

## **Chapter 36**

### **On the Threshold of the Third Millennium**

#### **A Polarized Church**

There have always been theologians identified as “conservative” and “liberal” as clearly seen in the crisis of Modernism (see Chapter 29). However, the reaction to Vatican II created a conservative and liberal reaction that also involved a great many of the Catholic laity. Gone are the pre-Vatican II days when many, if not most, Catholics simply followed the teachings of the Church leaders - popes, bishops and the curia - and did not envision the need for any fundamental changes in the Church and its teachings.

(NOTE: the Roman Curia is an administrative bureaucracy established by Pope Sixtus V in 1588. The higher ranking officials of the Curia are usually cardinals or archbishops. Over time they have assumed more and more power and tend to be very conservative.)

However, in the late 1900's, especially in the developed countries, there arose a sharp polarization between liberal and conservative laity and clergy on such issues as contraception, abortion and the law, clerical celibacy, the ordination of women, social justice, liturgical reforms and the attitude of the laity toward church leaders from the pope on down.

While Pope John Paul II remained conservative on such issues as contraception, abortion, clerical celibacy and the ordination of women, he toured the world proclaiming the Church's liberal stance on social justice, care for the poor and the ecumenical movement. A good deal of his popularity was attributed to his many visits to countries around the world – 104 abroad and 146 inside Italy -- and his stand on issues that appealed to both conservatives and liberals.

Later critics of John Paul II would note that these very popular trips around the world left the Vatican in the hands of a very conservative curia, who seemed determined to stop the liberal trends inaugurated by Vatican II, especially that of collegiality. For these conservative curia, all authority should reside in Rome and the contributions of the laity and even the Bishop's Conferences all came under the conservative control of the curia. One example is the lack of attention that Rome seemed to pay to the various suggestions of bishops around the world concerning the revision of the liturgy.

John Paul II also left a conservative stamp on the Church by allowing the appointment of vast numbers of conservative bishops to various dioceses all over the world, many times in opposition to the wishes and recommendations of the local hierarchies and the priests and people of these various dioceses. This trend continues today.

## **Collapse of Communism**

John Paul II has been credited by many, including the Soviet leader Gorbachev, of making a significant contribution to the fall of Communism. His visit to his homeland of Poland spiritually energized his people and inspired the workers to organize the Solidarity union which toppled the Communist regime.

However, after the fall of Communism, Poland and much of the rest of Europe was judged by the Pope to be undermined by the same materialism that caused the fall of Communism, since many Catholics no longer attended church.

## **Interfaith Relations**

While John Paul II has been criticized for turning over the many of the functions of the church to the conservative curia, it is surprising to many how open he seemed to some liberal issues, especially interfaith relations. In 1995 he issued the encyclical *Ut Unam Sint* (That All May Be One). In that encyclical he noted that while the papal office belongs to the essential structure of the Church, the manner in which the office is exercised is always subject to criticism and improvement. In truth, it has been a great obstacle to the reconciliation of Christian communities, especially the Orthodox Christian Churches. And he called on the leaders and theologians of other churches to communicate to him their views on the role of the Papacy and what changes could be made in the structure and/or the functioning of the Papal office to further unity and conform more faithfully to the gospel.

Many were shocked that such an autocratic pope would ask non-Catholics for their views on how authority should function in the Catholic Church so that eventually a Christian unity of some sort could be established. One response came from Cardinal Konig who said the church model should be one of a “communion of communions”.

Again, in January of 2002, the pope called an assembly of world religious leaders to convene at Assisi in Italy. Some 250 leaders representing most world religions responded. Such a large response was seen as largely due to the world travels that the pope had made and his visits to such places as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. He had also visited Athens and apologized for the sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. (see: Ch. 14, pp. 11-12)

John Paul II's efforts coincided with such efforts as the twenty-year dialogue between Lutheran and Catholic theologians. Their publication of *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith* made some progress to address the basic issues of the Reformation. His efforts also coincided with and supported the ongoing Catholic-Lutheran dialogue which in 1973 established in The United States Lutheran – Catholic Dialogue. This joint effort included such well known Lutheran scholars as Karl Donfried and John Reumann and Catholic scholars such as Raymond Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer. They produced highly successful collaborative studies, i.e., *Peter in the New Testament* and *Mary in the New Testament*, focusing on two controversial

figures in NT theology.

The pope also congratulated the Protestant churches in their efforts which gave life to the ecumenical movement. This important movement began in 1910 at Edinburgh at a world missionary conference of 414 delegates from 122 denominations and 43 countries. They stated that “our divisions were contrary to the will of Christ. ...and that a unity of Christ and fellowship in the Spirit is deeper than our divisions”. It was not until Vatican II that the Catholic Church supported the ecumenical movement in its Decree on Ecumenism n.1.

### **The Issue of Religious Pluralism**

While John Paul II promoted the ecumenical movement, many questions needed to be discussed before any doctrinal unity could be established. A central question was and still is that of religious pluralism or better defined as the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions.

At the opening of the second session of Vatican II Pope Paul VI made this statement:

“The Church is a *mystery*. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and greater exploration.”

If we define the Church as the people of God, then perhaps the people of God include some of those not in the visible Catholic Church. St. Augustine once said that “God has a lot of people the Church does not have and the Church has a lot of people that God does not have.”

So how do we assess the situation of people in non-Christian religions? Can they in any sense be called the people of God? Perhaps it will help to note that in reacting to the pagans in Athens, St. Paul did not simply condemn them for their idolatry, but made this observation:

Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god’. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you....he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being. Acts Ch. 17.

While not condemning their idolatry, in Romans Ch. 19 Paul condemns those who suppress the truth about God’s will for them because he argues that:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. Vs. 20-21

Here Paul argues that the true God can be known through a careful observation of nature, thus non-Christians can have a true, if partial, experience of God.

