



The Journal



January - March 2013

Papal Power

by Paul Collins, Canberra, Australia



Introduction:

This is a book about power and the way it has been used to govern the Catholic Church. In a more ideal world it would be about service and Christ-like leadership. But this is not the reality of contemporary Catholicism. The second millennium of Catholic history has been characterized by the evolution of an ideology of papal power that has increasingly centralized all authority in the pope and his curial bureaucracy. Often in the process of asserting its authority papal intentions were laudable and honorable: centralization came as a result of reform of the Church and society, struggles to guard the Church from secular rulers invading the spiritual realm for their own ends, the protection of local communities from petty episcopal tyrants, and the coordination of the missionary work of the Church and the proclamation of the message of Christ. This process of the centralization of power has been going on for a little less than a thousand years and most people have forgotten that a highly centralized papacy is by no means normative for the entire history of the Church. The long tradition of Catholicism offers other models of governance and ways of relating to the Bishop of Rome...

As the Church confronts the third millennium of its existence, the importance of the role of the papacy in the ecumenical Church of the future is a major consideration in this book. The power of the pope, as presently constituted, is simply and totally unacceptable to the Orthodox, Anglican, or Protestant churches. But their views cannot be ignored by Rome. Despite many advances this century, the tragedy of Christian division still plagues us and the contemporary form of the papacy is an enormous stumbling block to the process of Christian unity.

But the power-focused Roman agenda has also become an obstacle for Catholicism itself. The centralized and absolutist operation of Rome has brought modern Catholicism to a grinding halt. Among the mainstream majority of Catholics in the Western world there is a pervasive sense that the Church has failed them, that it has not listened to their experience and their needs, and that the doctrinal and moral guidance that it offers in many areas is irrelevant to their lives. The Church hierarchy seems to offer little guidance or inspiration in the search for a contemporary spirituality and an ethical basis for living. The protection of papal power seems to be the constant underlying leitmotif of most papal decisions. To the outsider, the Vatican seems an extraordinarily conceited and self-absorbed institution.

Yet Catholicism cannot simply jettison the papacy. Catholics recognize that it is one of several defining elements of their faith. The Bishop of Rome has been part of Church history from very early in the formation of Christianity. The office has certainly developed and evolved over the centuries and its influence has ebbed and flowed in the Church, but it has been present since the Church's origins. The very fact that it has changed means that it can change again. This book is fundamentally about how that change might occur.

The core of the problem is how an institution so focused on and preoccupied with medieval, monarchical, and absolutist notions of *sacra potestas* (sacred power) can transmute into one concerned with genuine notions of leadership, especially the style of servant leadership modeled by Jesus in the Gospel of John and discussed by Peter in his First Epistle. As a model of abject service, Jesus washed his disciples' feet at the Last Supper (John 13:2-17) and Peter expands on this by saying that Church leaders should not 'lord it over those in your charge, but be examples ... all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another' (1 Peter 5:3-5). This is a far cry from a papal superstar who claims it as his right to regulate the most intimate details of human existence.

I am not questioning the sincerity of modern popes as they assert their right to act out the role and authority that they have inherited and have themselves helped to develop. They are as much the victims of history as the rest of Catholicism. But I do want to question the nature and limit of that role and to suggest that it can no longer be couched in terms of 'power over' people. The papacy must begin to learn the humility of genuine Christian leadership. In short, what I have tried to do in this book is to draw on the long tradition of Catholicism to suggest some alternative models that may be more acceptable ecumenically, more inspiring to Catholic people, and less destructive to the Catholic Church of today and tomorrow.

In *Papal Power* published by Harper Collins 1997, Dr. Collins, married priest, historian, broadcaster, and former Specialist Editor of Religion for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation looks beyond the details of over 260 popes to uncover the dynamics of papal power as it enters its third millennium.

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The Journal welcomes submissions from small faith communities and individuals that share its vision of the Christian Church as one in which all are equal, decisions are made by consensus, healthy relationships are nurtured, justice is done, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

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God does not need our prayers or our worship, but we do. Prayer, reflection, meditation, and liturgy help to centre us and bring us together as a community to make God and Jesus present in the world by our gathering. When we come together as a community either in prayer or in social action, the Church and Jesus are made visible. Jesus is made visible when we gather and share our faith and ourselves in a real "communion" of the faithful. We are the "body of Christ".

Healing The Planet

by François Brassard, Victoria, BC



Diarmuid O'Murchu, author of *Quantum Theology*, wrote a very important book on evolutionary spirituality in 2002.¹ He describes two major developments affecting our planet that have been evolving since the 1970's: the new cosmology and globalization. In and of themselves these two developments are a

source of wonder and excitement. The possibilities for growth seem endless. But how has humanity been dealing with this? Typically, because we humans have free will, we can use the information to build or to destroy. Some would say that the latter is occurring and they point in the direction of the multi-national corporations whose power and control exceeds that of the various national governments the world over. It would not be hard to show in great detail how that power is wounding the planet, particularly in the southern hemisphere. But does it have to be that way? Can we not save the planet? I believe we can by linking the two above-mentioned developments, that is, by globalizing conscious awareness of what the new cosmology is revealing.

Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry set the stage for the new cosmology in a very exciting way with their 1992 book, "The Universe Story." Then Brian Swimme dealt with the heart of the new cosmology in his 1996 book, "The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos." O'Murchu also deals with this material in chapter three of "Evolutionary Faith."

All the discoveries of science, whether it be of large phenomena (galaxies, stars, planets) or of small phenomena (sub-atomic particles/waves), are based upon careful observation that lead scientists to develop theories of how everything works. Classical physicists from Newton to Einstein have developed mathematical formulas that work fairly well in the domain of the 'large.' However, they have not been able to explain the weird behaviour of sub-atomic entities discovered by quantum physicists (particle or wave?, indeterminate potentiality/non locality, and the relationship of observer and observed). It would appear that the way to resolve these differences lies with a better understanding of the relationship of the observer and the observed.

Newtonian physicists have a mechanistic view of reality. A planet, a rock, a tree, a horse, and a human being are each separate, individual entities that follow immutable laws of nature (e.g. thermodynamics). They don't explain how or why these entities have come into existence and seemingly, with time, disappear from existence,

because, according to them, that is beyond the purview of science. Some will posit the existence of a deity that creates everything. Others holding a materialist view deny such a theory, and a number of quantum physicists would agree with them as they toil in their own field of endeavour. Can this difference of opinion be resolved? Amazingly, it can.

Recent discoveries in astro and quantum physics tell an amazing story of the ongoing journey of our universe. Astro-physicists have discovered that, in fact, the dark vacuum of space inside and between stars and atoms is not empty. Rather, it is full. It is a vast ocean of seething energy that makes up 96% of our universe. Quantum physicists describe it as a vast cauldron of electromagnetic waves (weak photons) of indeterminate potentiality travelling at speeds way faster than the speed of light. They have no mass, but through their *interaction* with atomic particles they assist in creating mass (matter) by producing infinitely diverse patterns or forms through a process of frequency adjustment ('morphic resonance').² Quantum physicists call this immense ocean of dark energy the Zero Point Field (ZPF). Others have called it 'The Force' (Arthur C. Clarke), or the 'collective unconscious' (Carl Jung) or the 'noosphere' (Teilhard de Chardin). Quantum physicist, Rupert Sheldrake, calls it the 'morphic field,' by which he means a *form* or *pattern* producing grid.³ Sheldrake has made amazing discoveries relating to the self-organizing properties of biological systems (morphogenesis). He theorizes that the ZPF is made up of many sub-set fields that store memory information across multiple generations relating to past and present biological shapes and the timing of their formation, in other words, how does a fertilized egg know how to form an arm or a leg or a brain and in what order.⁴ Sheldrake's research has also provided evidence that legitimizes alternative medical practices such as homeopathy and acupuncture. His theories have also provided plausible explanations, on the one hand, for strange paranormal behaviour such as levitation and psychokinesis (e.g. fork bending), and, on the other hand, for strange animal behaviour such as how large groups of birds or fish make instant choreographed movements without ever interfering with one another or how whales communicate with one another over vast distances.

