

Mini marriage prep course from Father Pat Connor, Bordentown, NJ. He is interviewed by Maureen Dowd, New York Times columnist.

An Ideal Husband  
July 6, 2008

This weekend, we celebrate our great American pastime: messy celebrity divorces. There's the Christie Brinkley/Peter Cook fireworks on Long Island and the Madonna/Guy Ritchie/A-Rod Roman candle in New York.

So how do you avoid a relationship where you end up saying, "The man who I was living with, I just didn't know who he was" — as Brinkley did in court when talking about her husband's \$3,000-a-month Internet porn and swinger site habit? (Not to mention the 18-year-old mistress/assistant.)

Father Pat Connor, a 79-year-old Catholic priest born in Australia and based in Bordentown, N.J., has spent his celibate life — including nine years as a missionary in India — mulling connubial bliss. His decades of marriage counseling led him to distill some "mostly common sense" advice about how to dodge mates who would maul your happiness.

"Hollywood says you can be deeply in love with someone and then your marriage will work," the twinkly eyed, white-haired priest says. "But you can be deeply in love with someone to whom you cannot be successfully married."

For 40 years, he has been giving a lecture — "Whom Not to Marry" — to high school seniors, mostly girls because they're more interested.

"It's important to do it before they fall seriously in love, because then it will be too late," he explains. "Infatuation trumps judgment."

I asked him to summarize his talk:

"Never marry a man who has no friends," he starts. "This usually means that he will be incapable of the intimacy that marriage demands. I am always amazed at the number of men I have counseled who have no friends. Since, as the Hebrew Scriptures say, 'Iron shapes iron and friend shapes friend,' what are his friends like? What do your friends and family members think of him? Sometimes, your friends can't render an impartial judgment because they are envious that you are beating them in the race to the altar. Envy beclouds judgment.

"Does he use money responsibly? Is he stingy? Most marriages that founder do so because of money — she's thrifty, he's on his 10th credit card.

"Steer clear of someone whose life you can run, who never makes demands counter to yours. It's good to have a doormat in the home, but not if it's your husband.

"Is he overly attached to his mother and her mythical apron strings? When he wants to make a decision, say, about where you should go on your honeymoon, he doesn't consult you; he consults his mother. (I've known cases where the mother accompanies the couple on their honeymoon!)

"Does he have a sense of humor? That covers a multitude of sins. My mother was once asked how she managed to live harmoniously with three men — my father, brother and me. Her answer,

delivered with awesome arrogance, was: ‘You simply operate on the assumption that no man matures after the age of 11.’ My father fell about laughing.

“A therapist friend insists that ‘more marriages are killed by silence than by violence.’ The strong, silent type can be charming but ultimately destructive. That world-class misogynist, Paul of Tarsus, got it right when he said, ‘In all your dealings with one another, speak the truth to one another in love that you may grow up.’

“Don’t marry a problem character thinking you will change him. He’s a heavy drinker, or some other kind of addict, but if he marries a good woman, he’ll settle down. People are the same after marriage as before, only more so.

“Take a good, unsentimental look at his family — you’ll learn a lot about him and his attitude towards women. Kay made a monstrous mistake marrying Michael Corleone! Is there a history of divorce in the family? An atmosphere of racism, sexism or prejudice in his home? Are his goals and deepest beliefs worthy and similar to yours? I remember counseling a pious Catholic woman that it might not be prudent to marry a pious Muslim, whose attitude about women was very different. Love trumped prudence; the annulment process was instigated by her six months later.

“Imagine a religious fundamentalist married to an agnostic. One would have to pray that the fundamentalist doesn’t open the Bible and hit the page in which Abraham is willing to obey God and slit his son’s throat.

“Finally: Does he possess those character traits that add up to a good human being — the willingness to forgive, praise, be courteous? Or is he inclined to be a fibber, to fits of rage, to be a control freak, to be envious of you, to be secretive?