Since, for Paul, every human being lives, moves and has their being in God, then perhaps, even without the gift (grace) of the revelation of God in Jesus, all human beings can catch a glimpse of God and this glimpse, however faint and incomplete, can be incorporated into their particular religions and thus they can respond to the creative presence of God who calls them to love themselves, others, the material world and God himself. In this sense perhaps they can be called a people of God.

In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, perhaps the most important document of Vatican II, we find in section 16 the affirmation that God's "plan of salvation" includes Jews, Moslems and "those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God" and the document goes on to note that God, as Savior, wills that all men be saved, with reference to I Tim.2:4. Having thus indicated that all non-Christians are related in various ways to the People of God (the Church), Section 16 continues in the next paragraph:

Those also (non-Christians) can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace.

These testimonies which indicate the possibility of salvation for all of God's children do not promote a position of religious relativism, but rather point to the mystery of our God who is present in power to all creation and to the possibility that this presence can be perceived in some way by all who seek God. However, they do cancel out the old phrase "outside the Church there is no salvation".

The writings of Father Dupuis, mentioned in the text, are just some of the attempts to understand how God is present throughout the ages to human beings, and especially how various religions manifest this presence. Other scholars have offered five main positions: 1) no religion is true, 2) only one single religion is true, 3) all religions are equally true, 4) all religions share in the truth of the one true religion.

To briefly indicate some surprising moments in the Catholic response to these questions these are two examples:

1) In September 6 of 2000 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by then Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a document entitled *Dominus Deus*. It stated that individual non-Christians can receive the salvific grace of God only by means of

Jesus and the Church. All who are saved must have a “mysterious relationship with the Church” (No.20). It also states that followers of other religions are “in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation”. (No. 22). This raised a storm within and outside the Church and put a damper on ecumenical dialogue.

2) Another surprising moment came at a Good Friday service on March 29, 2002 in St. Peter’s Basilica, which was celebrated by Cardinal Ratzinger in the presence of the Pope who was sidelined because of a bad knee. The preacher that day was the pope’s official “preacher of the pontifical household”, Raniero Cantalamessa. In the presence of the author of *Doninus Deus*, he made some remarkable statements. He said that while all religions are not equally true, every religion has the right to “consider itself the true one “ and that non-Christian religions were not just tolerated by God but “positively willed by him as expressions of the inexhaustible richness of his grace and his will for everyone to be saved.”. Also that “Christ is more concerned that all people should be saved than that they should know who is their savior”.

Truly the church and salvation are deep mysteries.

### **The Canonizing Pope**

Pope Paul II was concerned about the life of Christians and the challenge of secularism. He saw the saints a symbols of a flourishing religious life and so he canonized hundreds of saints and beatified over one thousand.

He paved the way for the canonization of Mother Teresa which many applauded. His canonization of a nun, Edith Stein a Jewish convert who died at Auschwitz, caused some concern among the Jews who said she died there because she was a Jew and not because she was a Catholic nun.

Another concern was raised by the canonization of Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei (the Work of God ). This is a conservative secret society with authoritarian methods that induced fear in many of it members.

### **Hitler and Pius XII**

Another large and ongoing controversy was created by the possible canonization of Pius XII. The controversy centers over his relationship with Hitler during the Holocaust. Pius XII had been sent all over the world as a papal representative under Pius XI and served as papal nuncio in Germany from 1917 to 1920. He was elected pope on March 12, 1939 and on March 15 of that year, the Germans entered Prague.

On October 20, 1939 Pius XII issued his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, which condemned the invasion of Poland. Through the end of 1939 and into 1940 Pius tried to launch peace negotiations and to serve as mediator. “Nothing is lost by peace”, he said, “everything is lost by war”. On Christmas of 1942 he spoke of his opposition to

totalitarian regimes. This evoked German protests and threats of personal attacks on himself. The possibility of personal attack became more likely when the Germans took over Italy and entered Rome in 1943 and Vatican City became a refuge for many refugees, including many Jews. Throughout WWII Pius XII and the Vatican were seen as opponents of tyranny and workers on behalf of the oppressed, including many Jews who received help from Pius XII.

Criticism of Pius XII came much later with the publication in 1963 of Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* which claimed that the pope's silence promoted the pope's business interests and later John Cornwell's book *Hitler's Pope* accused Pius XII of not only being silent, but actually supporting Hitler as a defense against the Russians, because he judged Communism to be far more dangerous than Nazism. After ten years of criticism of his book, Cornwell, somewhat chastened, admitted that he was not able to judge the motives of Pius XII. He made this admission in a later work, *The Pontiff in Winter*.

Pius XII also had many supporters, including famous Jews such as Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, Moshe Shrett and Rabbi Isaac Herzog. While the pope is credited with doing a number of positive things to help the Jews, critics maintain that he could have done a great deal more. Some critics also maintain that his excuse, that he feared strong statements would only cause greater reprisals, not only of Jews, but also of German Catholics, was unfounded.

With the controversy continuing, the Israeli ambassador to the Vatican, Aharon Lopez asked the canonization to be put off for fifty years.

### **Pius XII and the German Bishops**

Pius XII was accused, with some merit, of being ambivalent in his approach to the German bishops during WW II. Thus he left it up to the German bishops to decide how to act. Unfortunately, episcopal leaders were split on the issue of how to handle the situation. Bishop von Preysing of Berlin was for public confrontation and condemnation, while Bishop Bertram, president of the German bishop's conference, disagreed.

There was lay support for von Preysing's approach but without any support or guidance from the Bishop Bertram no organized resistance took place. Journalist and historian Donald Nicholls cites a tradition within German Catholicism that encouraged suffering in silence.

