Introduction: What if we had kept the values and lost the Gospel?

There is a form of Christianity that can seem extraordinarily attractive to modern man.

It speaks of love.
It speaks of solidarity.
It speaks of fraternity.
It speaks of justice.
It speaks of welcome.
It speaks of peace.
It speaks of human dignity.
It speaks of caring for those in need.

And yet something deeply paradoxical can happen: **it can speak about almost everything Christianity teaches without actually speaking about Christ.**

This phenomenon could be called **“natural Christianity” or “naturalized Christianity,”** understanding the expression here not in the Catholic sense of natural law, but as the reduction of Christianity to those things that man can understand, admire, and accomplish through his own natural capacities.

In this reduced version, Jesus Christ appears primarily as a great moral teacher. The Gospel becomes a program for social coexistence. The Church becomes an institution dedicated to promoting certain values. Conversion becomes “becoming a better person.” Holiness becomes confused with moral respectability. Supernatural charity is reduced to solidarity. Prayer becomes a form of spiritual well-being. The sacraments appear to be community symbols. The liturgy is interpreted as a cultural celebration.

And then an uncomfortable question arises:

If we remove grace, Redemption, sin, the Cross, the Resurrection, the sacraments, eternal life, and the need for conversion, what is really left of Christianity?

Something good remains.

But Christianity in its fullness does not.

Because Christianity did not begin when some men decided that it would be beneficial to

promote fraternity.

It began when God entered history.

It was not born from an ethical theory.

It was born from an event.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

This statement contains a revolution that no moral philosophy can replace.

Christianity is not, first and foremost, a system of values.

It is man’s response to a God who has revealed Himself, who has come to meet humanity, who has assumed our nature, who has died for our sins, and who has risen again to open for us the gates of eternal life.

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1. The great misunderstanding: confusing Christianity with humanism

One of the greatest pastoral challenges of our time is the need to distinguish between **Christian humanism and simple secular humanism**.

Christianity certainly has extraordinary humanizing consequences.

The Christian faith defends the dignity of every person because every human being has been created in the image of God.

It defends life because life is God’s gift.

It defends the poor because Christ mysteriously identifies Himself with the little ones and those in need.

It defends the family because there is an order willed by the Creator.

It defends justice because God is just.

It defends truth because Christ Himself is the Truth.

But Christian reasoning does not work the other way around.

We do not say:

> *"Because solidarity is good, Christianity is therefore good."*

We say:

> ***"Because God is good and has loved us in Christ, Christian life necessarily produces love, justice, mercy, and service."***

The difference may seem small.

It is not.

In the first case, Christianity eventually becomes a tool for promoting values that could be defended from other philosophies.

In the second, Christian values arise from something infinitely deeper:

man's participation in the life of God.

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2. The Church never taught that reason was the enemy of faith

Here we need to introduce a fundamental theological clarification.

Criticizing “naturalized Christianity” **does not mean despising human nature, reason, or natural law**, all of which form an essential part of Catholic doctrine.

The Catholic Church teaches precisely the opposite.

Human reason can know fundamental truths about God and the moral order. Man can discover through his intellect that objective goods exist, that certain actions are morally good and others evil, and that there is a moral order inscribed in human nature itself.

Saint Paul expresses this clearly when he speaks of the Gentiles who, even without possessing the Mosaic Law, show that the work of the law is written in their hearts:

“They show that the work of the law is written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15).

The Catholic tradition has developed this doctrine profoundly.

Natural law is real.

Reason is real.

Objective morality is real.

Human dignity is real.

But this is precisely where naturalized Christianity makes its mistake:

it confuses what human reason can know with what can only be received through Revelation and grace.

Reason can recognize that we must love our neighbor.

But Revelation reveals something infinitely deeper:

that we must love our neighbor as Christ has loved us.

Reason can understand that we should forgive.

But the Gospel reveals the mystery of a God who forgives our sins through the Cross.

Reason can recognize human dignity.

But Christianity announces that man is called to an infinitely greater dignity:

to participate in divine life.

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3. The decisive distinction: nature and grace

The entire question can be understood through a fundamental distinction in Catholic theology:

nature and grace are not the same thing.