“After I regale a group with this talk, the despairing cry goes up: ‘But you’ve eliminated everyone!’ Life is unfair.”

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Is this next for the United States if the Church is unwilling to make the difficult choices necessary to ensure that we are not deprived of the Eucharist?

New-style church being born in France due to shortage of priests

Jul 8, 2008

The Irish Times

RITE AND REASON: Perhaps what is already happening in the French Catholic Church is an indication of where Irish Catholicism is headed, writes David Rice.

IT HAS often been said that France has her crises before the rest of Europe - whether it be the French Revolution itself, or the student revolt of 1968, or the alienation of people from the churches.

There is one such crisis where France is ahead of Ireland, and that is in its shortage of Roman Catholic priests. France is also ahead in its response to that shortage. In essence the lay people have taken over the local church and run it for themselves.

In one diocese in northern France there is only one priest to serve 27 parishes. It means the priest has been reduced to the role of circuit rider who drops by on rare occasions to offer a Mass and

consecrate some hosts. For the rest of the time the people run their church themselves. In 2001 the diocese of Nice had to reduce its 265 parishes down to 47.

One of these, the recently created parish of Nôtre Dame de l'Espérance, runs along a celebrated strip of the Mediterranean coast, with five churches. There were five priests; now there is just one, who cannot cope on his own. Yet all five village churches are flourishing.

The secret is that each church has an appointed lay person, called a relais local, whose duty is to run both church and parish, and perform almost all functions save uttering the words of consecration and administering those sacraments only a priest is allowed to do. A principal function of the relais is to conduct a Sunday Communion service in the absence of the priest - for all practical purposes a Mass without the consecration. There is frequently no priest at a funeral any more.

At the Église Sacré Coeur in Beaulieu, I attended one such funeral, conducted by the relais locale for the church. She received the coffin. There were words of welcome, the singing of hymns, a short eulogy of the deceased, readings from scripture, a brief reflection by the relais, the lighting of candles beside the coffin, a blessing of the coffin with holy water, and prayers for the deceased. It lasted about half-an-hour. There was no Mass, as there was no priest. But there wasn't a Communion service either.

This new de facto structure in the parish is not confined to relais locales. Marie-Anne Hosley, an energetic Frenchwoman whose mother hails from Co Down, has lately been appointed general manager of the parish with its five churches. While her official title is économiste, she assures me it is more about admin than money.

Although unpaid herself, she manages a payroll of nine people, including cleaners, organists and two parish secretaries.

Other lay people - men and women - are equally active in many of the former roles of the priest - parish visitation, counselling, pre-marriage instruction, attending the sick, bringing communion, chaplaincies to hospitals and retirement homes and in some areas to scout and youth groups.

Also it is lay people who, almost exclusively, perform the crucial role of imparting their faith. In the neighbouring diocese of Monaco, Bernadette Keraudren gives many hours guiding catechumens - those who want to become Christian or Catholic.

The catechumens go through about two years of guidance, all done by lay people. None of this is stop-gap until better times come. This is for keeps, because better times are not coming. Soon there won't be any priests at all. Or so few that it simply won't count. So people here see a totally new church ministry evolving, which will inevitably become more formalised.

But the dearth of priests means that the people will ultimately be left without the sacraments and without the Eucharist, the centre of their faith. That is why the relais, and all these other layfolk who are de facto running the church, are asking, when will the Vatican wake up to the facts of life and allow or recognise new ministries?

"Vatican Two talked about us all being priests," Hosley says. "The priesthood of the laity. So maybe the church will soon have a new form of priest." That could mean that, in one fell swoop, there would be women priests and married priests. Many here believe that time is not far off.

And if it is next for the United States, would that be the worst thing?  
David Rice is a former Dominican priest and the author of six books.

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Not a Moment Too Soon, I Thought of Tim Russert  
By MICHAEL BICKS  
July 8, 2008

Most Saturday mornings, I bicycle with a group of men, mostly in their 50s, whom I affectionately call the Cheat Death group. We are all in pretty good shape, competitive but supportive, and convinced that hard-core exercise is our ticket to postponing the inevitable.