The research of many quantum physicists including Sheldrake during the last 40 years raised the crucial question of the exact nature of the *interaction*, referred to above, between the ZPF waves and various sub-atomic particles. In numerous experiments quantum physicists discovered that when electromagnetic waves of indeterminate potentiality (not localized) were observed or measured, they became definite, localized particles. Sheldrake and others elaborated and refined this phenomenon as a result of their experiments, particularly in the field of quantum biology. They were able to conclude that the ZPF is a vast memory bank of information detailing everything that has ever existed, does exist and could possibly exist in the universe. They also determined that sub-atomic particles are living entities that know about each other, and, as they are tightly interlinked by bands of common electromagnetic fields, they can communicate with each other. In order to verify these theories, carefully controlled scientific experiments were run in several countries and, particularly, at

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Princeton University in the USA in the 1970's and 1980's. From the mountainous data collected they were able to show that distant communication, distant healing and remote viewing were achieved beyond the statistical parameters of success due to chance. More importantly, in my view, they were able to establish a number of factors that seemed to enhance the possibility of success in the running of these experiments. For instance, though they discovered that using gifted (psychic) experimenters enhanced the possibility of success, particularly in the case of remote viewing, they also found that ordinary people could achieve success especially if they placed themselves in a 'meditative' state of consciousness before undertaking the experiment. Also, women tended to do better than men and, it would seem that this was so, because they were better able to quiet the left brain and allow the right brain to predominate and to interact with emotional states activated by the limbic system. This state worked better, it would seem, because it enhanced the conscious coherence necessary to interact with the ZPF. It would also appear that when multiple experimenters were in synchronized conscious coherence, not only with themselves but also with the planet as a whole, the rate of success improved.

The work of all these scientists investigating the nature and functioning of the ZPF has opened up enormous possibilities for healing the planet. Indeed, if these theories are true, is it not possible for humans to tap into this vast source of indeterminate energy? Could we not find an abundant, clean, renewable fuel that would not only satisfy all our earthly needs, but would also allow us to eliminate the use of polluting hydrocarbons? Could we not travel to the stars? Could humans produce healing outcomes particularly in the field of biomedicine?

But not everybody agrees with these theories. Indeed, it is a fact that most classical physicists ridicule and dismiss the work of these quantum physicists as 'magical thinking.' For myself, I tend to grant more credibility to researchers who provide plausible, common sense explanations for bizarre phenomena than I do to those who provide unsatisfactory or worse, no explanation at all. Broadening this topic, I find it interesting to point out that proposals for resolving the rift between the classical physicists of the 'large' and the quantum physicists of the 'small' is coming from the latter group. McTaggart states that "there are those who believe quantum theory will one day be replaced by a modified classical theory which takes into account the Zero Point Field. [They may be able to] create a unified physics of the world, large and small."⁵

The above divide is small by comparison with the 350 year rift between science and religion or, otherwise said, between matter and spirit. Unfortunately, science does not or has not been able to explain the existence of *consciousness* and *free will*. On the contrary, philosophy and religion (spirituality) in the last 3000 years have made great contributions to the understanding and meaning of these two interrelated phenomena. Fortunately, the gap between matter and spirit is narrowing as a result of intense research into the mysterious world of *consciousness*.

Consciousness is an awareness of 'other' and like everything else in the universe, it evolves. Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., a Canadian psychiatrist writing in 1899, distinguished three forms or grades of consciousness.⁶ He described Simple Consciousness as an awareness of objects, be it a rock or a tree or even a part of a being's own body. He

thought that the upper half of the animal kingdom (horse, dog, elephant, ape) possessed this form of consciousness. Today, some would extend that group to encompass all living things, including electromagnetic waves/particles. Bucke then described Self Consciousness as a more evolved form of consciousness particular only to humans. It's an awareness of 'self' being separate from the rest of the planet/universe. Today, researchers would refine that definition by adding that humans are increasingly aware of being intimately connected and symbiotically interrelated to everything in the planet/universe.

A number of signposts marked the steady and progressively rapid advance of self-consciousness in the direction of more diverse and complex expressions of creativity. Archeological digs show evidence of tool making going back 100,000 years designed to improve hunting (spear, bow and arrow), food storage (pottery) and clothes making (bone needles). Later discoveries of cave drawings indicate the development of communal song and dance, the precursors of language. Burial sites indicate primitive beliefs in an after-life. The agricultural revolution led to communal living in villages and cities and that necessitated more complex tools and forms of communication and organization. The last 10,000 years has evidenced an exponential advance in conscious body/mind/spirit awareness. Three major tools have contributed to this development: *abstract thinking* which led to *language and writing*. And these three have produced music, poetry, story telling, history, philosophy, theology, medicine/biology, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and more.

The advent of writing was a crucial development because it enabled each future generation to build upon the creative output of previous generations.⁷ The disciplines of philosophy and theology going back 3000 years reveal the concerns of humans about their outer surroundings, their own inner world and the interaction of the two. They became aware of dualities, such as creation and destruction (life/death), good and evil, immortality and extinction. In their efforts to resolve these polarities, they posited the existence of 'deity,' of human 'free will,' of the immortal soul, of judgement/karma, and of heaven (nirvana) and hell. The sacred writings (Hindu, Buddhist, Abrahamic) abound with myths and metaphors dealing with these issues. So too do the writings of the great mystics of the world. But the source of mystical information, in my view and that of many others, reveals another giant leap in the evolution of consciousness.

According to Bucke, the third form of consciousness which encompasses and builds upon Simple and Self Consciousness, is Cosmic Consciousness. It deals with the life and order of the universe. It occurs as a *total brain* (neuro-receptors throughout the body) enlightenment that is the result of a major traumatic experience (near death experience (NDE) or a 'mystical' event). Bucke described eleven traits common to people possessing Cosmic Consciousness as a result of an enlightenment experience.⁸ In the latter two-thirds of his book he illustrates this phenomenon by providing detailed information of historical people he feels truly attained Cosmic Consciousness. The first five people in chronological order that he investigates are: Gautama the Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus,

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Plotinus, and Mohammed. Based on my study of the New Testament, I was quite impressed with his presentations of Jesus and Paul.

For the purposes of this essay, namely, the healing of the planet through activated conscious intention, I would like to detail the most important traits and after-effects of the enlightenment experience that Bucke and other very recent researchers have discovered.⁹

Traits:

- The person is suddenly enveloped in a brilliant light emanating Peace, Joy and Unconditional Love. In the vast majority of NDE experiences, the subject is reluctant to return to earth.
- There is a conscious disconnect from the physical body: awareness of time and space is radically altered; all body pain disappears.
- All information is communicated directly and instantly known; sensory perception disappears. This clarifies why subjects have post illumination difficulties in explaining their experience in the analytical self-conscious mode of transmission through language.
- The person often encounters and communicates telepathically with pure spirit beings.

After-effects:

- The person instantly develops a sense of immortality, becomes totally aware of a compassionate Divine Presence, realizes that 'evil' does not exist in this ethereal domain, and no longer fears death.
- Often the person returning to earth is physically transfigured, showing a change in appearance (luminescent face, sparkling eyes) as well as heightened sensory capabilities (like hearing the music of a beautiful sunset), and exhibiting a great curiosity to learn more about physical and psychical reality.
- Dependent upon free will choice, the person devotes self to the service of the Divine Plan and the needs of the planet during remaining time on earth.