### **A Call for Repentance**

John Paul II was open to admitting the failings of the Church – historically there were many -- and called to the entire Church to atone for its transgressions, including its acquiescence in human rights abuses under totalitarian governments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Before a visit to the Czech Republic in 1999, he apologized for the cruel execution of Jan Hus (1369-1415). Hus was a Czech priest/theologian and rector of the University of Prague. He was a radical reformer with a large band of followers. They rejected transubstantiation, demanded Communion under both kinds and claimed that reprobate priests, including popes, forfeit their authority within the Church. He was excommunicated in 1410. He agreed to submit himself to the Council of Constance in 1414. On arrival at Constance, despite a guarantee of safe conduct from the Emperor Sigismund, he was incarcerated by the Dominicans, condemned and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. This infuriated his followers in Bohemia and they initiated the Hussite War between Hussites and Catholic Germans, which lasted from 1419-36.

The pope also made strong efforts toward reconciliation with the Jews. In his papal letter "We Remember: A Reflection of the Shoah" he acknowledged the Church's anti-Semitism and called for Catholics to repent for any contributions they made toward the Holocaust. In Holy Week of 1993 he invited the chief Rabbi of Rome to a concert at the Vatican commemorating the Holocaust.

### **Papal Loquacity?**

John Paul II was an intellectual pope, speaking eight languages and writing a number of papers, bulls, encyclicals and letters. Given his intellectual status and his acquaintance with the modern philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology, it was expected by many that he would take a new initiative in the age-old attempt to reconcile faith and reason.

However, in his encyclical *Faith and Reason* he took the classical stance that philosophy was subordinate to faith in the old Thomistic tradition. Many Catholic intellectuals were disappointed that he did not open up the discussion of how to reconcile the faith with the postmodern intellectual world. While the faith had been sustained with Thomistic philosophy, why was there no attempt to use modern philosophy, when appropriate, to relate the faith to the modern situation?

For many the Pope's approach comes close to the notion of *fideism*, which holds that religious knowledge is an act of faith alone and not at all an act of the human intellect and certainly rejects some modernists notions that reason is the basis of all truth. Most supporters of the Pope maintain that he subscribed to the Vatican I position which rejects both *fideism* and rationalism. The existence of God can be known by human reason (St. Paul), but faith brings supernatural knowledge and is a gift of grace.

### **Dissenters Beware**

Since the time of St. Anselm (1033-1109) theologians have gone about the task of helping the faithful come to an understanding of their faith. Anselm was a philosopher and a theologian who saw his scholarly work defined as *fides quaerens*

*intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) or how to relate our faith to the current intellectual culture and the ordinary experiences of life. He held that faith and reason cannot contradict each other, because each is a gift of God. Therefore, it seems to follow that there should be an ongoing effort to understand and apply our faith better in light of the advances in human understanding in such areas as science and psychology. Any theology that ignores its culture will eventually fail to adequately communicate with it effectively. St. Thomas Aquinas used Greek philosophy to speak to the philosophical culture of his time, because the Muslims, Jews and Christians in Spain had cooperated to give the fullness of Greek philosophy to medieval Europe as a way to approach the mysteries of faith.

Most modern theologians would agree with this quote from Leonard Boff O.F.M. in his pamphlet “*The question of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus*”:

It is no sign of orthodoxy to repeat old formulas without the effort of examining the present and its questions. There are heresies which originated from a zeal to maintain the tradition unchangeable. Christian truth remains alive and not a museum piece, only if it is translated into the various languages of our day.

However, this effort by theologians is not without its problems. Authority figures like Pope John Paul were concerned that efforts to relate faith to the modern sciences might result in relativism or the rejection of long held doctrines like transubstantiation and moral issues like birth control.

Pope John Paul expressed his concerns in an encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (faith and reason). He also made an effort to restate a good deal of orthodoxy in language for lay people in the 1994 publication of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This catechism was widely read and it upheld such moral positions as the condemnation of abortion, euthanasia, divorce and artificial birth control. It also included modern social sins like tax evasion, drug abuse, mistreatment of immigrants, etc.. While it condemned homosexual activity, it did not condemn homosexuals, given that they do not choose their orientation. They are welcome in the Church.

Critics maintain that the Catechism ignores modern theology, sometimes uses the Bible inaccurately, does not provide a distinction between central beliefs and less important ones and elevates some debatable theological positions to the level of orthodoxy and seems to close the debate over the issue of the ordination of women.

In December, 1990 more than 400 Catholic theologians accused the Vatican of obstructing change in the Church, inhibiting freedom of expression, diminishing the roll of the bishops and laity and favoring more centralized control by Rome. They also mentioned that the issue of the ordination of women should be up for discussion.

Reacting to the issue of the ordination of women, Pope John Paul issued a papal letter, *Ordination Sacerdotalis*, in which he said that “the Church has no authority

whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women” and that “this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful”. When asked by a bishop if “definitively” was meant to indicate that this judgment is part of the deposit of faith, the reply by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said that it was indeed.

In reaction, theologians asked how a papal letter and a statement of the CDF could define an infallible statement and declare it part of the deposit of faith. They reminded the CDF that popes and theologians had justified the morality of slavery as part of an unbroken, universal tradition. This defense of slavery continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One example among many: From 1600-1800 a total of 2,000 slaves, almost all Moslems, manned the galleys of the pope’s navy. (see John Noonan’s treatment of slavery as the “Unknown Sin” in his book “A Church That Can and Cannot Change” pp.17-123) So is the morality of slavery part of the deposit of faith?