Human nature is good because it was created by God.

But it is wounded by sin.

And, furthermore, it has been elevated by God to a supernatural destiny.

This means that man is not simply called to “be a good person.”

He is called **to be holy**.

He is not simply called to improve psychologically.

He is called to live in communion with God.

He is not simply called to build a more just society.

He is called to participate eternally in divine life.

Here we find the heart of the problem.

Naturalized Christianity often speaks about **improving man**.

Supernatural Christianity speaks about **transforming him through grace**.

These things are related, but they are not identical.

A man can be educated, kind, generous, hardworking, charitable, and honest without having received the Christian faith.

He may possess admirable natural virtues.

But supernatural life is another reality.

Sanctifying grace is not simply “being better.”

It is a created participation in divine life.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of Christian existence is not to become an improved version of ourselves.

It is to enter into communion with God.

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4. Why would Christ have died if all we needed were good advice?

This question should resonate throughout all contemporary catechesis.

If man’s problem consisted simply in needing better values, then an excellent teacher would be enough.

We could listen to Christ.

We could admire Him.

We could apply His teachings.

But the Gospel announces something infinitely more dramatic.

Man needs to be saved.

Sin is not simply a mistake.

It is not merely an educational deficiency.

It is not simply unhealthy behavior.

It is a rupture with God.

Sin profoundly affects man’s relationship with his Creator.

That is why Christ did not come merely to teach us.

He came to redeem us.

The Cross is not a pedagogical illustration of solidarity.

It is Christ’s redemptive sacrifice.

The Resurrection is not a metaphor for hope.

It is a real event that inaugurates a new creation.

The Church is not simply an association of people who share certain values.

It is the Mystical Body of Christ.

The sacraments are not merely cultural symbols.

They are efficacious signs of grace.

The Eucharist is not merely a communal meal.

It is the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.

And Confession is not simply a therapeutic conversation.

It is the sacrament through which Christ, through the ministry of the Church, forgives sins.

When this supernatural dimension is removed, the Christian building may retain many of its walls.

But its foundation has been lost.

5. “Jesus was a great man”: an insufficient statement

One of the most common statements of our time is probably:

> *“Jesus was a great man.”*

The statement sounds respectful.

But, theologically, it is radically insufficient.

Jesus is not simply a great man.

He is true God and true man.

He is not merely a moral teacher.

He is the eternal Word made flesh.

He did not come simply to teach us how to live.

He came to reveal the Father to us and reconcile us with Him.

That is why reducing Jesus to an ethical reference point fundamentally changes the identity of Christianity.

We can admire Socrates.

We can study Aristotle.

We can learn from Seneca.

We can respect great social reformers.

But Christ is completely different.

Christ does not simply say:

> *“Here is an interesting doctrine.”*

He says:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

He does not merely say:

> *“Learn from my teachings.”*

He says:

“Come, follow me.”

He does not simply present a code.

He presents Himself.

That is the scandal and the beauty of Christianity.

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6. Christianity does not simply consist in “being a good person”

This reduction is particularly dangerous because it appears harmless.

“I am a good person.”

“I try not to hurt anyone.”

“I help people whenever I can.”

“I don’t need to go to Mass to be good.”

“God knows that I have a good heart.”

Naturally, a person should strive to do good.

But Christianity cannot be reduced to this.

Because the fundamental question is not merely:

“Am I a decent person?”

The Christian question is:

“Am I united to Christ?”

Eternal life does not consist simply in receiving a reward for having fulfilled certain social norms.

It consists in eternal communion with God.

And that communion already begins here through grace.

Therefore the Church does not preach morality alone.

She preaches conversion.

She preaches faith.

She preaches Baptism.

She preaches penance.

She preaches the Eucharist.

She preaches prayer.

She preaches holiness.

She preaches the Cross.

She preaches the Resurrection.

She preaches judgment.

She preaches heaven.

And she also warns about the real possibility of definitively rejecting God.

All of this is uncomfortable for a culture that prefers a therapeutic, positive, and undemanding Christianity.

But precisely for that reason, it is necessary to return to the Gospel.