P.M.H. Atwater has researched the NDE phenomenon for more than 30 years and she has rigorously analyzed and verified more than 6000 cases. She herself had three NDE's in 1977. The list of traits and after-effects described above came in great part from her work. Her analysis is most enlightening from a left-brain point of view, though her stories and those of others describing actual NDE experiences have had more *affect* on me from a right-brain/limbic system point of view.

The key point to remember here is that all these NDErs and 'mystics' who have had an enlightenment experience are people possessed of cosmic consciousness. Atwater and other researchers add to that list, and particularly from the 1980's onward, a great number of adults and children who display all or elements of cosmic consciousness expressed by all manner of personal 'psychic' gifts.¹⁰ She estimates that four to five percent of the world population fit this description and she claims that that number approaches the tipping point for major evolutionary changes in consciousness on this planet.

What remains to be determined is the *validity* and *significance* of this research as regards the healing of the planet.

In terms of validity two points need to be addressed: what value does anecdotal evidence have from a scientific point of view and, specifically, can NDE and Enlightenment experiences be accepted as valid proof of the existence of an Eternal Compassionate Conscious Presence, Source of all Being.

Strict constructionist scientists who require successful double blind

+ control group repeatable experiments would not accept anecdotal evidence. Dependent upon the nature and value of the evidence, I would disagree with them. True, careful investigative research must be undertaken and, in the cases of Atwater and others, that has taken place. Secondly, double blind + control group protocols are not able to evaluate adequately the evidence presented. Finally, telepathic communication received during NDE and Enlightenment experiences can only be validated by post-experience analysis of the subject's state of mind and behaviour compared to common traits and after-effects. It should also be pointed out that sometimes information surrounding an NDE experience can provide incontrovertible proof supporting the evidence presented. Such a case does exist and I present it here, copying the summary from the back cover of the book.¹¹

"Thousands of people have had near-death experiences, but scientists have argued that they are impossible. Dr. Eben Alexander was one of those scientists. A highly trained neurosurgeon, Alexander knew that NDE's feel real, but are simply fantasies produced by brains under extreme stress.

"Then, Dr. Alexander's own brain was attacked by a rare illness [E. coli meningitis]. The part of the brain that controls thought and emotion - and in essence makes us human - shut down completely. For seven days he lay in a coma. Then, as his doctors considered stopping treatment, Alexander's eyes popped open. He had come back.

"Alexander's recovery is a medical miracle.¹² But the real miracle of his story lies elsewhere. While his body lay in coma, Alexander journeyed beyond this world and encountered an angelic being who guided him into the deepest realms of super-physical existence. There he met [experienced], and spoke [telepathically] with, the Divine source of the universe itself."

Because the core of Dr. Alexander's neo-cortex, as well as his limbic system, were being eaten away by the disease, the dendritic receptors that activate human consciousness and memories were not operational and he was not able to take those awarenesses into his out of body experience as most other NDErs do (e.g. being greeted by a pre-deceased relative or friend). Yet, he had total conscious awareness of the out of body experience. What that tells us is that consciousness resides in the spirit or soul and enables telepathic communication with other spirits as well as the Divine Presence. It also validates information provided by other out of body experiencers, though care must be taken to filter socio-cultural comments emanating from a translation of the spiritual experience into five sensory language.

Conclusion:

What is the significance of all these discoveries as regards the healing of the planet? In my view, they provide us with a Vision of the wondrous Plan of Creation designed by the Source of all Being. It's the ongoing story of the life of the universe as told by the Divine Poet. In the story every thing is held together and unfolds by its connection to the Storyteller, the Source of Consciousness. Every thing is alive and has its separate story, but all stories are interrelated and interdependent like pixels in a digital painting. There are many chapters to the story, each one having a particular role to play as the story progresses. The most recent

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chapter deals with humanity as a particular species on planet Earth. Toward the end of the chapter humans become progressively intelligent beings with a growing capacity for conscious communication with all elements of this universe as well as parts of the ethereal realm of the Author. At this point in the chapter humans are learning what particular contribution they are being asked to make in building a healthy, thriving planet that is beneficial to all. They are being asked to work cooperatively using materials and strategies developed and abundantly provided by the Master Architect. Will humans accept the contract? We don't know. That part of the chapter hasn't been written yet. Nevertheless, there are presently many wonderful signs of healing activity appearing all over the globe that are inspiring great hope and excitement. Listing some of them is the stuff of a future article and, in view of that, I would greatly appreciate it if you would send me any information that would assist me (Email: ckfb@shaw.ca).

Notes:

1 Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2002.

2 For more detailed information, see "The Field: The quest for the secret force of the universe" by Lynne McTaggart, Harper Collins, 2001.

3 Rupert Sheldrake, "A New Science of Life", 1987.

4 McTaggart, op.cit. pp.46-48.

5 McTaggart, op.cit. p.224.

6 Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., *Cosmic Consciousness*, continuous printing by Citadel Press, 1899.

7 This remark in no way denigrates the contribution of oral communication of information.

8 Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, op.cit. pp 72-79.

9 Cf. especially P.M.H. Atwater, "Near-Death Experiences: what they teach us about living, dying, and our true purpose,"

Hampton Roads Publishing, Charlottesville, VA, 2011; also, Peter Fenwick, "The Art of Dying," Continuum, 2008.

10 P.M.H. Atwater, "The Indigo Children: The New Children and the Coming of the Fifth World," Bear & Co., 2005.

11 Eben Alexander, M.D., "Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife," Simon & Schuster, N.Y., N.Y., 2012.

12 His medical prognosis post coma was that he would live in a permanent vegetative state. In fact, he recovered totally.

God's Other Name

by *Hank Mattimore, Santa Rosa, CA*



The God I believe in has another name. The name is both simple and profound. Everybody knows what it means, because like the air we breathe, it is everywhere. God's other name is love.

God is love. He is the energy that gives life to our world, the spirit that warms us, and the fire that stirs our hearts. God is the magic

of springtime, the miracle of birth, the power of the wind and waves.

God is the old man who comes to the nursing home every day without fail to visit his ailing wife, the kid who carries his little brother on his back, the cop who puts his own life at risk to save a person he does not even know.

God is the God of small things, too.

I dropped my foster grandson off at school today and said to him "Have a good one, sweetheart." Whoops! I caught myself. Did I really just call my strapping 18 year old kid...SWEETHEART?" Hurriedly, I opened the window and yelled after him, "Hey, sorry I called you sweetheart. He just smiled back at me. "It's okay. It's all good." And it was. That God, whose other name is love, makes you do sappy things and they turn out okay.

But love can go deep, too.

I heard a story recently about a young dad whose wife was killed in an auto accident. The man went into a deep depression. He wondered how he could possibly carry on being both dad and mom to his seven-year-old little boy. In despair, he locked himself in the bathroom and was holding a gun to his head when he heard his son's voice. "Hey dad, where are you? I need help with my homework."

Call it God or call it God's other name. Something, Someone penetrated the young dad's soul. He put the gun away. "No way, I can do this to my boy." He said, "I'll be right there, son." And he was. That's the kind of stuff we do when we love. Love is just another name for God.

Hank's latest book is *Figuring It Out As I Go Along* It is reflections on life and love and spirituality. www.yahoo.com

Theological Soapbox: Re-Imagining The Virgin Birth

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC



My attention was recently drawn to the silencing of a Jesuit writer in December of 2012. An account of this event can be found in the *Association of Catholic Priests* web site ([HYPERLINK "http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2012/12/colombian-jesuit-silenced-over-critical-review-of-popes-book/"](http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2012/12/colombian-jesuit-silenced-over-critical-review-of-popes-book/) <http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2012/12/colombian-jesuit-silenced-over-critical-review-of-popes-book/>), which I quote as follows:

“Fr. Alfonso Llano Escobar, S.J. ...whose weekly column *Un alto en el camino* (“A stop along the road”) had appeared in the major Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* for 30 years, has been told that his writing career has come to an end.