The ride a few Saturdays back was a tough one. At 6:30 a.m., the pack took off fast and immediately headed for the hills near Durham, N.H. The first few climbs felt pretty good, but by the third hill I started to feel nauseated.

Figuring that was probably a result of the four beers and large Chinese dinner the night before, I kept going. Twenty-five miles into the ride, I had fallen to the back of the pack. I was short of breath and wondering how I was going to make it much farther.

I am someone who hates to quit. But after the third time the group had to stop and wait for me, I decided I had no choice. I watched them pedal away, then lay down in the grass. I was angry and scared. For the first time my body had given out on me, and I had no clue what was going on. Besides the nausea, my only symptoms were a persistent cough and an overwhelming feeling that something was not right.

I called my wife and got a ride home.

After showering, I lay down in bed and started thinking. Though I am a 50-year-old guy with a stressful job and a little too much around the middle, I had a clean bill of health. I had good cholesterol numbers and a great doctor, and recently I had passed a cardiac stress test.

That's when Tim Russert popped into my head. In the last couple of weeks, like almost every middle-age man, I had taken a very personal interest in every detail of his story. Yes, he was overweight. But hadn't he just passed a stress test?

That's when the light went on. I bolted out of bed, went to the computer and Googled "How do you know you are having a heart attack?" The first Web site that popped up was a list of warning signs from the American Heart Association. As I read on, I started to sweat.

"Nausea." Check.

"Shortness of breath." Check.

"Chest discomfort." Perhaps, though it really didn't feel like much.

Ignoring the Web site's advice to call 911 (I was too vain to have an ambulance pull up to my house), I drove to the hospital.

When I stepped up to admissions desk the nurse asked why I was there. "Mild chest pains," I said. "How old?" she asked. "Fifty," I replied.

She nonchalantly turned to the orderly and said, "Hey, Lenny, we got another one." I guess many men, stunned by Mr. Russert's sudden death, were doing just the same thing I was.

A doctor attached some wires to my body and conducted a quick EKG. "Mr. Bicks," he said minutes later, "you are suffering a heart attack."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," he answered, then produced those squiggly lines on the graph paper. I swore. Then I called my wife and I started to cry.

This is one of those times that defines your life, like the death of a parent or the birth of a child. In a split-second, you cross the invisible "before and after" line and realize that nothing is ever going to be the same. For that moment my life had been removed from my hands. But I kept thinking, I'm supposed to be invulnerable. I'd passed a stress test, drank red wine, used a lot of olive oil, exercised like an insane person. This could not possibly be happening to me.

The doctor took out a large needle full of a sedative. The rest is a blur: a trip in an ambulance to a larger hospital, sirens blaring, an hour on the table in a cath lab, a stent implanted to open the blocked artery, my wife crawling tearfully into my bed to give me a hug, a doctor showing me before-and-after pictures of my artery, and losing his temper when I asked when I might return to work.

As in Tim Russert's case, there were no warning signs. No sign I was suffering from coronary artery disease. A piece of plaque in one of my arteries just broke off and created a massive blood clot. When it did, I suffered a severe heart attack. If I had not gone to the hospital, I might very well have died.

Because at the right moment I thought of Tim Russert, I am one of the lucky ones. I get to hug my wife and my kids, understand how wonderful my friends are and realize exactly how much I love my life. It is a debt I can never repay.

Michael Bicks produces documentaries for ABC News.

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If they will not tell the truth about their reasons for going to war (at the cost of 4,116 US soldiers killed, 30,316 seriously wounded, more than 85,000 Iraqi civilian deaths, 8,000 Iraqi military and police deaths, and 4.5 million refugees within and outside Iraq), why would we expect the truth about anything else from the present administration?

Statistics as of July 1<sup>st</sup>.