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7. When “love” ceases to mean conversion

Another symptom of naturalized Christianity is the use of the word **love** without supernatural content.

“God is love.”

Correct.

But Christian love does not simply mean emotional approval.

True love seeks the good of the beloved.

And man’s supreme good is God.

Therefore, loving the sinner does not mean affirming that every behavior of his is good.

Christ loves the sinner precisely because He wants to save him.

In the Gospel we find a combination that our age struggles to maintain:

mercy and truth.

Christ forgives.

But He also calls to conversion.

Christ welcomes.

But He also says:

“Go, and from now on sin no more” (Jn 8:11).

Mercy without truth becomes permissiveness.

Truth without charity can become harshness.

Christianity holds both together.

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8. The Cross is the great element that naturalized Christianity does not know where to place

There is a reason why naturalized Christianity prefers to speak about values and avoids speaking about sacrifice.

The Cross is uncomfortable.

The Cross reminds us that sin exists.

It reminds us that man needs conversion.

It reminds us that salvation has a price.

It reminds us that following Christ involves renunciation.

It reminds us that not every desire should become a right.

It reminds us that there is a difference between our will and God's will.

Christ did not promise:

> *"You will be happy if you follow your desires."*

He said:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).

These words are profoundly countercultural.

Society teaches:

"Realize yourself."

Christ says:

"Deny yourself."

Culture says:

"Do whatever you feel."

Christ says:

"Follow me."

Culture says:

"Your freedom consists in choosing anything you want."

Christianity responds:

true freedom consists in being able to choose the good.

9. Naturalized Christianity and the culture of self-help

There is also an especially modern version of naturalized Christianity: Christianity transformed into **spiritual self-help**.

God appears as a kind of heavenly therapist.

Prayer serves to make us feel better.

The Church serves to provide community.

The Bible serves to provide positive thoughts.

Jesus serves as inspiration.

Religion becomes a technique for emotional well-being.

But the Gospel does not simply promise that we will feel better.

It promises something much greater and much more demanding:

that we will be transformed.

Sometimes God comforts us.

Sometimes He grants us peace.

But He can also lead us through paths of purification, sacrifice, and suffering.

The saints understood this perfectly.

Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis of Assisi, and so many others did not seek a comfortable religion.

They sought God.

And they discovered that the path to Him necessarily passes through the conversion of the heart.

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10. The sacraments are not accessories

A practical consequence of naturalized Christianity is that the sacraments begin to appear secondary.

“What matters is believing.”

“What matters is loving.”

“What matters is helping.”

But a question must be asked:

Why did Christ desire a sacramental Church?

Because God does not save man as though he were a disembodied spirit.

Man is body and soul.

Therefore God uses visible signs to communicate invisible grace.

The water of Baptism.

The bread and wine of the Eucharist.

The laying on of hands.

Anointing.

Marriage.

Confession.

The sacraments belong to the very structure of the economy of salvation.

Therefore they are not simply ceremonies.

They are encounters with Christ.

A Christianity that preserves values but abandons the sacraments runs the risk of becoming a kind of **Christianized Stoicism**.

It may continue to speak about virtue.

But it no longer lives from grace.

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11. The Eucharist by itself dismantles purely natural Christianity

Let us think about the Eucharist.

If Christianity were simply an ethic, it would be enough to remember the teachings of Jesus.

But Christ wanted to leave us something infinitely deeper:

His real presence.

The Eucharist forces us to abandon a purely natural vision of religion.

The altar is not simply a symbolic table.

The Mass is not simply a gathering.

The liturgy is not simply a community activity.

In the Eucharistic celebration, the Church participates sacramentally in Christ's sacrifice.

Therefore Christian life cannot be reduced to "doing good."

First, we must learn to receive from God.

Christian life is born from grace.

Then it is translated into works.

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12. “Apart from me you can do nothing”

Christ spoke a phrase that should serve as a permanent vaccine against Pelagianism:

“Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

Pelagianism, in simplified terms, consists in exaggerating man’s capacity to attain salvation through his own strength.

Catholic Christianity teaches something else.

Grace is necessary.

We are not saved exclusively through our moral capacity.