“In a message to the editorial board of the newspaper, Fr. Llano wrote that ‘Father Adolfo Nicolás, the superior general of the Jesuits, has ordered Father Alfonso Llano to consider his apostolic vocation as a writer to be over, has deprived him of his freedom of speech, and is demanding that he not even say goodbye and that he keep absolute silence.’

“The priest columnist earned his silencing for a November 24th column in which he offered his views on Pope Benedict XVI’s new book, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, and specifically on the doctrine of the virginity of Mary. The column focuses on internal debate about the subject within the theological community”.

The passage in Fr. Escobar’s column that provoked his silencing would appear to be:

“In other words: Mary conceived the Son of God virginally, in the theological sense, without the intervention of Joseph, as is narrated in Matthew 1:26, by the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, as mother of Jesus the man, just like us, she conceived him through an act of love with her legal spouse, Joseph, with whom she had four sons and several daughters (Mt 13:53 ff)”.

Here Fr. Escobar is stating a view that is publicly held by a many Protestant theologians and probably not a few Catholic theologians, who do not make their view publicly known for fear of being silenced as Fr. Escobar has been. It is my view as well, and I would like in this

article to share some of my reasons for holding this view.

The Biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus and the ensuing accretions to these accounts in popular Christianity incorporate legends and mythological motifs. They are of limited historical value. For a comprehensive survey of some of these legends and mythological motifs, see the *Religious Tolerance* web site ([HYPERLINK "http://www.religioustolerance.org/xmas_lib.htm"](http://www.religioustolerance.org/xmas_lib.htm) http://www.religioustolerance.org/xmas_lib.htm).

I will point out here a few things that lead me to imagine the birth of Jesus in a way different from that proposed by the official Roman Catholic Church doctrine of the virgin birth and its complementary doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

I first quote a comment I posted to the above mentioned *Association of Catholic Priests* web site in response to the story of Fr. Escobar’s silencing, and comments that others made in response to the story:

“A most interesting discussion. I see three possibilities for how a virgin birth could occur that are compatible with biology. (1) Mary’s egg is stimulated to begin cell division. The child is a clone of Mary and genetically female (no Y chromosome). Owing to a hormonal imbalance the foetus develops male sex characteristics and is accepted as male upon birth. (2) God creates a sperm that fertilizes Mary’s egg, or God simply infuses a set of genes into Mary’s egg and starts cell division. (3) God directly creates an embryo in Mary’s womb, without using Mary’s egg. Each of these three is problematic in its own way. In the case of (1), in what sense does God merit being called the Father of Jesus? In the case of (2), what advantage is there to using God-created genes as opposed to Joseph’s genes? In the case of (3) Mary becomes a surrogate mother, not the biological mother of Jesus. All three possibilities share the disadvantage of not fitting well with Hebrews 2:17, that Jesus “had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect”. Presumably foetal development is a rather basic element of what it means to be human in every respect. I fear the Church is making the same mistake it made with Galileo, maintaining a position that more and more scientifically knowledgeable people will be unable to accept. People will not bother arguing against the Church’s position; they simply will not take the Church seriously. And by the way, many of our Protestant brothers and sisters do not believe in the virgin birth, and it doesn’t stop them being very fine Christians indeed.”

Here I criticize the doctrine of the virgin birth because it does not make sense given what we know about the biology of human development. However, the doctrine can be critiqued on Biblical grounds as well. Let’s start with the story as Luke tells it.

The angel Gabriel (an invention of Luke’s since the angel does not name himself) appears to Mary and announces to her that she is to give birth to a child and then goes on to describe the child in messianic terms. Supposing that an angel did indeed appear to Mary and make this announcement, Mary would have been aware of two Old Testament precedents. One was God’s appearing to Abraham and announcing that Sarah would give birth to a child even though she was barren (Genesis 17:15-21). The other was

Re-Imagining The Virgin Birth Continued...

the angel of the Lord's announcing to Manoah's wife, who was barren, that she would give birth to Samson (Judges 13:2-24). In both cases the mother-to-be was married and the father-to-be was her husband. Mary at this point was engaged to Joseph. Based on Old Testament precedent, Mary would understand Gabriel to be telling her that she would give birth to Jesus after her marriage to Joseph. Gabriel does not say, and there is no reason for her to think, that she would give birth to Jesus before her marriage and that she would conceive the child as a virgin.

Luke says that Mary was perplexed and surprised by the appearance of the angel and his message. But what was the cause of Mary's astonishment? The answer can be found in her prayer praising God in response to the angel's message, her *Magnificat*. In this prayer she expresses her wonder that God has chosen her, a lowly country girl, to be mother of the Messiah. If her astonishment was owing, at least in part, to her conceiving a child as a virgin, this would not have gone unmentioned in her prayer.

So the question that Luke puts in Mary's mouth in response to Gabriel's announcement, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" would not have been Mary's question. Rather, Luke is implicitly linking the angelic message to Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel". In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Luke and other Gentile Christians would be familiar with, the Hebrew word for a young woman is mistranslated as "virgin". The Isaiah passage would have been viewed as a prophecy of Jesus by Christians, and this is probably one of the main reasons for why the doctrine of the virgin birth came to be.

Another reason for the doctrine was to support the mystery of the incarnation, that Jesus is both divine and human. Greco-Roman mythology has stories of gods impregnating mortal women, whose offspring become heroes or demigods. So the doctrine of the virgin birth would make it easier for Gentile converts to accept the

incarnation. But this happened at some cost to Jesus' humanity. The true mystery of the incarnation is one that takes great faith to accept: that the child of a man and a woman, conceived through sexual intercourse, is also the Son of God, fully divine and fully human.

In part the difficulty people have in accepting the true mystery of the incarnation is the feeling that any sexual act is inherently sinful. The Roman Catholic Church has had a part in this by teaching at various times that "lust", which it identifies with sexual desire, even within marriage is sinful, so that while the sexual act itself is sinless, the feelings that necessarily accompany the act are sinful. So to preserve the sinlessness of Mary, she must remain forever a virgin.

This view of sex and marriage is a perversion, if I may use that word, of the Old Testament ideal of marriage, affirmed by Jesus, as a man and woman's becoming one flesh, to which end sexual intercourse is an essential means. This is confirmed, albeit in contradiction to the doctrine of the virgin birth, by the Church's teaching that the indissoluble sacramental union of husband and wife only comes about when the marriage is consummated by sexual intercourse. If Mary remains a virgin, she and Joseph never become one flesh. It is ironical that the Church proposes their marriage as a model for Catholic married couples.

Let us be clear that the virgin birth is not a mystery of faith like the incarnation or the Trinity or the salvific death and resurrection of Jesus. The virgin birth is a miracle story, no different in that sense from the story of the marriage at Cana or the feeding of the five thousand or the raising of Lazarus. Does the mystery of the incarnation need the miracle of the virgin birth in order to be believed? Not at all. If anything the virgin birth makes the incarnation less of a mystery.

There are many Christians who believe in the incarnation with a faith that has no need for a virgin birth. I am one of them.

Change Within CNWE

by Kim Sylvester, RCWP, Gatineau, QC



It is well known that women's equality in the Catholic Church has not yet been achieved, although there are many reform groups in North America who continue to advocate for this basic human right. One of these groups is Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE), formed in Canada 30 plus years ago; many of the founding members are still active in eastern Canadian provinces, from

St. John's to Windsor.

A recent edition of CNWE's journal, The Seed Keepers, contained some short pieces written by Ottawa members on the subject of change within CNWE. One in particular asked how the relationship of CNWE members with ordained womenpriests (some of whom are also members of CNWE) will be affected, and how this relationship might change CNWE. Following is a short piece I wrote in reply to this question.

