

**Catholic sisters, the sole remaining force in the Church embodying the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, continue to face what can only be described as persecution at the hand of male hierarchs.**

**What follows is an article describing the process, by Eric Gorski, Associated Press.**

### **Catholic sisters queried about doctrine, fidelity**

A Vatican-ordered investigation into Roman Catholic sisters in the U.S., shrouded in mystery when it was announced seven months ago, is shaping up to be a tough examination of whether women's religious communities have strayed too far from church teaching.

... the nature of some questions in the document seems to validate concerns expressed privately by some sisters that they're about to be dressed down or accused of being unfaithful to the church.

The report, for example, asks communities of sisters to lay out "the process for responding to sisters who dissent publicly or privately from the authoritative teaching of the Church."

It also confirms suspicions that the Vatican is concerned over a drift to the left on doctrine, seeking answers about "the soundness of doctrine held and taught" by the women.

Still other questions explore whether sisters take part in Mass daily, or whether they follow the church's rules when they take part in liturgies. Church officials expect consistency in how rites and services are celebrated, with approved translations and Masses presided over by a priest.

The study, called an apostolic visitation, casts a net beyond fidelity to church teaching, with questions also covering efforts to promote vocations and management of finances.

The investigation is focused on members of women's religious communities, or sisters. These are women who do social work, teach, work in hospitals and do other humanitarian work of the church. The investigation is not looking at cloistered communities, or nuns.

"The sisters being investigated have for many years made almost nothing, took very little and gave everything," said the Rev. James Martin, an editor at America, a Jesuit magazine.

Francine Cardman, associate professor of historical theology and church history at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, said it isn't clear why these questions are being asked now in the U.S.

But she said the focus on doctrine puts it in the context of establishing a "correct" and exclusive interpretation of the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s and of women's religious communities.

She said the inquiry should be seen "as part of a much older tradition of misogyny in the

church and especially distrust of women who are not directly and submissively under male, ecclesiastical control."

Catholic sisters, Cardman said, have repeatedly over history been "returned to the confines of the cloister" or restricted in the kinds of ministries they could perform in public view.

Conservative Catholics, however, have long complained that the majority of sisters in the U.S. have grown too liberal and flout church teaching. Some have taken provocative stands, advocating for female priests or challenging church teaching against abortion rights or gay marriage.

... The Vatican also has opened a separate "doctrinal assessment" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the largest umbrella group for communities of Catholic sisters in the U.S.

In a statement Tuesday, the conference said the new information on the apostolic visit had just been sent to its members, and that discussing it would be on the agenda at its annual assembly in New Orleans next week.

Sister Prudence Allen, a member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Mich., part of the more traditional Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, welcomed the scope of the inquiry.

"It's nothing to be afraid of," she said. "It's part a process that should ultimately help all of us."

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**The following announcement from Call to Action appeared in the National Catholic Reporter on August 7. The report is by Heidi Schlumpf.**

### **A new leader at the table**

It's easy to see why the board of Call to Action chose Jim FitzGerald as its new executive director. He is a young, bright Catholic with a decade of experience in not-for-profit management and an advanced degree in theology. And he has been involved in leadership of Call to Action for several years, so already knows and supports church reform.

But it's also not so easy to understand why they chose a candidate with Planned Parenthood on his resumé, given how hard Call to Action has worked to remain neutral on the hot-button issue of abortion.

Even FitzGerald admits that the possibility of a negative reaction from conservative Catholics was on his mind when he was offered the position. "But to me that's bumper-sticker thinking," he said. "What's missing in our church is the freedom to talk without fear about issues like abortion or gay marriage or stem cell research.

"That's what I love about Call to Action: Everyone's at the table," he says, quoting the theme for Call to Action's November conference. "It's easy to be in conversation with

people who think like you. But if we only do that, we miss out on something that could be very positive for Catholicism.”

