zealots with messianic complexes who specialize in deriding the Church.

4. Several publications, which solicit and depend on Catholic subscribers, and are known as "Catholic" periodicals, have made a policy of publishing irresponsible statements and distortions of doctrine and moral discipline, which are clearly incompatible with responsible research and the defined doctrines of the Church. They attempt to capture the patronage of the young, to cater to the avant-garde, to gain the support of what they regard as elite charismatic groups in opposition to the "institutional church."

Not Much Sense

Such irresponsibilities have caused harm without measure to the work of legitimate, sensible and holy renewal in the Church. Many religious and lay people alike, have too often given their ears to these fringe personalities and groups who are "updating the Church" in accordance with their own imprudent juvenile ideas. Our Lord spoke for our times too, when he warned against the false prophets who might deceive even the elect.

In his opening address at Vatican Council II, Pope John XXIII told the Bishops at the Council: "In the daily exercise of Our pastoral office We sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who though burning with zeal are not endowed with much sense of discretion or measure. The Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers. Our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to the work which our era demands of us."

The words of St. Paul (2 Timothy, verse 4) are timely: "The time will come when men will not listen to sound teaching, but with ears itching, will pile up for themselves

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teachers who suit their pleasure. They will turn away their hearing from the truth to fables."

In the latest instruction issued by the newly created Congregation for Divine Worship (May 8, 1969) we read: "In our day and age there are those who think they are up-to-date only when they can show off novelty, often bizarre, or devise arbitrary forms of liturgical celebrations. Priests, both religious and diocesan, considerate of the true welfare of the faithful, realize that only in a generous and unyielding fidelity to the will of the Church, expressed in its directive norms and structure, lies the secret of a lasting and pastoral success. Those who wander from this line, even if it is alluring, finish in creating bewilderment in the faithful. At the same time they are killing and rendering sterile their sacerdotal ministry."

Keep Up Your Courage

But thank God, there is a bright side to the picture. In whatever passing crisis befalls society there we can expect to find forces that will fight for its preservation, just as the human body has when attacked by germs. And in the present instance, you loyal faithful Catholic laity are one of the many forces which can be counted upon

to turn back the current vogue of smartness and confusion to the sources of wholesome truth and reality.

Just be patient a little longer and continue to put your trust and confidence in the promise of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that He will be with His Church all days even to the end of the world, "and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against Her". (Matthew 16, 13 to 19). He established His Church upon Peter and the Apostles and promised to be with them and their successors, the Pope and Bishops today, in their office of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. It is to them that Christ guaranteed the assistance of "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name; he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you". (John 14, 25).

You can put trust in the Pope and the Bishops today, who are in union with him. They constitute the sole teaching authority in the Church—and no one else. Just stay with them. Long after the hippies, yuppies and knooks have disappeared, the Pope and Bishops will be here to be our safe guides on the road to eternal life. Pray earnestly for the Pope and the Bishops, who need your loyal support in these days of trial for the Church.

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