Given all of this discussion, especially about the ordination of women the Pope concluded that Vatican II had given too much freedom to theologians and so a document – *Ex Corde Ecclesia* - was sent to the bishops from Rome which authorized local bishops to issue a *mandatum* to theologians certifying that their teaching is “authentic Catholic doctrine”. In this atmosphere Rome has continued to censure a number of well known theologians including Hans Kung, Charles Curran, Roger Haight, and Elizabeth Johnson.

These have caused concern in the academic community. When Elizabeth Johnson’s book “The Quest for the Living God” caused the Bishops’s Committee on Doctrine to issue a critical statement, this resulted in a statement from the Catholic Theological Society lamenting the lack of dialogue and communication on the part of the hierarchy.

### **Congar**

Given Pope John Paul’s deep concerns about liberal theologians, it is another paradox that he made Yves Congar, a legendary dissenter, a cardinal in 1994, a year before Congar’s death. Congar was a champion of change and development of doctrine. However, Rome considered him a dangerous dissenter and near heretic. In 1954, he was exiled from his teaching post, restricted from public speaking and hounded by Curial inquisitors who sought to trap him.

Congar was finally vindicated when the bishops of Vatican II endorsed his views on ecumenism and made them a center-piece in the *Decree on Ecumenism* published by Vatican II in 1964. He is an inspiration for those working for change in the Church.

### **Sex and the Pope’s Theology of the Body**

Again, Pope John Paul got praise and criticism, both deserved, for his various positions in the area of sexual morality. Bokenketter states that traditional Catholic sexual morality was based on a natural law approach, but a distinction needs to be

made between two natural law traditions – that of the Greeks and that of Ulpian. Ulpian was a Roman lawyer who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Unlike the Greeks, he held to a natural law theory that would identify human acts simply with the physical structure of the act, rather than from a total perspective of human happiness and well being.

Those in the Catholic tradition, including John Paul II, who judge contraception to be immoral, use Ulpian's restrictive notion of natural law to condemn contraception in every case, because it violates the "natural structure of the sexual act", rather than judge it within the entire context of a marriage relationship.

The Pope got praise for approaching human sexuality from a biblical point of view and interpreting the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve in a very positive manner. However, when it came to the subject of contraception he held that the use of the "natural rhythms" of the human body is the most human way to exercise procreative responsibility – an echo of Ulpian.

He also condemned the use of condoms in the fight against AIDS, but there have been some recent changes in the church's approach which allow some use of condoms to address the AIDS problem in areas of the world most infected.

John Paul II also reiterated the Church's condemnation of abortion and euthanasia. However, he did depart from Church teaching on the issue of capital punishment, which he stated could only be tolerated in cases of "absolute necessity" to protect society, although in the modern world these cases are rare if not non-existent.

### **The Polarized Church**

One of the key factors that creates a polarized church is the way some bishops and sometimes Rome respond to differences of opinion on various topics. For example, the issue of homosexual unions were addressed by the Austrian Catholic Men's Association which called for a blessing of homosexual unions. This did not result in a dialogue with the bishops concerning this matter, but rather a simple declaration that this was against the authoritative teaching of the Church.

And when the French Bishop Jacques Gaillot spoke in favor of married priests, the use of condoms for people with HIV and respect for committed homosexual unions, the official response was to remove him from office with no prior warnings. Protesters to this action were joined by the president of the French Bishops Conference, Joseph Duval. He called for dialogue rather than an authoritarian approach. Later, the French bishops argued that condoms might even be considered a "necessity" to address the HIV situation. Even the Dutch cardinal Adrianus Simonis of Utrecht favored the use of condoms as a "lesser evil".

The issue of dialogue verses an authoritarian approach is a crucial one. Modern Catholics want to know why something is morally right or wrong rather than simply

being told. This knowledge will help them form their consciences – conscience is a judgment – and many Post Vatican II Catholics will follow their conscience rather than simply comply with an authoritarian pronouncement.

The dialogue approach will include a rational justification for the Church's position. For example, the official position on abortion is backed by reasonable argumentation, but if this is not clearly explained, many Catholics will follow their uninformed conscience. In Ken Walk's book *Religion and Politics in the United States* (ch.6), he reports that a national survey found that Catholics responded to the abortion issue in this way: abortion never be permitted 9%, permitted in cases of rape, incest or danger to the mother's life 35%, other reasons 16%, a matter of the woman's personal choice 40%. A careful, rational explanation, rather than an authoritarian pronouncement would no doubt change these percentages significantly.

The overall question is: to what extent the Church should be more democratic and less authoritarian? With an educated laity living in democratic societies there is arising an urgent plea for the laity to be involved in the decision making within the Church. Authoritarianism is out of date and all members of the church – men and women – need to be consulted and involved. Many have said that if mothers had been members of parish committees which handled child abuse complaints concerning the priests, the scandal would have been handled quite differently and much to the benefit of the children and the Church.

In fact, women's role in the church has become and will remain one of the most polarizing issues in the modern church. The "We are Church" movement in Germany issued a statement in 1999, criticizing Pope John Paul II lack of support for German reform groups. The movement called for the ordination of married men, allowing remarried divorcees to receive Communion and the ordination of women priests. According to a Gallup poll in 1992, two thirds of Catholics in the U.S. favored having women priests.

### **The Polarized Parish**

Given that there are a number of polarizing issues in the Church and that the laity are becoming or want to become more involved, then this polarization naturally expresses itself in the structures and activities of individual parishes. When the bishops, priests and laity are fairly liberal or conservative in a particular parish, then parish life goes on pretty well. However, when members of these diocesan groups are at odds with one another, conflicts can and do arise. Two examples of this are given by Bokenkotter on pages 497-498. And when things get too derisive then often members of a parish find another parish or simply quit the Church. Only new leadership and/or a new form of leadership in Rome can hope to adequately address this problem.