The article, "Change within CNWE," in the Fall 2012 number of *The Seed Keepers* contains several questions which, in my view, cry out for reasonable as well as inspiring answers. I believe the basis for some of the desired change is already within CNWE, which has moved through the years after Vatican II trying to determine what action or changes could be initiated or experimented

Change Within CNWE Continued...

with, but not always with clearly imagined consequences. I sense a strong desire to move into the future, a future developing out from CNWE that will reflect its motivation and, possibly, new direction. And to that purpose I offer some reflections on only a few of the questions the writer poses.

The relationship with ordained womenpriests entails, she says, “a shift in our relationship to our own organization. Surely we now have to be clearer about our own theology?” Our beliefs re the Church “remain inchoate..., but not fully articulated among us.”

This is a very perceptive point and will very likely necessitate a clearing away of previously held attitudes and actions.

So how do we change this and move forward? It is always true that we cannot change people and their ideas, but we can change ourselves, which then requires a change in behavior from others who realize the dynamic has changed. Now that CNWE is engaging with ordained women, relationships and communications have changed, both within and without the organization. This is positive development!

An important point to remember here is that the feminist movement of the 1970s did not desire simply “to include women in the present model of patriarchal clericalism: [it] wanted to transform the church.”

In fact, this is the approach I have taken and continue to take in my life--as a passionately engaged catholic woman who is now an ordained priest building open and inclusive Christian communities where the role of the priest is to be an animator for this democratic and participatory community, not a ruler over it.

When a community develops from this basis, when the leader empowers the members to transform the model of community, then all work towards and share in the constructive process. Talking about ideas together is a potent force for change.

When a group is focused on this journey, many will want to be immersed in learning a renewed theology (based on Jesus’ model and teaching) and in this way, all the community will benefit through sharing this return to the source. The ripples from the stone tossed into the pond...

We need not be fearful of what the Vatican might “do” to us: we are acting according to the Holy Spirit’s call to renew the church. We can see that we and many are disenchanted and disagreeing with RC hierarchical structure. The question is what to do about it? Most of us in one way or another have simply left regular participation in our former parishes. We have become activists through our words and actions. Now we must step forward once again, into a new space on new paths. Here are some ideas, some of which you may already have tried; others of which you may have been fearful, because they require change.

- Break out of the clerical church structures that may still live within you. Reject fear of reprisals from the clergy. For example, see yourself as equal in many ways to the clergy--possibly even superior in education and experience, and definitely worthy to analyze how things have gone so wrong in the church for decades in our time. Find answers to your questions from current groups and sources such as “Call to Action,” “Future Church,” “Women’s Ordination Worldwide,” Women’s Ordination Conference.”

- Become more informed about the feminist movement to reform the church, continuing in our own time, for example, with the US Leadership Conference of Women Religious refusing to bow down to the Vatican. There are websites devoted to many renewal movements and ideas, such as *rcwp.org*, WOW, WLC, WOC.

Read, study, share, discuss, and regularly meet in small groups to celebrate your own accomplishments as women worthy of creating their own spiritual experiences.

- Create a liberating church community. Think of and proclaim your communities as a liberation from patriarchy and its hierarchies. We reject patriarchy in our social structures, which also means rejecting it as the appropriate structure for the church.

- Create theology based on your own reflections and discussions and reclaim your life and authenticity from clericalist distortion. Hear what Rosemary Radford Reuther says on this point: *We understand theological education and teaching as our own reflections on the meaning of reclaiming our authentic life from such distortion. Ministry is the active work and reflection upon that life; it is also the building of redemptive communities as the bases from which to challenge systems and ideologies of oppression and injustice.*

- Open up the idea of “a discipleship of equals” in prayerful study and discussion with your small group community. “*Education must empower and make the educated into peers of the educator.*” Claim your empowerment to create a community which is a discipleship of equals.

- Of course, mature leadership is important, but not all are called to lead; many need to learn first how to challenge old forms and help create new ones. **But all have a role to exercise in developing new sacramental, scripture-based, equality-structured small groups where ministry becomes function-based, not the role of a few privileged clerics.** We are all disciples of Christ in renewed communities, and all decide on its sacramental, spiritual, educational, and service activities. This is a clear demonstration of discipleship of equals, liberating and mutually enhancing.

CNWE was created to facilitate change for women in the RC church. I believe it must now break out further into new ministry to facilitate the construction of broadly-based, inclusive, liberated, redemptive, ministering communities of equals in all aspects of Christian life. Whatever each of you may personally think and decide about this challenge, may it be first of all a liberation from former structures that repress, demean, and exclude. I invite you to “Come and see.”

Quotations from Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Catholic does not equal the Vatican: A vision for progressive Catholicism*, 2008.

Pink Smoke Over The Vatican

by Emil Kutarna, Regina, SK

“Is this true? Women have been ordained in early Christianity? Why haven’t we been told about this before?” These are remarks overheard following the showing of the documentary “Pink Smoke Over The Vatican”. On the last Sunday of January this year, a group of women organized the showing at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Regina. It was publicized in the local paper, “The Leader Post” and on the local TV stations. About 60 people attended on this frosty afternoon.

Refreshments and discussion followed. It was interesting how shocked or surprised many were at the information regarding women’s ordination. A very positive article about this experience later appeared in The Prairie Messenger, the Saskatchewan Catholic weekly.

Maybe it is a little prophetic that this documentary was shown just shortly before Pope Benedict shocked the world doing something no Pope had done for 600 years – he resigned, effective the end of February. That morning my old 93-year-old German friend phoned to tell me that he is

voting for me as the next Pope. I hadn’t seen the news yet and couldn’t understand why he said that. Then my daughter Kristin phoned and said, “Have you heard the news?” “What news”, I asked. “The Pope has resigned!” she said. “Sure” I replied, “somebody is pulling a hoax. Popes never resign”.

When I turned on the TV, I was shocked. Sure enough it was true! That news was on all the stations. Now I understood what my German coffee pal was getting at. At my next coffee with him I said that I was not eligible to be Pope because I

was married. But he was eligible because according to Canon Law, any single baptized male was eligible, and he was a solid Catholic Kraut bachelor. He said “Thank you” but he didn’t want the job, so I shouldn’t even submit his name.

Not likely that any single baptized male that is not a cleric or a cardinal has a snowball’s chance in hell of being nominated. But after viewing “Pink Smoke” I can’t help thinking how biased, misogynist the Canon Law is. I understand that Women’s Ordination Conference is planning to send a delegation to the Vatican during the conclave to protest this sin of sexism in the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I wonder how they make the pink smoke?

The documentary is very well done. There are DVD copies available

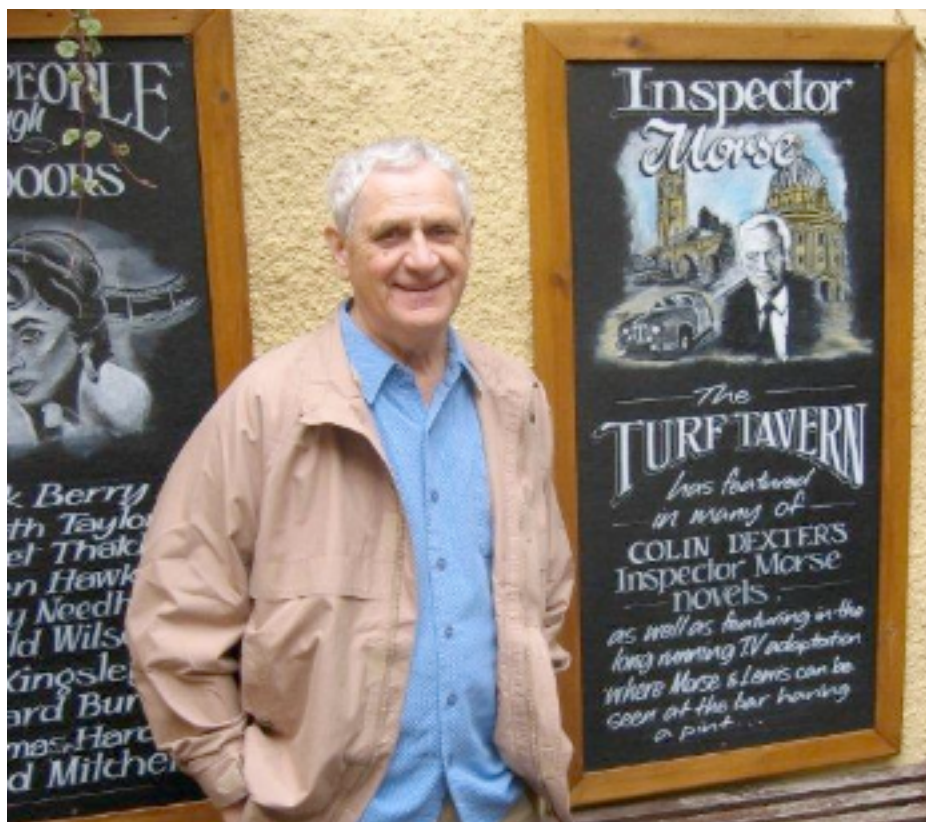
I think from Call To Action. I also found it on the Internet by google-ing Pink Smoke Over The Vatican.