We need Christ.

We need grace.

We need the Church.

We need the sacraments.

We need prayer.

We need conversion.

This does not mean that our works are irrelevant.

Quite the contrary.

Grace transforms our capacity to act.

But the Christian cannot say:

> *"I can save myself simply by being a good person."*

The Gospel's answer is:

you need Christ.

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13. The opposite error: neither should we despise good works

Here we must avoid another extreme.

Criticizing naturalized Christianity does not mean claiming that good works are unimportant.

Quite the contrary.

Christ is absolutely clear:

"You will recognize them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16).

Grace produces fruits.

True faith transforms existence.

The Christian who speaks constantly about doctrine but has no charity contradicts the Gospel.

Saint Paul expresses this with extraordinary force:

"If I have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2).

Therefore the problem is not doing good works.

The problem is **separating good works from their supernatural source**.

Christian charity is not simply philanthropy.

It is the love of God poured into the heart.

Solidarity can be natural.

Charity is supernatural.

The difference lies in the root.

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14. Charity is not the same as philanthropy

We can formulate the distinction simply:

Philanthropy helps man because it recognizes a human value in him.

Charity loves man because it recognizes in him a creature loved by God and, in a certain sense, Christ Himself.

That is why charity can reach extremes that a merely natural ethic can hardly explain.

Forgiving one’s enemy.

Praying for those who persecute us.

Giving without expecting anything in return.

Accepting suffering out of love.

Offering sacrifices for the conversion of others.

Loving someone whom we find naturally unpleasant.

All of this becomes understandable when we realize that Christian life does not arise solely from our natural sympathy.

It comes from God.

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15. Grace does not destroy nature: it elevates it

One of the great contributions of Catholic theology is precisely its avoidance of two opposite errors.

On the one hand:

naturalism: everything can be explained and achieved through human capacities.

On the other:

contempt for nature: as though everything human were evil.

The Catholic tradition teaches something much more beautiful:

grace perfects nature.

Human nature is good, although wounded.

Reason is good.

Intelligence is good.

Freedom is good.

The body is good.

Sexuality, within the order willed by God, is good.

Marriage is good.

Culture is good.

Work is good.

Politics can be good.

Science can be good.

But none of these realities can become a substitute for God.

Christianity does not destroy what is human.

It orders it toward God.

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16. How did this tendency to naturalize Christianity arise?

The temptation is ancient.

From the earliest centuries, the Church had to defend the supernatural dimension of the faith against different forms of reductionism.

Christianity always had to explain that Christ was not simply a moral teacher.

The Fathers of the Church insisted on Christ’s divinity.

The great councils defended His true humanity and true divinity.

Medieval theology deepened the relationship between nature and grace.

Saint Thomas Aquinas showed how reason and Revelation do not contradict one another.

The Reformation and Counter-Reformation raised new questions concerning grace, justification, and freedom.

Modernity introduced an even greater challenge:

the possibility of constructing a worldview without reference to God.

From then on, Western culture progressively began to preserve some elements inherited from Christianity while its theological foundation weakened.

And a paradoxical situation emerged:

a society could continue speaking about dignity, equality, fraternity, rights, solidarity, and justice while rejecting the Christian worldview that had contributed decisively to shaping many of those concepts historically.

This produced a cultural Christianity increasingly separated from faith.

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17. Cultural Christianity: when the form remains and the substance disappears

Cultural Christianity can survive for generations.

Baptisms.

First Communions.

Weddings.

Christmas.

Holy Week.

Processions.

Christmas carols.

Religious images.

Patronal feasts.

But if all of this loses its connection with faith, what remains may simply be a cultural tradition.

The problem is not that Christian culture is bad.

On the contrary.

It is an extraordinary heritage.

The problem arises when **culture replaces faith**.

We can keep the Christmas tree and forget Christ.

We can keep the processions and forget conversion.

We can keep the churches and forget worship.

We can preserve Christian words and empty them of content.

We can speak of love and eliminate truth.

We can speak of mercy and eliminate sin.

We can speak of dignity and eliminate God.

We can speak of Jesus and forget that He is Lord.