There has been little or no outcry from Call to Action’s 25,000 members -- or even from the Catholic hierarchy or pro-life groups -- about FitzGerald’s appointment, although the press release did not mention his previous employer. An *NCR* blog post did, however, and elicited a negative comment accusing FitzGerald of not being Catholic.

“I’m sure there are some members for whom this might be a problem,” said former Call to Action board member Bob McClory, “but I don’t think it will be an obstacle for most people in Call to Action.”

If anything, Call to Action staff and board members say they hope FitzGerald’s history and views will help spark respectful conversation within the organization -- as is starting to happen around the country -- on the issue of abortion.

“If people of goodwill are willing to listen, it will help us all understand that there is no simple answer to this issue,” said Call to Action board member Tom Honoré, who served on the search committee for the position. “Of course there will be those who will try to accuse him of going in a way that is offensive to a lot of conservative Catholics.”

Honoré said FitzGerald “respects life as much as any of us,” though the new director’s views are solidly pro-choice.

FitzGerald eschews labels, but thinks abortion should be legal and doesn’t believe life begins at conception. “This issue is extremely complex,” he said. “I honor the person who follows their conscience on it.”

He doesn’t see any problem with being Catholic and working for Planned Parenthood. Admittedly, abortion is a tiny part of Planned Parenthood’s services, and FitzGerald was not involved in it. He served as a community educator -- teaching about abstinence, birth control and sexual assault prevention to public school health classes and other community organizations -- for three years, then as vice president of education for seven years at Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson in upstate New York.

“No organization -- Catholic or otherwise -- has done more to prevent abortion than Planned Parenthood,” he said, citing its comprehensive sex education services as well as access to affordable birth control.

It was Call to Action’s tolerance for different viewpoints on abortion and its willingness to create space for conversation about the issue that attracted FitzGerald to the organization in the first place. At his first Call to Action conference in 1997 in Detroit, he attended a pre-conference daylong workshop sponsored by the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice.

“Without compromising our views on abortion, we entered into dialogue to see where we did agree,” he recalled.

He returned home excited to connect with other like-minded folks, so contacted other Call to Action members in the Albany area. “I wanted to get five people in my living room

so we could continue sharing some of what we had experienced at the conference,” FitzGerald said.

When 45 people RSVP'd, he sought space at the diocesan pastoral center. “My living room was nowhere that big!” he said.

After leading that local Call to Action chapter for several years, FitzGerald was asked to serve on the organization's national board of directors. Later, when he moved to Boston, he started a “NextGen” group for young adult Catholics there.

He plans to continue living in Boston, communicating with the Call to Action staff in Chicago via webcam and frequent travels. He will meet the wider membership at the national conference in Milwaukee Nov. 6-8. His priorities include Call to Action's anti-racism program, the NextGen outreach to younger Catholics and the JustChurch program that supports those being treated unjustly by the church.

He is optimistic about Call to Action's future in general and about younger Catholics in particular. “For young adults, as well as the ‘wisdom generation,’ when we see any unjust or discriminatory law, we have no problem voicing our concerns about it and trying to change it,” said FitzGerald, who is 38. “And if those in authority don't do it, we use our consciences to do something about it.”

He's even optimistic about wider church reform. FitzGerald said he used to have this fantasy in which a progressive pope would be elected and would announce sweeping changes from the balcony at St. Peter's in Rome.

“As long as we continue to have our gaze on that balcony, it's easy to get discouraged,” he said. “But if we turn around and see all the positive things that are happening among everyday Catholics, it's encouraging. I am convinced we are at a tipping point in the church reform movement.”

### ***What follows is an NCR interview with Jim Fitzgerald.***

#### **NCR: Do you think most young people find the Catholic church relevant?**

*Jim Fitzgerald:* Young Catholics want what most Catholics want: a welcoming and inclusive faith community with meaningful homilies, inspiring music and opportunities to create a better world by putting their faith into action. I think the more such elements are present, the more relevant young people find the Catholic church.