That site also has other interesting videos. One is of the producer of the documentary Jules Hart being interviewed about her making this film that was shown for the first time at the Santa Fe Independent Film Festival in 2010. She is not a Catholic but she did this documentary because she believes it is a social justice issue. She mentions that one of the male bishops who came to ordain a woman in the USA overnighted at a monastery. The next day he was prevented from going to the ordination because they had locked him in his room! Look for the title: “Web Extra: Pink Smoke Full Interview (2010-12-03). If you have difficulty finding it try: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=GMOQ0KhZm9jI>

Another video on that same site worth watching is: “Exclusive: Pink Smoke Over the Vatican”. Address: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=GGij4nobQ18>.

Seeing that women are already being ordained, I’m reminded of one Corpus Canada Conference when François Brassard came out with the expression “Just Do It”. Well the women did it. Congratulations! It’s great to see on the Corpus Canada Journal now lists RCWP contacts on our back cover page. I think it would be nice to list our Canadian woman bishop Marie Bouclin from Windsor ON as well if she will agree.

In every issue of the Journal, our mission statement says: “This faith community is dedicated to Renewal of Ministries in the Church, including an ordained ministry open men and women, married and



unmarried”.

And here we are, it’s happened! I am so energized and proud that we have persevered almost 24 years!

What a great team effort on the Journal since 1989. There is a great Letter from the Publisher Arthur Menu in the December 2011 issue. Arthur names names of so many who devoted hours and hours to the work of the Journal. Sadly I note that the USA Corpus Reports online is not free. I hope we can keep ours free. Congratulations to the Xristos Community for getting the donation status, which I’m sure, has been a big help. Covering expenses. And a great idea to make donations online.

Summary: Some Real Authority Problems In The Church Today

by Charles Curran, Dallas, TX

It is useful to remember that some words and phrases often have more than one meaning; they have a history that can be used, misused, and misunderstood. For example, The 'Law' as used by Jesus and Paul is often misunderstood or misinterpreted without distinguishing Godgiven Law from rules made by humans. Two other examples a propos Dr. Curran's article are 'authority' and 'Church'. 'Authority' is often taken to mean 'power to demand compliance or submission'. In the christian scriptures on the other hand, 'one with authority' is one who gives existence and life or who leads to freedom (salvation) and acceptance of God's relationship to us (ie. faith). 'Church' is often understood as a place, from 'kuriakon', short for 'Lord's house'. It is also used in translation for 'ekklesia' which has a very complex history and whose meaning is often misunderstood.



Summary of Charles Curran's "Some Real Authority Problems in the Church Today" Fr. Charles Curran delivered "Some Real Authority Problems in the Church Today." in Detroit, MI on Sept. 11, 2012 Thanks are due to Bev Parker who transcribed his address.

After outlining the problems of authority, Curran left the audience with a positive

outlook saying that "There are no easy answers! One of the greatest of Catholic traditions is its emphasis on mediation: The divine is mediated in and through the human with all its warts, with all its problems, and with all its difficulties, but also with its willingness to appreciate its greatness. God comes to us through community, and we go to God through community. That's why one belongs to the Church. We are a pilgrim church who are never going to be perfect and who are always going to fall short. We are a pilgrim people; none of whom is perfect. Christians are people who live in hope. The Church does positive things. There are structural things and moral teachings which are not the basic teachings of the Church. However, they are important and significant, and they can sustain us and give us life and hope. There have been many periods in Church history where things looked worse. For example, recently in 1950, who would have thought there would be a Second Vatican Council? Very, very few! But some did; and they worked for it. But there never would have been a Vatican II if it had not been for the grass roots catholics working through the late 19th and 20th centuries in

- The biblical movement,
- The liturgical movement,
- The ecumenical movement,
- The catechetical movement.

People were there working. These were elite movements. Most of the people in the Catholic Church didn't even know about them, but they were there; and ultimately they came to the surface. Change in the Church comes from below along with both dissent and authority."

The following is the gist of Fr. Curran's address:

1. There are problems in the Church over moral issues, such as contraception, divorce and remarriage, abortion, sexual conduct, and homosexuality, Surveys from 1987 - 2011 by William D'Antonia, show that many catholics disagree also with how Church leaders have handled celibacy, priestly ordination of women, and the pedophilia scandals. Committed catholics have been forced to dissent.

The following are two examples of dissent:

First example: On Trinity Sunday of 2011, a group of Austrian priests, now representing more than 10% of all the priests in Austria, issued a very strong initiative entitled "Appeal to Disobedience". They said in the light of what was not happening in the Catholic Church, it was necessary for them to disobey rulings of the bishop and the Pope. In their appeal, they went on to say:

- They will not deny Communion to people of good will, especially divorced and remarried people, and members of other churches.
- They will avoid, as much as possible, celebrating multiple Sunday liturgies because the bishops think that this is the only way to deal with the shortage of ordained ministers in the Church.
- They will ignore the prohibition of preaching by competently trained lay people, including women.
- They will advocate for a married clergy, including women priests.

Second example: In Ireland, the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) supports the following:

- Full implementation of the vision and teaching of Vatican II, with special emphasis on the primacy of the individual conscience;
- The status and active participation of all the baptized;
- The task of establishing a Church of all believers who will be treated by Church leaders as equals;

Authority Problems In The Church Continued...

- In particular they ACP supports a number of other issues:
- The redesigning of the ministry of the Church to incorporate the gifts of all, male and female;
- A re-structuring of the governing system of the Church based on service, not on power;
- Encouraging at every level the culture of consultation and transparency;
- A re-evaluation of Catholic sexual teaching and practice that recognizes the profound mystery of human sexuality and the experience and wisdom of God's people.

It is priests who are dealing with people as they face these problems in everyday life and who have come to the conclusion that existing policies, teachings and structures within the Church are inadequate. The priests and other pastoral ministers feel that they are caught in the middle between the needs of the people and the existing Church teachings and structures.

2. The structural mindset and practices of the Roman curia and the bishops have not changed with the vision of Vatican II. Lumen Gentium spoke of the Church in metaphors, such as, the Church is primarily the people of God! In the Church, the bishops with the Pope form a college to lead the whole people of God. Each bishop and the faithful of his diocese are not simply a part of the Church but they are a complete Church. However, the new Code of Canon Law that came out in the early 1980s and subsequent Church practice have gone back to the pre-Vat.II model of the Church which stressed the centrality of authority in the papacy.