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18. Christianity “without sin”

There are words that our age finds especially uncomfortable.

One of them is:

sin.

Without sin we do not need a Redeemer.

Without sin we do not need conversion.

Without sin we do not need Confession.

Without sin the Cross becomes an absurd tragedy.

Therefore, eliminating sin inevitably leads to the naturalization of Christianity.

If man simply needs to “grow,” Christ is a teacher.

If man needs to be “saved,” Christ is the Savior.

The difference is immense.

The Gospel begins precisely with a call:

“Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15).

Conversion is not therapy for self-esteem.

It is returning to God.

It is recognizing that our life does not absolutely belong to us.

It is abandoning sin.

It is accepting grace.

It is beginning again.

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19. Why is naturalized Christianity so attractive?

Because it is comfortable.

It allows us to preserve Christian identity without accepting all its consequences.

It allows us to say:

“I am Christian because I believe in love.”

But without talking about doctrine.

It allows us to defend solidarity without talking about conversion.

It allows us to admire Jesus without accepting His commandments.

It allows us to speak of mercy without speaking of judgment.

It allows us to speak of dignity without speaking of God.

It allows us to speak of fraternity without speaking of sin.

It allows us to have religion without needing to change our lives deeply.

And here one of the great pastoral questions of our time arises:

Are we forming disciples, or simply people who feel sympathy for certain Christian values?

Because Jesus did not say:

“Go and teach people to admire me.”

He said:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

Disciples.

Not spectators.

Not admirers.

Not religious consumers.

Disciples.

20. Naturalized Christianity and the smartphone

This problem also appears in the digital world.

Social networks are full of content that uses Christian language.

Quotes from Jesus.

Images of saints.

Messages about love.

Reflections on peace.

Religious videos.

But a Christian phrase does not necessarily produce a Christian life.

We can share twenty biblical quotations and never pray.

We can publish images of saints and never go to Confession.

We can argue about theology for hours and fail to love our neighbor.

We can publicly defend Christian morality and secretly live in sin.

The algorithm can turn even religion into content.

But **Christ did not come to become content**.

He came to become our life.

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21. The difference between consuming religious content and living the faith

This distinction is crucial for contemporary pastoral ministry.

Consuming religious content can be good.

Reading theology is good.

Listening to homilies is good.

Watching documentaries about saints can be good.

Following Catholic accounts can be good.

But none of these things replaces:

- prayer;
- Confession;
- Holy Mass;
- Eucharistic adoration;
- reading Sacred Scripture;
- examination of conscience;
- penance;
- charity;
- the struggle against sin;
- sacramental life.

Christianity is not lived primarily on a screen.

It is lived before God.

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22. The Christian is not simply called to be “good”: he is called to be holy

This distinction deserves to be engraved in our hearts.

A good person may avoid many sins.

A saint seeks, in addition, an ever deeper union with God.

A good person may be generous.

A saint learns to love through Christ.

A good person may follow rules.

A saint seeks God’s will.

A good person may have a morally ordered life.

A saint wants his entire existence to be offered to God.

Holiness is much more than moral correctness.

It is interior transformation.

That is why Saint Paul does not simply say:

“Be better.”

He says:

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Here we find the heart of supernatural life.

It is not simply a matter of adding religious behaviors to a natural existence.

It is allowing Christ to transform our entire existence.

23. The Church is not a religious NGO

The Church can carry out extraordinary social works.

She has done so for centuries.

Hospitals.

Schools.

Universities.

Orphanages.

Assistance to the poor.

Missions.

Care for the sick.

Aid to the persecuted.

But if the Church were merely a humanitarian organization, we could replace her with an NGO.

The Church exists because she has an incomparable mission:

to proclaim Christ and communicate salvation.

Material assistance is necessary.

But man needs more than bread.

He needs God.

That is why Christ, while feeding the crowds, also announces the Bread of Life.

The Church must not choose between evangelization and charity.

She must do both.

Because Christian charity is born from faith and leads toward God.

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24. The real pastoral problem: offering a Christianity without demands

A pastoral approach that seeks only to make people feel comfortable runs the risk of forgetting that the Gospel also makes us uncomfortable.