#### **What about the assertion that young Catholics today are more conservative than previous generations?**

I don't think that's accurate. My own experience affirms the polls that show that young adult Catholics are more progressive than previous generations. This is especially true regarding divorce, birth control and same-sex relationships.

#### **What could the Catholic church do to better serve or reach out to young adults?**

I think it is important to remember that all of us are the Catholic church and that Catholics of every age need to create a church that is welcoming and relevant to young people.

Every young adult Catholic I know has gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered friends or family members. All the young adult Catholics I know view women as being equally gifted in leadership as men and want their church to be outspoken advocates for social

justice. The Catholic hierarchy focuses on church teachings that differ from what young adult Catholics think is important.

**Do church reform movements like Call to Action help young adult Catholics stay connected to the church?**

Absolutely. If it weren't for Call to Action, I don't think I would have remained Catholic. Thanks to Call To Action, FutureChurch and Women's Ordination Conference, there are young adult small faith communities sprouting up all over the country. These small faith communities not only nurture our spirits but allow young adult Catholics to get involved in social justice activities.

**What advice or encouragement do you give young Catholics who may be discouraged with the church?**

My advice would be: "Don't leave!" Never before have young adult Catholics been so prepared to create the radically inclusive and loving Catholic community Jesus intended. We are the Catholic church, and we have the unique opportunity to join God in co-creating a new Catholic church that speaks and acts from a place of love and inclusion.

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**Tom McMahon today argues that we still understand little of the psychology of priesthood — those deep imperatives that 'drive the system' relentlessly on — even though the system is nearly 1800 years old. What drives the minds of bishops and priests? What do they believe they are trying to achieve? What do they think the religio-spiritual objective is? Have some of them ever stopped to ask questions like this or are they just 'driven' by this ancient feudal system that has evolved?**

**An excerpt from a longer article.**

**Catholics on the edge...**

Sigmund Freud died in 1939; I was ten years old. This man was one of the first to offer a scientific study of human psychology whereas people practiced human behavior from the dawn of consciousness. We long had had the Greek gods of Olympus, masks of human psychology. In the year 2009 little is publicly known of the psychology of priests, even though a Christian priesthood has been in existence for around 1800 years, that priesthood having various styles of living over the centuries, mostly in the shadows of open society. Surely no one wore a roman collar at the Last Supper. The roman priesthood is a highly closed system. The worldwide seminary system has a powerful lock on clerical psychology. Is the "priest" becoming free from that lock? It is hard to appreciate the human psychology of anyone who claims to have supernatural power. In reading Eugene Kennedy's FASHION ME A PEOPLE, MAN, WOMEN AND THE CHURCH (1967), Andrew Greeley's CRUCIBLE OF CHANGE (1968), and Gregory Baum's MAN BECOMING (1970) I began my limited 'scientific' study of Roman Catholic priests, having ample first-hand knowledge from my boyhood years and my own ordination in 1954. Tim Unsworth in 1995 wrote of 16 persons he called CATHOLICS ON THE EDGE, a decent and bold psychological study of outspoken people; in chapter 2 (Bishops on the Edge) Tim quotes a gnarled old cleric: "Congratulations" (to) a seminary classmate who had just been appointed to a diocese, "you'll never get a bad meal and no one will ever tell you the truth".

Three priests are interviewed by Tim, Maryknoller Ed Moffet (Christian adventurer in Asia), Charles Schmidt (worker priest sprung loose by Cardinal Bernadin) and myself.

Tim interviews me on a PRIESTHOOD THAT IS FAST BECOMING A MEMORY. Clerics live in isolation from reality and people. By the time of Tim's book I had an education in ordinary life-beyond seminary, was no longer a Roman cleric, and was ranked as a professional in the psychological world. Having nothing to hide along with Moffett and Schmidt I was psychologically humanly phosphorescent ..... we seem happy as human beings doing human things. I had learned on a visit to Trinity College that tonsure was the early civil Roman sign of slavery.