Another phenomenon that could be related to polarization is the drop in Mass attendance. In the 1950's about 75% of Catholics attended Sunday Mass. This percentage slipped to 66% in the 1970's, 53% in the 1980's, 40% in the 1990's and

only 37% by 1999. One can only guess at the current rate in those parishes experiencing the worst of the child abuse scandal, ie. in Ireland.

One explanation among the local clergy and Rome is that this is due to secularization and an emphasis on personal freedom, rather than compliance with authorities and institutions. There may be some truth in this, however since Gallop began polling on this issue in the 1930's, society as a whole attends weekly church services at a steady rate of about 40%. It is only Catholics that have descended from higher to lower participation. Scholars suggest that one reason for this decline is that Catholics no longer believe that missing Mass on Sunday without an excuse is a mortal sin.

### **Archbishop Weakland VS. the “Reformers” of the Reform**

Some of the new theology and changes in the liturgy that came out of Vatican II have caused concern for the conservative element in the church. Some of their concerns about the liturgy and the way it is celebrated are understandable, however most would agree that the changes in the liturgy since Vatican II have been very helpful.

However, in a 2002 article in *Commonweal*, Archbishop Weakland notes that a “restorationist” movement has arisen in the Church which intends to inaugurate a “reform of the reform” and go back to a pre-Vatican II approach to liturgy. For some in the movement this could mean a restoration of the Latin in the Mass, the priest not facing the people, no women involved in the liturgy or distribution of communion, traditional music, very little participation of the laity and more. Weakland believes that this restoration movement is based on a negative evaluation of modern secular society, especially what seems to them to be a lack of a sense of the transcendent and a downgrading of the hierarchy.

Rome seems to be giving some support to this conservative movement as seen in its revised form of the Roman Missal. This revision was mainly the work of the Roman curia with little involvement of the bishops throughout the world. For Weakland this is a step backwards and a return to tight control by Rome.

The concern in Rome seems to be a fear of doctrinal errors. They point to the dwindling devotion and even “disbelief” in the Real Presence. However, part of the problem may be that doctrinal approaches to the Real Presence are locked in the medieval, Greek language of substance and accidents. Perhaps a more modern approach to the mystery of the Real Presence might make more sense to people in the modern thought world.

### **The Priesthood in Trouble**

While there has been an increase in the number of seminarians in the U. S. in the past five years, their numbers are still not enough to replace those who retire, quit or die. Many of the priests who have come from foreign countries to help out have difficulty in pronouncing English, which makes their sermons difficult to understand. This

shortage is related to smaller families, more career opportunities, pedophilia scandals and stressful work. About 15% resign after five years for several reasons, including loneliness and the issue of celibacy. However, a poll of five hundred priests ordained since 1995 found half of those still serving after five years were very satisfied.

One observation by Fr. Donald Cozzens in his book “The Changing Face of the Priesthood” is that an “inordinate number of candidates for the priesthood are homosexual”. They take the same vow of celibacy as heterosexuals and find the priesthood as safe place to function as single males.

### **Pedophiles and Priests**

The sexual abuse of children by priests is an international phenomenon. To be precise, the term pedophile refers to a man who is sexually attracted to children below the age of puberty, but the vast majority of sexual abuse cases among priests involve teenagers of either gender.

In the United States an analysis of why some priests abused children points to a variety of reasons. Data reported by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 2010 show that – between 1950 and 2002 – 4,392 priests were accused of at least one credible incident of immoral sexual conduct with 10,667 young people. This estimate conflicts with the 1996 estimate of Philip Jenkins of 1,000 to 1,500. The Jay report also could find no single answer as to why these priests abused those young people. Much more research needs to be done.

A real problem for the institutional Church has been not only that its priests abused children, but that much of it was not dealt with effectively at the time by bishops or Rome nor reported to police by local authorities in the Church. Cardinal Sean Brady in Northern Ireland admitted in March of 2010 that he had been aware of allegations of abuse against a priest as early as 1975 and did not report them to police. In 2002, the trial of Fr. Geoghegan was based on the accusation that he had molested some 150 children during his various assignments and he had been moved from parish to parish after these serious allegations had been made to church authorities.

On the other hand, some bishops were given advice from psychiatrists and criminologists that, much like alcoholism, priests with these problems should be given therapy, which might well cure them, rather than simply punishing them. In the case of alcoholic priests, historically many were cured and sent back to their priestly duties with a great deal of success. So some bishops may simply have used this “successful model” to address the abuse problem.

There have been multiple effects of this scandal, including, public suspicion of all priests, disdain for some authorities in the church and laity simply leaving the Church. Since the revelations of abuse in Germany and Austria, it is estimated that 180,000 German and 87,000 Austrian Catholics have left the Church. Plus, the lawsuits that have ensued from those offended have cost dioceses hundreds of

millions of dollars and even caused some to declare bankruptcy.

These two issues: sexual abuse by priests and the failure of some bishops to address the problem are of great concern to American Catholics. In a 2003, Dean Hoge and James Davidson asked a random sample of 1,119 American Catholics to rate serious issues in the Church. The top issue was sexual abuse by priests 85% of the sample and the second was that bishops had not done enough to stop these priests, 77% of the sample.

### **How the Media Came to Focus on Clerical Abuse as a Peculiarly Catholic Problem**

The media have been rightly accused of presenting clerical abuse as a specifically Catholic phenomenon. As professor Philip Jenkins – *Pedophiles and Priests* – has claimed, the cases of abuse in other church communities have about the same percentage range.

The media is always looking for sensational stories such as the case of Archbishop Richard Sanchez of Santa Fe, who admitted to relationships with three young women. In another case, bishop Patrick Ziemann of Santa Rosa, California admitted to a “consensual” relationship with another priest – Fr. Jorge Salas – which he claimed was consensual when sued by Salas.