Christ comforts.

But Christ also corrects.

Christ embraces.

But Christ also calls us to leave everything behind.

Christ forgives.

But He also demands:

“Go and sin no more.”

A truly merciful pastoral ministry does not hide the truth.

It announces it with charity.

A doctor who loves his patient does not tell him:

“You have no illness.”

He tells him the truth so that he can be cured.

In the same way, the Church does not love man by telling him that sin does not matter.

She loves him by announcing that **grace is more powerful than sin**.

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25. Supernatural Christianity is not an escape from the world

Another frequent misunderstanding is to think that defending the supernatural dimension means despising the world.

No.

The Christian lives deeply within the world.

He works.

He forms families.

He participates in society.

He studies.

He conducts research.

He creates art.

He does science.

He participates in politics.

He helps those in need.

But he does so with a different awareness:

this world is not God.

And neither is it our final homeland.

Saint Paul expresses it this way:

“Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20).

This truth does not make us less responsible for the world.

It makes us more responsible.

Because we know that our lives have an eternal destiny.

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26. How can we recognize naturalized Christianity?

We can formulate some simple questions.

First question: Is Christ being spoken about, or only values?

If Jesus appears merely as moral inspiration, there is a problem.

Second: Is sin being spoken about?

If everything is explained through “mistakes,” “processes,” or “circumstances,” the biblical category of sin may have been lost.

Third: Is conversion being preached?

The Gospel always calls us to conversion.

Fourth: Is grace being spoken about?

If everything depends upon our abilities, we are facing a naturalistic reduction.

Fifth: Are the sacraments being spoken about?

Christian life is sacramental.

Sixth: Is eternal life being spoken about?

Christianity ultimately looks toward communion with God forever.

Seventh: Does the Cross occupy a central place?

If the Cross disappears, something fundamental has been lost.

Eighth: Is Christ presented as Savior or merely as teacher?

The answer immediately reveals what kind of Christianity we are proclaiming.

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27. How can we recover supernatural Christianity?

The answer is not to abandon reason or reject culture.

It is to **return to the center**.

And the center is Christ.

Not an ideology.

Not an aesthetic.

Not nostalgia.

Not a political identity.

Not a culture war.

Not a collection of values.

Christ.

Everything must begin and end in Him.

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28. First practical application: return to prayer

If we want to escape a purely natural religion, we need to recover prayer.

Not merely reading about God.

Speaking with God.

Not merely posting spiritual quotations.

Kneeling.

Not merely listening to religious podcasts.

Becoming silent.

Prayer reminds us of something essential:

I am not God.

I need to receive.

I need to ask.

I need to give thanks.

I need to worship.

I need to repent.

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29. Second application: recover Confession

Confession is one of the great answers to naturalized Christianity.

Why?

Because there we acknowledge something modern culture tries to eliminate:

we have sinned.

But we also acknowledge something far more beautiful:

God can forgive us.

Confession destroys two errors.

The first:

“I am perfect.”

The second:

“I am hopelessly guilty.”

Christianity teaches:

you are a sinner, but God’s mercy is greater than your sin if you repent.

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30. Third application: return to the Eucharist

The Eucharist reminds us that Christian life does not consist in producing our own salvation.

First we receive.

Then we give.

First Christ gives Himself.

Then we learn to give ourselves.

First we receive grace.

Then we can produce fruits.

That is why Mass should not be regarded merely as a weekly obligation.

It is the center of Christian life.

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31. Fourth application: recover doctrine

Naturalized Christianity thrives where religious ignorance exists.

When a Catholic does not know his faith, he easily replaces Christianity with his own opinions.

That is why we urgently need to recover:

- the Catechism;
- Sacred Scripture;
- Tradition;
- the Fathers of the Church;
- theology;
- the lives of the saints;
- the documents of the Magisterium.

Not so that we become specialists incapable of loving.

But so that our faith has roots.

A faith without formation easily ends up becoming sentimentalism.

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32. Fifth application: recover the meaning of sacrifice

We live in a culture that tries to eliminate every discomfort.

But Christianity has a different word:

sacrifice.

Fasting.