The above mentioned books gave me a beginner's insight to clerical psychology, and others followed of fine value like Cozzens, Crosby, Sipe, Berry, Schillebeeckx, Herring, etc., yet no one seemed to be able to give a first-hand personalized profile of the modern day priest, his genuine image and personal psychology usually suppressed in a clericalism that spins off of the Council of Trent in 1542. From Trent on the black-frocked priest was another Christ, that mysterious man whom one saw in vestments at church on Sunday. Carl Rogers, or was it Rollo May, spoke of the priest holding the host aloft at the consecration and the people climbing onto his fiddle back chasuble, right into the presence of God. The priest was mythological. When the human persona (facial mask) was turned to the people this fantasy vanished and the ecstasy ceased, far too human. Old timers refused the human priest, pretending the human was not there. Clerical sexual abuse has brought attention to many heads buried in the sand.

### **A feudal medieval game...**

Personally I have known some splendid human beings who happened to be ordained priests, the role never suffocating their humanity. Power bishops would soon annihilate a given priest who had individual personality or was too friendly with ordinary women and men. We learned well in seminary, cookies from the same cookie cutter. To stay humanly alive the priest need avoid his bishop. It's a feudal medieval game!

The image of Bing Crosby's GOING MY WAY priest still has deep recall for many, even though the newspapers carry a consistently different picture, esp. in the arena of sexual abuse. It is the myth priest they write about. People reluctant to talk about this tragedy are still able to deal with the word priest in the abstract. Abraham Lincoln soon after the American Civil War's debacle of Bull Run said "this war is no longer in the abstract". I quote here from a post I received 29/07/09:

"The archdiocese of Chicago has agreed to pay \$3.9 million to settle six 'sexual abuse' cases and on Tuesday released a bishop's deposition that detailed the church's failure to report the crimes and attempts to keep them secret."

With no mention of the word priest the sum of \$3.9 million draws me away from the abstract; for me it sits badly in my gut and promotes a desire for further investigation of the psychology of the Roman Catholic priest as person. I am unable to shunt off the realization that I got canned from the Roman priesthood because I married (took on another persona) while men who raped and abused children were protected and moved to another parish, their clerical image had to be kept intact. Such was a continued denial of their human sexuality. If I denied biological parenthood of my two sons I would still be an active pastor. Even today a priest can easily have a mistress ..... wear your clerical collar, be secretive, and just don't have kids! (I have long been amused with hard-nosed priests who had a hidden sexual life while condemning honest Catholics who used birth control ..... Such gammy hypocrisy!)

## **Gone 29 years but still addressed as "Father"...**

I have been gone from institutional ministry for 29 years and am now a grandfather. The dominant image people have of me in 2009 is still the priest; I meet friends of old and they hesitate to call me by my first name, preferring to be safe and use "Father". The archetype (first deep hit) sticks like glue. Will the archetypal image ever change? Some will change it but for many "once a priest always a priest" ... confusing? In Follett's two volumes (WORLD WITHOUT END and PILLARS OF THE EARTH) there is more report, skimpy as it is, on the secular priesthood than in volumes of church history in the Middle Ages. Follett tells of the impoverished priest who steals money from the orphaned children of the dead king. I suspect the historical disappearance of the secular priest has much to do with the widespread woeful condition of the peasant people in the Dark Ages and subsequent feudal system. As I watch the *History Channel's* depiction of the Viking mayhem of the 900's I can't imagine the survival of the individual secular priest. The priesthood seems to fall into disrepair after the banishment of priestly marriage. In the pillage the people and the priest were separated and there was no longer Christian community. In later years there are stories of abbesses (literally female bishops of the Middle Ages) who maintained control over the secular clergy on the abbess's fief over which she ruled independent of males. As accounted in Follett bishops are well known politicians and landowners.