White House in climate change "cover up"-Sen Boxer

Jul 8, 2008

By Richard Cowan

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A leading U.S. Senate Democrat accused the Bush administration on Tuesday of a "cover-up" aimed at stopping the Environmental Protection Agency from tackling greenhouse emissions.

"This cover-up is being directed from the White House and the office of the vice president," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, the California Democrat who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

At issue is a preliminary finding by the EPA last December that "greenhouse gases may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public welfare," according to Jason Burnett, the agency's former associate deputy administrator who appeared at a news conference with Boxer.

Such a finding would be an early step toward government regulation aimed at protecting public health.

Boxer said that unless EPA documents were released, it was likely that within the next two weeks her committee would try to subpoena the material. She did not know whether Republicans on the panel would block the effort.

Burnett, who resigned on June 9, told Boxer's committee the White House tried pressuring him to retract an e-mail in which he detailed the finding. Burnett said he refused.

Democrats say that since then, the EPA finding has been left "in limbo."

White House spokesman Tony Fratto said many federal agencies, departments and offices normally review any initiatives being developed to check for "factual inaccuracies" or "discordant" policies.

Without getting into specifics, Fratto said "views are frequently discussed and worked out in ways that make sense."

Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, asked about the administration's actions, said, "I don't know if that is criminal. I doubt it. OK. But I know it is immoral."

"The health of my grandchildren, my children and me are affected by this head-in-the-sand that global warming doesn't exist," Reid told reporters.

Boxer acknowledged she wanted to gather information so that the next administration could get a jump on global warming initiatives quickly after it takes office on January 20, 2009.

She has been trying since last October to obtain related documents to show that planned congressional testimony on global warming by Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was censored by the Bush administration.

Boxer said Gerberding's testimony would have detailed the direct impact of rising global temperatures on human health, including mortality and the spread of disease.

Burnett told the congressional committee the administration's Council on Environmental Quality "and the office of the vice president were seeking deletions to the CDC testimony." He refused to say who in Vice President Richard Cheney's office was involved.

Responding to Burnett's charges, Fratto said, "Jason Burnett is not the EPA administrator" and that it was up to EPA chief Stephen Johnson to oversee environmental policy.

Asked at Tuesday's news conference about his support for Democratic candidates and whether he was trying to embarrass the Republican administration, Burnett said, "Following the law and responding to the Supreme Court is not a partisan issue."

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Clean Air Act gives EPA the authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

In October, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said Gerberding's draft testimony to Congress "did not comport" with science contained in an International Panel on Climate Change report and that "a number of agencies had some concerns with the draft."

On Tuesday, Boxer said Gerberding's planned testimony, which has since been detailed in media reports, and the IPCC report "matched identically."

(Additional reporting by Thomas Ferraro; Editing by Maggie Fox and David Wiessler)

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On July 4<sup>th</sup>, the following item appeared on the Whispers in the Loggia blog. Please consider supporting Rocco Palma's work on the blog.

Finally, It's Official: Molokai's Hero = Hawaii's Saint

The requisite miracle for his canonization approved in May, the Pope yesterday green-lighted the elevation to sainthood of Bl Damien deVeuster -- the Belgian priest (1840-89) who spent his life ministering to the leper community on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, eventually contracting and dying of the disease.

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Collins comments on Catholic Church scandal  
From the Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
08/07/2008  
Reporter: Ali Moore

Ali Moore speaks with Dr Paul Collins, a former priest and one of the most controversial commentators on the Catholic Church following the allegations of a cover-up by Cardinal George Pell.

Transcript

ALI MOORE, PRESENTER: Dr Paul Collins is a former priest and one of the more controversial commentators on the Catholic Church. He's also a broadcaster and author whose most recent book 'Believers, Does Australian Catholicism have a future?' was published earlier this year. Dr Paul Collins has been watching events unfold and I spoke to him late today in our Canberra studio.

Dr Paul Collins how serious is this for the Catholic Church and for its highest representative in this country, particularly coming as it does just days before the arrival of the Pope?