Penance.

Mortification.

Renunciation.

Silence.

Discipline.

Generosity.

Service.

All of this educates the heart.

Because someone who never learns to say “no” to himself will have enormous difficulty saying “yes” to God.

Christian freedom does not mean obeying all our desires.

It means being free to love the good.

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33. Sixth application: learn to live counterculturally

The Christian does not need to seek conflict constantly.

But neither should he be afraid to live according to the Gospel when it contradicts dominant trends.

If culture says:

“Every desire must be satisfied,”

the Christian responds:

not every desire is good.

If it says:

“Truth depends on each individual,”

he responds:

truth exists.

If it says:

“Religion is a private opinion,”

he responds:

God is real.

If it says:

“Death is the end,”

he responds:

Christ has risen.

If it says:

“Man saves himself,”

he responds:

we need a Savior.

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34. The danger of turning Christianity into an ideology

There is also a danger among those who want to combat naturalized Christianity.

We can move from the extreme of a Christianity without doctrine to the extreme of doctrine without life.

We can constantly talk about tradition, liturgy, morality, politics, and culture and forget charity.

We can correctly defend a truth while doing so with a heart incapable of loving.

We can win arguments and lose souls.

This would be another form of naturalization: turning the faith into a cultural or ideological identity.

Authentic Catholic tradition is not an ideology.

It is the living transmission of the apostolic faith.

And its center remains Christ.

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35. Tradition does not mean nostalgia

This point is particularly important.

True tradition does not simply consist in preserving forms from the past.

Tradition means receiving and transmitting what the Church has received from Christ and the Apostles.

Traditional Catholic liturgy can powerfully help recover the sense of the sacred.

Sacred music can lift the soul.

Silence can teach worship.

Latin can remind us of the universality of the Church.

Sacred architecture can catechize.

But no external form can replace interior conversion.

The liturgy must lead us to Christ.

Tradition must lead us to Christ.

Doctrine must lead us to Christ.

Devotion must lead us to Christ.

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36. Supernatural Christianity restores man’s true greatness

Paradoxically, the more supernatural Christianity is, the more deeply it dignifies man.

Because it does not say:

“You are merely an intelligent animal.”

It says:

you were created for God.

It does not say:

“Your life ends in the grave.”

It says:

you are called to resurrection.

It does not say:

“Your sins define you forever.”

It says:

you can be forgiven.

It does not say:

“You must save yourself through your own strength.”

It says:

God offers you His grace.

It does not say:

“Your suffering is meaningless.”

It says:

it can be united to the Cross of Christ.

It does not say:

“You are alone.”

It says:

Christ is with you.

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37. Christianity does not simply promise a better life: it promises a new life

This is perhaps the best summary.

Christianity is not simply a method for improving life.

It is the proclamation of a **new life**.

Saint Paul expresses it magnificently:

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

A new creation.

Not simply a slightly better person.

Not an optimized version of ourselves.

An existence renewed by grace.

This explains why the saints could live in a way that seemed incomprehensible to the world.

They were not simply extraordinarily disciplined people.

They were men and women transformed by God.

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38. True Christianity begins where self-sufficient man ends

Modern man wants control.

Control over his body.

Control over his future.

Control over his image.

Control over his reputation.

Control over his environment.

Control even over his identity.

But the Gospel begins when man discovers that he cannot save himself.

And then he hears extraordinary news:

God has come to seek him.

We do not have to climb up to God through our own strength.

God has descended to us.

Christianity begins in Bethlehem.

It continues in Nazareth.

It passes through Calvary.

It triumphs in the Resurrection.

It spreads through Pentecost.

And it continues sacramentally in the Church.

It is not a philosophy invented by man.

It is salvation history.

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39. A question for our time: what would remain if we removed Christ?

We can perform a very simple exercise.

Imagine that tomorrow all references to the following disappeared from Christian discourse:

- God;
- Christ;
- sin;
- grace;
- the Cross;
- the Resurrection;
- the sacraments;
- the Church;
- prayer;
- conversion;
- eternal life.

And we retained only:

- solidarity;
- justice;
- equality;
- fraternity;
- peace;
- dignity;
- tolerance;
- helping those in need.