I find it difficult to imagine how the priest was trained and who ordained him during the four hundred year period before the priest emerges as one of the seven sacraments that Trent establishes and seminaries are formed. Forgotten for four hundred years, the priest, by the bishops of Trent becomes in the 16th century the centerpiece of renewal — in control of the new sacramental system as long as he works in union with his ordaining bishop. This newness of priest is truly a resurrection story, especially if one recounts the Council of Constance in 1444, a disgraceful immoral gathering of powerful clergy, the majority of whom were bishops. The priest must never think for himself; obedience even to ignorant and incompetent bishops is the only acceptable conduct. Follett's books give a clear picture of the role of the bishop during the Middle Ages as the bishop sits in the cat-bird's seat of feudal power (*cathedra*) and financial wealth. In the new industrial-technological age (post-French Revolution) the bishop worldwide desperately needs the money of the new-found middle class as feudalism disappears. As his semi-vassal fief priest disappears so goes his fat pocket book and the medieval manorial parish system. Bringing in foreign born clergy is a kiss of death.

In our YEAR/CLUE chart on Psychology last week we left off in the year 1139, the year Roman authority annihilated clerical marriage and suppressed by edict the emotions and feeling level of the Roman secular clergy. If one penetrates beyond the facts and dates one can imagine the heartbreak and disappointment that followed the institution's cruel and criminal annihilation of priestly marriage; the forced separation from wife and children damaged for centuries the psyche of priests, many of whom lived underground in abject poverty and bitterness. Outside of Chaucer's "a man of religion, a poor parson of a town ..... a shity priest ....." we have virtually no mention of secular clergy until they are resurrected by the Council of Trent in 1542. The 1139 separation of bishop from simple priest was catastrophic and remains within the Roman system to this day. (I look forward to Tom Lee's forthcoming history on celibacy.)

**Bishops 'of the people'/priests 'of the people'...**

I share here a keen memory; when Mark Hurley (r.i.p) was ordained a bishop in 1960 his brother Frank (then secretary to the American bishops and now retired Archbishop of Anchorage, Alaska) floored a brotherhood group of San Francisco priests when he casually said "my brother has just joined one of the most elite all male clubs in the world". How little we knew of the life of a bishop and his power. We would begin to find out after Vatican Two. There is no comparison today between His Eminence Cardinal Mundelein of 1930's Chicago fame and power and his Rolls Royce with coat of arms hub caps and humble bishop Tom Gumbleton, shunned by Rome in 2008 for his peace and justice work. Tom is that straw man 'priest-of-people' we created in the 600's s today in 2009. Australia has its Geoffrey Robinsons.

Keep in mind that the secular priest differs radically from the monk priest, the secular taking none of the two vows of poverty and chastity as does the religious order (monk) priest. The secular lives with the people whereas the religious order men live in community, separate from people. The secular is commonly called the parish priest, which I was for 26 years, as contrasted to a Jesuit who teaches at nearby Santa Clara University. The religious order priest, right out of the Middle Ages takes a vow of obedience to his superiors and a Jesuit a special vow before ordination to never criticize the pope (a holdover from medieval times and the feudal system) whereas the secular priest promises to obey the ordaining bishop and his successors. This latter promise of silencing is part of the loyalty demanded by the king in feudal times. Vatican Two literally overturned such promises in its DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM (1965), particularly in the case of promises made without full knowledge and immaturity of the one making the promise. Vatican Two was an expression of the desperate need of humanism to return to institutional religion, lest religion cease to be a meaningful part of modern society. Pope Benedict 16 and his cadre of modern day Roman bishops are attempting to resuscitate a dead and dying medieval European religion that has little value to the modern person. Roman Catholicism is a duplicate of the Middle Ages feudal system, replete with medieval psychology. Catholicism is neither God, nor Jesus.

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