These kinds of stories, reported time over time in the media, send an overall message about the status of the catholic priesthood and hierarchy. However, in fact, the vast majority of the clergy are innocent of such behavior and afflictions.

For Catholic liberals, this media message is considered a powerful reason in support of their agenda, which calls for an end to the patriarchal autocratic structure of the Church. For Catholic conservatives this situation is proof that the post-Vatican II reforms have gone too far. Clergy abuse, they believe, was a natural outcome of liberal and Vatican II excesses, specifically the infiltration of homosexuals into the clergy who were morally contaminated by liberal opinions.

Thus, the media has contributed to the polarization of the church.

### **Laity on the Move**

Given all the bad news in the Church, there is also some good news. With the shortage of priests, there has emerged an educated, informed, active and loyal laity that is willing and able to help the hard working clergy in the running of the church at the diocesan and parish level. In January of 1998, the *New York Times* reported that the men and women who are now entering religious orders are mature, educated and devoted to addressing the social needs of their communities.

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It is especially interesting that more and more women are assuming pastoral, liturgical and administrative responsibilities. In many large parishes with only one priest, lay people, mostly lay women and religious, actually run the parish. They also take positions such as hospital chaplains, campus ministers, directors of religious education – CCD and RCIA - , spiritual directors, college professors and pastors of parishes without full-time priests. Given this expanding role of women and the need for them, in 1995 a group of experts in canon law concluded that it would be within Catholic theology and practice to ordain women as deacons.

The more active role of educated women in society is a worldwide phenomenon. In an article in the *Economist* (8/27/11) p. 58 it was noted that even in countries without democratic governments women play important roles, for example *Forbes* magazine reported that of the 14 women identified as self-made billionaires, 7 are Chinese and in the United Arab Emirates 65% of university undergraduates are women. Also in the past century women have held positions equivalent to the president of the U.S. in countries like Britain, Israel and South American countries. Maybe the church is catching up with the modern world.

### **Is Smaller Better?**

While traditional religious orders continue to decline – a 40% decline since 1962 – a growing number of lay men and women are forming small communities that help them lead a more intense Christian life. Some have a life in common, while others meet at various times to study the Bible and join in prayer.

In his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI saw these groups as a sign of hope for the universal church. In 2002, an article in *America Magazine* estimated that there are some 50,000 of these small groups in the United States. In 1976, Jean Jadot, the Apostolic Delegate to the U.S., speaking to the NCCB suggested that these small groups might be forming a new pattern of parish life – a community of small communities. From the beginning of the Church, the patterns of parish life have taken on different forms which are often the reflection of the needs of people in the current culture.

### **Dynamic Lay Communities**

There are many thousands of Catholic laypeople who throughout the centuries have formed groups to serve others in need as Jesus did. In earlier days these groups often formed religious communities of men and women, but today most of these groups are laypeople who focus on the special needs of their communities. They operate food banks, clothing banks, take in battered women, visit those in prison, etc.

Two large groups of laypeople have also drawn international recognition. One is the

Sant'Egidio Community of Rome and forty other countries, they meet nightly for prayer and look for ways to serve the poor. They also won international recognition when they won the UNESCO peace prize for brokering a 1992 peace accord in Mozambique. They also sponsored a meeting of Jews and Muslims.

Another international group, Focolare, was founded by Chiara Lubich. She and others formed this group amid the bombings of WWII in Italy. When going to the bomb shelters, they took the Bible with them. Reading all the times that Jesus called his followers to love one another, they decided make the God of love the center of their lives and to risk their lives in helping those suffering from the bombings. This movement, dedicated to the love of neighbor, serves all humanity regardless of their faith tradition or lack thereof. It has grown to involve millions of people in 182 nations.

### **Is the Church Top-Heavy? Kasper vs. Ratzinger**

In a word: yes. History has proven Lord Acton's adage: "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Certainly there would not be a church without Jesus, but Jesus did not spend any time in his ministry setting up a structured church. He only had a small group of followers and when he preached of the Kingdom of God and worked miracles, he never asked those who heard him to join his group of followers or set up "Jesus communities" in their home towns. For a founder of a worldwide religious community, this was unusual. Two other founders of worldwide religious communities, Moses and Muhammad, claimed detailed instruction from God to govern their communities.

So who put together a structured church for Christians? That task was begun by the early communities of Christians and goes on today. It is simply a matter of sociology that large groups need some kind of structure, but the type of structure is open to choice and to change. The way the Christian Church and later the Catholic Church is structured is largely a matter of human choice and has changed and will probably continue to change over the centuries. And like all human endeavors, it is never perfect.

It is clear that many bishops and laity believe, and history has shown, that the Church has too much power concentrated in Rome and the Curia. Plus, this power is often used in a very authoritarian way with little consultation with the world conferences of bishops or the laity. This flies in the face of Vatican II, which called for more collegiality.

In Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* – "On Reconstructing the Social Order" - he stressed that change and problem solving is most effective when it comes from the bottom up, not the top down. This is a social doctrine of the Church known as subsidiarity. It applies to the state and the church. It means the upper levels of the state and the Church should not take over what the lower levels are capable of doing.

For example, why should Rome be in charge of the entire process of nominating and appointing bishops? This is also part of the change model found in classic approach known as Organizational Development. People need to be involved to make change effective and in problem solving people at all levels have valuable insights. As was noted earlier, today's well educated laity can be most helpful in organizing an effective model of church organization and functioning.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in the U. S. has been a very effective for on social issues and implementing the spirit of Vatican II. However, in 1995, more than forty American bishops endorsed a 12 page statement criticizing the weakening role of the Bishop's Conferences and Rome's reluctance of consult them prior to making policies for the Church.