Would we still have Christianity?

The answer is clear:

not in the full sense.

We would have values compatible with Christianity.

But we would have lost what makes those values fruits of supernatural life.

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40. The Christian of the future will have to recover the word “supernatural”

Perhaps one of the great evangelizing challenges of the coming decades will be precisely to recover a word we have stopped using:

supernatural.

Because if the supernatural does not exist, then prayer is merely introspection.

Mass is merely a gathering.

Confession is merely psychology.

The Eucharist is merely a symbol.

Grace is merely a metaphor.

Miracles are merely ancient stories.

The Resurrection is merely an image.

The saints are merely moral examples.

Heaven is merely a poetic hope.

But if God exists and Christ has risen, then everything changes.

Religion ceases to be a human construction.

And becomes an encounter with the deepest reality that exists:

God Himself.

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41. True Christianity is radically supernatural and radically human

Here is the final synthesis.

We do not have to choose between humanity and the supernatural.

Christ Himself is the answer.

The Son of God assumed a human nature.

Grace did not destroy Christ’s humanity.

It brought it to its fullness.

Likewise, grace does not destroy man.

It restores him.

It elevates him.

It sanctifies him.

It divinizes him by participation.

That is why true Christianity is profoundly human precisely because it is profoundly supernatural.

It loves man because it loves God.

It serves man because it recognizes in him the image of God.

It defends truth because Christ is the Truth.

It protects life because life comes from God.

It loves the enemy because Christ died for sinners.

It forgives because it has experienced forgiveness.

It hopes because Christ has conquered death.

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42. Conclusion: we do not need a more natural Christianity, but a return to the supernatural source

Perhaps the problem of our time is not that there is too much Christianity.

Perhaps the problem is that, in many environments, **we have tried to make Christianity into something the world can accept without needing to convert**.

We have reduced the Gospel to values.

Jesus, to a teacher.

The Church, to an institution.

The liturgy, to a celebration.

The sacraments, to symbols.

Morality, to rules.

Charity, to solidarity.

Prayer, to well-being.

Faith, to cultural identity.

And then Christianity ceases to scandalize.

But it also ceases to save.

Because the Gospel was not proclaimed so that the world would say:

“What wonderful values.”

It was proclaimed so that man could say:

“Lord, save me.”

Christianity does not simply proclaim that we must become better.

It proclaims that **God offers us His grace**.

It does not simply proclaim that we must love.

It proclaims that **God loved us first**.

It does not simply proclaim that we must forgive.

It proclaims that **Christ died for our sins**.

It does not simply proclaim that we must have hope.

It proclaims that **Christ has conquered death**.

It does not simply proclaim a new ethic.

It proclaims a new creation.

Therefore, faced with every attempt to reduce Christianity to a human ethic, the Church must once again proclaim with all her strength what constitutes the heart of her existence:

Christ is true God and true man.

Christ died for our sins.

Christ rose again.

Christ is truly present in the Eucharist.

Christ forgives sins.

Christ communicates His grace.

Christ calls us to conversion.

Christ founded His Church.

Christ will return.

Christ is the beginning and the end.

And then we understand the true difference between a naturalized religion and Christianity.

A naturalized religion says:

> *"Do good and be a good person."*

The Gospel says:

> *"Come to Christ, receive His grace, convert, follow Him, and allow Him to transform your life."*

A naturalized religion can produce admirable people.

But only grace can produce saints.

And the Church does not exist simply to manufacture good citizens.

She exists to lead men to Christ.

Because, at the end of all our works, all our virtues, all our projects, all our discussions, and all our human achievements, there remains one truly decisive question:

Have we known Christ?

And even more:

Have we allowed Christ to live in us?

There begins true Christianity.

Not in mere morality.

Not in ideology.

Not in culture.

Not in sentimentalism.

Not in a collection of values.

In Christ.

Because Christianity is not simply a way of life.

It is the life of Christ communicated to man through grace.

And therefore, in the face of every attempt to reduce it to a human ethic, the Church must return to proclaiming with all her strength that which constitutes the heart of her existence:

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).