Two people (and many others) who recognized this are

a) Eugenio Corecco, PhD in Canon Law and Bishop of Lugano, who

very strongly pointed out that the new Code of Canon Law does not give primacy to the communion of all the baptized. Canon law sees the Church as a society with office holders.

b) Ladislav Orsy, a well known canonist, has been even stronger in his criticism of the Code and contemporary Church policies for not incorporating the centrality of the communion ecclesiology. Unfortunately today, Church law and structure continue to stress the centralization of power and authority in the papacy; the result has been no structural change but only a lessening of respect for Church authority.

Vatican II intended the Synod of Bishops to determine the needs of the Church. However, Paul VI in 1965 and the new Code of Canon Law gave the Synod of Bishops a consultative voice only. Regional and National Conferences of bishops (NCB) were limited in 1998 by John Paul's "Apostolicos Suos" which says that doctrinal decisions by any NCB must have unanimous approval by all its member bishops or the approval of the Vatican. That took away the purpose of the Bishops' Conferences and there has been little contribution from Conferences since. The appointment of bishops named by the Pope is a recent practice; before that, Roman Catholic bishops were elected and then were received into communion by the Pope.

The hierarchical Church has claimed too much authority for its positions and, afraid of losing its power, it has changed its practice of allowing the faithful to "discern the Spirit".

There Is Far More At Stake Than The Future Of Just One Priest

by Sean O'Connell, Colerain, Ireland



Truth can impose itself on the mind of man only in virtue of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power. (Article 1, Declaration on Religious Liberty, Vatican II 1965)

Way back in 1965 this official statement reconciled me to the Catholic Church, after years of agonising as a student of history over its long record of religious persecution. That was all behind us

now, I told myself. The church at its summit had at long last realised

that truth cannot be conveyed or strengthened by coercion. The truth of the Creeds is centrally also love, so in future it would only be communicated lovingly, in freedom.

This conclusion was supported by the strong criticism directed by some eminent bishops during the council toward the formerly unjust practices of the church's central theological monitor, the Holy Office (once the Roman Inquisition). This body became the 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith' on the same day the Declaration on Religious Liberty was formally ratified. Most of us then expected that the CDF would now develop procedures and structures that would bear comparison with the highest principles of jurisprudence in the secular world.

The CDF has instead reverted to the intellectual brutalities of the Holy Office, reneged on this key Vatican II declaration on religious freedom, and very seriously weakened the authority of the church.

From 1965 until 2012 in Ireland we could all confidently believe that those Irish priests who strictly adhered to all the positions of the magisterium, even on controversial matters, were doing so freely in good conscience. We could do so because there was visible freedom in the church to express conscientious

There Is Far More At Stake Continued...

reservations about some non-essential aspects of those teachings. That freedom was visible only because people like Fr Tony Flannery had shown the courage to call for a rethink on a number of issues, some in the difficult area of sexuality. He did that not from the ambo in the chapel but as a media columnist – so every adult Catholic in Ireland knew that he was expressing a purely personal, and therefore fallible, opinion. Far from accepting everything he wrote as necessarily correct, we knew that he might well be in error – as did he. However, we knew the dignity attributed to private conscience by St Thomas Aquinas and Cardinal Newman. We knew also that key changes in church teaching – for example on slavery and monetary lending at interest – could not have occurred without conscientious disagreement among theologians, or without a magisterium courageous enough to tolerate opposing views.

So Fr Flannery's open statement of his conscientious difficulties served to buttress also our confidence in the magisterium, because it too, by its restraint, was visibly witnessing to the dignity of private conscience, as well as to its confidence in its own positions. Tony's witness, like that of other outspoken priests, told me that I was a member of a thinking and mature church, not a closed and fearful club that could never dare to reconsider anything.

The truth of those issues would in the end convey itself solely by virtue of its own truth, as Vatican II had confidently insisted.

Now, in a process that defies the promise of St John the Evangelist that perfect love will cast out fear, the CDF's perfect fear has cast out love – as well as justice – from the central administration of the church. We are forced from now on to the conclusion that it may well be this same fear, rather than sincere faith, that rules the minds of those who do not differ from the central magisterium on any issue. This decision to excommunicate a priest for giving expression to private conscience on some non-creedal questions has delivered another deadly blow against the trust that needs to reign within the church if it is to fulfil its mission, and to educate. It has compromised every priest on the island who never questions anything. What answer can such a priest now give to the most tempting teenage gibe: "Aren't you just saying that because you would lose your job if you didn't?"

I too wait now to hear how Irish bishops will react to this CDF decision. Tony Flannery's future is at stake, but so is something else. I can see no prospect of a successful 'New Evangelisation' in an Ireland dominated by the delusion that a seamless clerical unanimity, achieved only by threat of excommunication, will defend the truth. Instead that delusion can only strengthen a rampant secularist campaign to represent Catholic teaching as nothing more than repressive indoctrination.

The Vatican And "Persons Of Interest"

by *Charlie Callanan, St. John's, NL*



There is much talk today about the "imploding" Church. Robert C Mickens of THE TABLET has given an interesting talk recently on this subject. You can access it on Google by typing Robert C. Mickens on the search line. It seems that many people are standing on the

sidelines watching the institutional Church self destruct.

To me the Church today is like an apple that has been cut down the middle into two halves. Both halves are distancing themselves from each other on a continual basis like the expanding universe. There are various names for the two halves but basically it comes down to traditional and non-traditional. Most of the books that I have read these days have been written by persons of interest" to Rome. There is a two page list of these persons in the back of Matthew Fox's book, "The Popes War". Some of these names would surprise you. For example, What is Karl Rahner doing there? Bishop Remi de Roo made it as well. I have never heard of most of the people on the list Of course Hans Kung and Tony de Mello are there. Yet for some reason or another, they are all under the eye of Rome. What is happening? Is this a schism? Some writers and theologians say that the Church has been in schism since Vatican II.

My training for the priesthood was a training to be a good servant of the Vatican. I was not taught to think for myself. I was actually

discouraged to do so. We were taught to accept someone else idea of Jesus. We were encouraged to remain in what Richard Rohr calls, "the first half of life" In this first half we are thoughtless, obedient children simply passing on mandates from Rome as a federal civil servant would be expected to pass on new regulations from Ottawa, without being encouraged to critique them.

The second half of life allows us to form our own concepts and to move outside "the box" we have inhabited for years. This is an exciting challenge. It wakes us up, maybe for the first time since childhood to the vastness of the universe and to the greatness of God. People want the truth and the truth sets us free. Who is going to give this truth to people today? Is the Church giving us "the good news". Good news excites everyone including young people.

Remember this old saying, "the people are not ready for this yet". This is a cry of a timid Church unworthy of Jesus. The people have raced far beyond "the Church" and are hungry for this new spirituality.

I now feel that major changes in the Church will not happen in our lifetimes... but they WILL happen. The senior authority of the Church is falling apart, not the People of God. Vatican II tells us that the People of God are the Church. Young people are spiritual and are seeking "the Way", no matter what people say about them. The Spirit is speaking to them through a number of sources.

The new creation story is of greater interest to young people than the traditional story we all learned as children. Evolution makes sense to them. The "people of interest" make sense to them, even if they are condemned by the higher ups.

Tribute To Mary

Given by Joan & John Palardy on January 12th, 2013 at 2:00 at the Community Hall in Bragg Creek



Chuck and Mary McLellan at Bragg Creek, 2001

John and I are honored to represent the Corpus group, which is a faith community of men and women.

Following a National Corpus Conference in Regina, SK approximately 23 years ago a number of Priests and their wives in the Calgary area have met on a monthly basis in individuals' homes. Mary and Chuck have been members of our group from its inception. Over the years, the group has evolved into a Faith Community for individuals interested in belonging to a non-traditional Faith community.

Our group has a spiritual component to our gatherings and Mary's love of nature, the arts, her reaching out to others, her listening skills, her marital relationship, were all integral components of her spirituality.