In 1992, when Ratzinger was still a Cardinal, his office (CDF) sent a document – “The Church as Communion” – which reversed the spirit of Vatican II by advocating the centralizing power of the Curia. This was challenged by Cardinal Kasper who pointed out that the local church came first, not the universal. Rome came to be a centralized power almost by a historical accident of Western (Roman) history. This was unlike the Eastern Church, which emphasized a collegiality which still exists in the Orthodox Church, since the split in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. For the ancient church, the bishop of Rome could be granted the status of *primus inter pars* – first among equals, but not the imperial type of power that it assumed from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

Kasper also was concerned about Ratzinger throwing “monkey wrenches” into the ecumenical dialogue in the Catholic Church which was represented by Kasper. Kasper was concerned about Ratzinger's critical comment on the joint Lutheran-Catholic declaration on the doctrine of justification and Ratzinger's document “Dominus Jesus” which dismissed other Christian denominations as “not Churches in the proper sense.”

Conservative supporters of Ratzinger pointed out that unlike Pope John Paul II's, quite positive and definitely ecumenical encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint*, which was directed to leaders of other Christian Churches, *Dominus Iesus* was directed primarily to the bishops of the Catholic Church and secondarily to theologians and missionaries.

Furthermore, they argued, *Dominus Iesus* was not an encyclical from the pen of the pope, but a Declaration from the office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), signed by its Prefect, Cardinal Ratzinger. The CDF was originally established in 1542 by Pope Paul III as the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition. The purpose of this office was to safeguard the faith, discover false doctrines and guard the Church from heresy. In modern times the CDF is charged with assisting the bishops in their role as authentic teachers of the faith. To that end the CDF investigates writings of Catholic theologians that seem dangerous or contrary to the faith. Many of the best theologians of the 20th century have been called on the “doctrinal carpet” of the CDF.

In any event, Ratzinger, then cardinal and now pope, came out of all this as one who again was seen as opposing the spirit of Vatican II, this time on the important issue of ecumenism.

### **The Debate's Impact on Ecumenism**

The call by many bishops and theologians for the expansion of collegiality is a call for decentralization. This will be necessary and a difficult task. The modern world is becoming more and more democratic, while the Church remains autocratic and is becoming more so.

For Kasper this is a major roadblock in the ecumenical movement. Kasper sees a major goal of the ecumenical movement as the formation, not of one uniform, united Church, but “one Church in reconciled diversity” – a unity in diversity, a communion of communions. Reaching this goal could pave the way for a reunion with the Orthodox and Anglican churches and other Protestant communities.

Can this important change take place? It will be most difficult especially with Ratzinger now the pope. But there is hope. There are important players like the president of the Brazilian bishops' conference, Jayme Henrique Chemmello. Representing the largest Catholic country in the world, he called for more participation by bishops, especially in the selection of bishops. He also called for local churches to have more authority in four important areas: translations of liturgical texts; nominating witnesses for marriages; dispensations from ordained ministry; and annulment of marriages.

Also, in 1996, Archbishop John R. Quinn called for major reforms in the operation of the papacy. He said a power shift should occur away from Rome to the local bishops.

In 2001, John Paul, at a meeting with all 137 cardinals, heard some cardinals call for decentralization, however, John Paul replied that “the existing systems are effective”. And with the advent of Ratzinger as pope, decentralization is clearly not on the horizon. This seems to put the ecumenical movement and the reforms of Vatican II on the back burner.

### **Shaping the Future?**

In January 2001, Pope John Paul named 37 new cardinals bringing to 128 those eligible to vote for his successor of which 118 were his appointments. In 1996, John Paul also made a significant change in the method of electing a Pope. Traditionally, a papal election required a two-thirds majority, but now if the two-thirds majority cannot be reached, only a simple majority will be required for election. History has shown that the appointment of these cardinals and the new election requirements was most effective in the election of Ratzinger as pope.

Another reason to predict an ongoing conservative, Rome-centered church is the fact that papal appointments have resulted in Latin America having 26 voting cardinals and as mentioned earlier the Latin American church seems to be of a conservative bent. In addition, the Archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne is the first member of Opus Dei to be made a cardinal. The conservative trend continues.

### **Apparitions Galore**

The International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton reports that nearly 80,000 apparitions of Mary have been claimed since the third century A.D. Yet only 7 (about a hundredth of 1%) have received official recognition by the Catholic Church, according to the institute's director, Father Johann Roten, S.M.

Those apparitions recognized are:

**1531** – Guadalupe, Mexico where Juan Diego claimed she appeared four times.

**1830** – Paris France to novice (age 24) Catherine Laboure who said Mary commissioned her to have the “Miraculous Medal” made.

**1846** – La Salette, France. Mary is said to have appeared to Maximin Giraud (age 11) and Melanie Calvat (age 14) while they tended sheep.

**1858** – Lourdes France at the Grotto of Massabielle, Bernadett Soubirous (age 14) reported to have seen Mary 18 times under the title of “the Immaculate Conception”.

**1917**-Fatima, Portugal. While tending sheep Lucia de Santos (age 10) and her two cousins, Francisco (age 9) and Jacinta Mario (age 7) reported six apparitions of “Our Lady of the Rosary”.

**1932-33** –Beauraing, Belgium. Mary is said to have come 33 times to the playground of a convent school to five children (ages 9-15)

**1933** –Banneux, Belgium. In a garden behind her home Mary is said to have appeared to Mariette Beco (age 11) eight times.

In 1981 Mary is said to have appeared to six children at Medjugorje in western Herzegovina. The Church has made no official evaluation of these appearances.

Whatever the official evaluations of these events, belief in them is not compulsory. The Church teaches that public revelation – the deposit of faith – ended with Jesus and the New Testament.