A few years ago Chuck shared with me that he bought their house in Bragg Creek before Mary saw it. He knew she would love it because of the environment around them. This spoke to me of her trust in Chuck.

For twenty years, our Christmas celebrations have been held in their home. Our children loved to go to Chuck and Mary's as they were made to feel so special and for weeks they anticipated the feeding of the deer at the back door and were touched by the special attention Mary gave to one Buck who had a huge tumor on his leg.

At one of these gatherings Mary showed us a glass paper weight. Enclosed within it was a dandelion head full of seeds ready to burst. It was a gift from one of her students. One of our members recently

commented on this. She said, "Mary could see the beauty in the dandelion and I thought, here is a woman who can truly experience the miracles of nature."

As much as Mary appreciated music, when it came to singing Hymns at our Services two verses was the absolute limit. This became a standing joke in our group.

As a group, we attended many of the plays Mary directed in Bragg Creek and marveled at the rapport she had with so many young people.

Over the last few years we have attended the Rosebud Theatre near Drumheller and Mary was so happy to be there. Her joyous spirit was always appreciated and will be missed but her memory will remain in our hearts forever.

At a recent gathering of our group I asked Chuck what he would remember most about their final hours together.

He shared that, 'Near the end she motioned for him to come closer. When he had his face directly in front of hers, she raised herself slightly, put both hands up to his cheeks and whispered to him, "I LOVE YOU!"

What a beautiful moment in time and what a lovely memory for you to hold on to Chuck.

Although we will miss her dearly, let's celebrate Mary's life. Let's share our memories of her with each other and make sure that her spirit lives on in all of us. Mary, you were loved.

In Memoriam

High Country News, Bragg Creek, AB, January 2013



**Mary Agnes
McLellan
Born
September
18, 1928
R.I.P.
December
12, 2012**

Mary and Chuck thought of their lives as having two vocations. Mary's first vocation was in the Sisters of Providence where she became a nun and trained to be a teacher. After leaving

the Sisters of Providence, she married Chuck McLellan, a Catholic Parish Priest: his first vocation. Mary and Chuck looked at Marriage as their second vocation: a new and loving experience that they enjoyed for 34 years together. She continued to teach school and drama, and Chuck made his contribution to the community promoting tennis and recreation. They continued to be members of and attend monthly meetings with a spiritual group called Corpus, and to celebrate their Christian Faith.

When it came to teaching, Mary taught all grades from 1 to 12. She taught at many different schools, such as Bishop Grandin High School in Calgary, Spalding High School in Saskatchewan and Fr. Mercredi High School in Fort McMurray. She was a gifted teacher and affected the lives of youth and adults. Mary had many of her students contact her later in their lives to thank her for her care and compassion. For instance, she kept contact with a male student of hers that she taught when she was a nun teaching in a Catholic school in New Westminster, B.C. When she visited him in Vancouver a couple of summers ago, he credited her as having the biggest and best influence in his life. Recently, another student also called Mary from B.C. to convey her gratitude. A key to her positive influence on her students was to treat young people as persons. Mary had a Master's degree in English. She loved Drama. She was able to raise the bar so that the hidden talents of young people were revealed through drama. She promoted Drama as an avenue for young people to explore, and learn, and to give form and substance to their experiences. In her class, her students did not just read Shakespeare, they acted the plays out. In one such class a student was asked to remove his shirt while Mary held a sword high in the air. The student must have thought that this class was getting far too serious. He was relieved to find out that the Merchant of Venice would not actually demand a pound of flesh, and not an ounce of blood would be shed.

A recurring theme of Mary's teaching was "don't let education get

in the way of life". She believed that the most important role or part a person can play is their role in life itself. The discipline of drama, the laughter and the sharing has helped many to build their self-image and confidence. The parents of her students would often express appreciation for the confidence that Drama was able to give their children. When Mary retired from teaching she never retired from her love of Drama. Mary was a founding member of Bragg Arts theatre group. She directed such plays as "The Odd Couple" and "The Boiler Room Suite". She was involved with the musical production of the story of Narnia: the first performance of the play in the West. And who will forget the production of "The Secret Garden" that Mary directed: at the time, even though she lost her musical director and also lost the Community Center, where the play was scheduled to be performed, to a fire that burned it to the ground, the show did "go on" and included a cast of fifty children and twenty adults. Her favorite play was Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream". She loved directing the "faeries" to go to sit on audience member's laps and often talked about it with pride. Even after all the exposure to Shakespeare's play over the years, she still had a marvelous time when she watched it at Calgary's Theatre in the Park at Eau Claire this past summer. Mary loved her home and friends in Bragg Creek. During the afternoons, in the summer she sat outside in her yard enjoying nature. She loved to soak up the sun. She enjoyed planting a vegetable garden too. In the winter, she bought sacks and sacks of oats and fed many deer and their offspring. She loved animals of all kinds, including bugs. Recently, she mourned her old cat, "Puddy", and went to the Cochrane Humane Society to adopt and love her new cat, "Pinky".

She also loved going for afternoon coffee with her dear friends: Milly and Irene and she would never miss an opportunity to do so. She loved people: both adults and children, and at every opportunity would try to engage them in conversation wherever she went be it a restaurant, recreation center or shopping mall.

She was funny and wise and compassionate and gave these of herself whenever asked. When there were conflicts, or difficulties she would often use her favorite expression: 'Let it Be'. She was a peace maker.

Her illness, Ovarian cancer, made itself known very suddenly. On November 11, Mary first went to hospital due to weakness, and was discharged without a diagnosis. Then two days later, she developed severe ascites in her abdomen and went back to hospital where she stayed until her death from cancer.

As a personal note Chuck says, "The end was only a short time away. For the last week of Mary's life, she could no longer speak. I promised her that I would be with her to her last breath. She put her hand on my cheek and spoke loud enough for me to hear her say "I love you". Her words took my breath away, and I will never forget that moment. I am glad that I could stay in hospital in her room with her, those last 5 days and nights. She also felt the support of the many family members and friends that came to visit and sit with her. In the end, as through her life, she was surrounded by love and support. I am very grateful to everyone who came. We shall not forget her love for all of us, for nature, and for life itself. I will miss her."

God bless. Chuck McLellan

Corpus Canada

WHO ARE WE?

We are a faith community of men and women empowered by our baptism in Jesus' Spirit to reach out to others in their need as Jesus did. We also provide support for married Roman Catholic priests, their family and friends.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

This faith community is dedicated to

- Renewal of ministries in the Church, including an ordained ministry open to men and women, married and unmarried;
- A vision of Church that includes all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ;
- Development of leadership among all the baptised in the Church;
- Promotion of a wholesome view of sexuality;
- Justice for all based on Gospel values.

Our message is a healing one and is directed to everyone, especially the marginalized in the Church. It is our hope to reach people through many ministries, and in a special way through the creation of small faith communities.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Through a collegial approach based on consensus reached through communal discernment in the Spirit, we share our gifts that all creation might be transformed according to God's loving plan.

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How Can I Join Or Show Support?

If you wish to join or renew your membership in Corpus Canada for the year 2013 (membership is open to all regardless of denominational affiliation), write to: Corpus Canada Treasurer, 35 - 10070 Fifth Street Sidney, BC V8L 2X9.

Enclose a cheque for \$50 (individual membership) or \$75 (family membership) payable to "Corpus Canada." Corpus Canada will donate \$25 of your membership fee to Xristos Community Society in your name, and Xristos will send you an official tax receipt.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE JOURNAL

If you would like to support The Journal, please send a cheque to "Xristos Community Society" c/o the Treasurer, Xristos Community Society, 35 - 10070 Fifth Street Sidney, BC V8L 2X9. Or by PayPal (see link on website)

Xristos Community Society is a registered charity. All donors of \$10 or more will receive an official tax receipt.

Thank you for your support of this Christian ministry.

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