### **Charismatic Movement**

The charismatic movement has been described as a ministry of healing where people gather to pray for the needs of their family and/or friends. It has been popular with Hispanic Catholics. In 1992 about 1,000 people gathered in St. Patrick's Cathedral to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Charismatic Renewal.

Warnings about rousing emotions, mass hysteria, and other excesses were expressed in documents from the CDF and the Congregation for Divine Worship in 2000. These

warning were confirmed in one instance when a leader of the Charismatic Movement, Archbishop Milingo of Zambia was married to a young Korean girl by Rev. Sun Myung Moon of the Unification Church. In a few weeks Milingo left his “wife” and she began a fast in St. Peter’s Square accusing the Vatican of kidnapping him.

Given these warnings from Rome and the Milingo affair the Movement still got some support from Cardinal J. Francis Stafford, head of the Council of the Laity, who said the Movement was “a manifestation of the new forms of evangelisation which the Holy Father has called for”.

### **Revision of the Rite of Exorcism**

A new rite of exorcism forbids exorcists from talking to the devil and allows exorcism only when possession is a certainty and the person is not suffering from a mental or psychological illness. A 1999 Vatican document reaffirmed that the devil exists and is at work in the world.

The Church’s best known exorcist is Fr. Gabriele Amorth of Rome. He says he sees about ten people a day for demonic possession, obsession and other minor problems. These people are not evil in themselves, but are victims of a spell. However, he admits that most people who seek him out need a psychiatrist and he will not see them until they do.

Amorth’s book *An Exorcist Tells His Story* has been reprinted 17 times. He believes that wars are caused by the devil and that Hitler and Stalin were consecrated to Satan. He is also critical of the new rite of exorcism, because it may exclude some people who are indeed possessed.

### **Secularism**

When many churches, especially the Catholic Church, are losing active members, the blame is often put on secularism in the modern world – a loss sense of the sacred. Some like Jesuit sociologist John Coleman argue that there has not necessarily been a loss of a sense of the sacred. However, Coleman observes that “authoritarian religion based on rigid doctrinal or moral orthodoxy finds an inhospitable climate in the modern situation”. A good number of young people are now saying things like – I am spiritual, but not religious. This may mean that they believe in a god, even the Christian God, but refuse to associate with an authoritarian church community – either Protestant or Catholic.

Given the rise of a secular culture and the failure of some church communities to adapt to a democratic culture, many countries like England and Italy have experienced some sharp declines in church attendance through the 1960’s to the present day. This has also happened to some extent in the U.S., but programs like the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) and local programs for fallen away Catholics have been successful.

In the U.S. one of the most difficult sectors to convert to Catholicism has been African Americans. Sam Dennis, a sociologist, traces the problem back to the Church's acceptance of slavery until late in the 1800's, its acceptance of segregation and its failure to develop African American clergy.

Some progress has been made to address this population and a significant event was the election of the first black President of the United States Bishop's Conference – Bishop Wilton Gregory.

While many western countries have experienced significant declines in church membership, on an international level the number of baptized Roman Catholics rose from 750 million in 1978 to almost 990 million in 1995. Non-western countries are making up the difference.

## **Epilogue**

Pope John Paul II left behind him a polarized Church – progressives vs traditionalists. Here in 2011 it is fairly certain that the traditionalists are in control with Ratzinger now as the new pope. This would make John Paul II quite content for he believed that Vatican II and the modern culture were a threat to the 'unchangeable' Church.

So what of the future? No one knows for sure, but most historians would say that change is inevitable for survival. The question remains: how long will it take? It could be quite a while. For over nearly three hundred years – the 14<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century - the Church experienced corruption and discord. These years saw the Avignon papacy, the Great Schism (with three men claiming to be pope) followed by the so-called Renaissance papacy which was perhaps the most corrupt in the history of the Church. All during this time, the need for change was seen by many, but all the efforts at major reform failed because of the power of a corrupt papal office and the curia.

Into this seemingly hopeless situation came the unexpected event of Martin Luther in the early 1500's. For many reasons he sparked a renewal of the church as well as a split in Christianity. Because when some of the dust had settled, the Catholic Church went through a much needed renewal which was crystallized in the Council of Trent (1545-63). Unfortunately, most of the changes and formulations of the Council of Trent stayed in place until the Second Vatican Council. Change does not come easily.

Then came a different kind of unexpected event, the person of Pope John XXIII and the result was the Second Vatican Council. Many saw this as the advent of some much needed change, not in a corrupt Church, but in a Church that was out of step with modern culture. Many saw the need for more democracy in the Church and a greater role for the well-educated laity. Also there was great hope for the expansion of the ecumenical movement, with the Catholic Church as an important contributor.

Some of the changes did take place and, in general, worked quite well, especially the changes in the liturgy and the openness to other Christian communities and all peoples of different faiths or no faith. However, as we have seen, Rome has now put the brakes on this process of renewal, especially any movement for more collegiality at all levels of the Church. Many are disappointed and this disappointment along with the clergy crisis have seen many leave the Church.

Does all this mean that the traditionalists/conservatives are always wrong and the progressives/liberals are always right? Certainly not, but the situation does call for a time of intense reflection, dialogue and prayer. Our God and the Church are mysteries and as such defy any final definition or static structure. As Pope Paul VI said so well at the opening of the second session of Vatican II:

“The Church is a *mystery*. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and greater exploration.”

All of us can learn from each other, but only if we are open to the possibility of changing our views. It is true that tradition must be maintained, however the maintenance of tradition demands that the core values and insights of this tradition be made meaningful to the changing cultures.

Is there hope for the future? There is always hope, especially if we let the Holy Spirit fill us with new life so that we can live the Kingdom of God in our Church and in our daily lives.