DR PAUL COLLINS: Well I think we've got to remember that Cardinal Pell himself was accused of sexual abuse not long after he became the Archbishop of Sydney.

And essentially he was cleared of those charges but he certainly went through a fairly difficult stage when he was facing up to that. So I mean the sexual abuse story has been running now since really the late '80s.

So this story has been going on and on and on and it's seemingly almost endless. I think that the impact, I think people just shrug their shoulders. They just say oh well another example, you know, it's something that we've always known.

So I don't think that it will necessarily have a big impact on World Youth Day. What I think it will do, though, it may well have, it will certainly create problems for Cardinal Pell; certainly create problems for his credibility, and his authority in the church in Australia.

ALI MOORE: How severe do you think those problems are going to be particularly when it comes to the question of credibility?

If we look at some of what Cardinal Pell has said, he says the fact he attributed the finding that the claim of aggravated sexual assault could not be substantiated, the fact he attributed that to his investigator Howard Murray, when in fact Howard Murray made no such finding.

He says that was an innocent error and an overstatement. He talks about his letter to the victim of having, being badly worded and a mistake. Is that good enough for a man of his standing?

DR PAUL COLLINS: Well, you know, I mean I can understand how mistakes are made, you know, I'm a human being myself. I've made some terrible mistakes in my time, and some of those mistakes have impacted on other people very badly.

However I would have thought that particularly given that this was not long after Cardinal Pell's own experience, that he would have been looking at these kinds of issues, much more carefully.

I mean to me, you know, there's a kind of a lurking question here. The abuse of the attar boy, for instance, that he mentions in his letter, I mean did he report that to the police?

I mean this is the kind of this is the essence of the story, it seems to me, and what responsibility did he have in that case? Was this something that happened before his time or did it happen under his watch and what are his responsibilities in the light of that?

I mean I think there is still quite a number of unanswered questions but at the same time I think we have to say that I really do have some sympathy for Cardinal Pell in this situation because these are very difficult, very sensitive cases and I suppose it is easy to make a mistake, that I can understand.

ALI MOORE: But isn't the very fact they are sensitive, they are complicated, he is the highest representative of the church in the land, I was him writing the letter, he would take great care to get it right?

DR PAUL COLLINS: I would have thought that's what you do but, you know, we're human beings, we make mistakes.

But allowing for that at the same time I do think that it does affect his credibility that he hasn't apparently taken care with this particular issue.

ALI MOORE: When he talks about bad wording in terms of his letter, part of what he's referring to is the claim that he made that no other allegations had been made against Father Goodall when in fact we now know, as you said, there was the attar boy.

There are now suggestions of other cases. If other cases are proved to have been known at that time and known to the Cardinal, what then?

DR PAUL COLLINS: I think that, that places the Cardinal in a very, very difficult position. I don't know that evidence, I haven't heard the evidence as I understand it, it is coming on 'Lateline' this evening but I mean until we see what that evidence is it's very, very hard to comment.

But hypothetically, and that's all we can do, hypothetically it would seem to me to make Cardinal Pell's situation a very, very difficult one, especially if he was responsible bishop at the time when these cases were reported.

And if he knew about these cases then it seems to me that his position he's going to have to do a lot more explaining.

ALI MOORE: A lot more explaining, his position is difficult, they're your words, would his position be untenable?

DR PAUL COLLINS: I think we have to wait and see what the evidence is. I don't think we can, it's not; I mean I've seen enough of these situations to want to prejudge them.

I think we really need to see what evidence is brought forward this evening apparently and then I think we can flake a judgment on it.

ALI MOORE: What is the process of review? Indeed is there one given the position Cardinal Pell holds within the church?

DR PAUL COLLINS: As I understand it, there is a way of reviewing cases. That is that if a person is unsatisfied with the decision they can ask the professional standards committee to appoint a reviewer who is totally neutral, who is from outside the Church.

Often the person will be a lawyer because of the legal issues that are involved in this and, you know, usually I would expect that the lawyer would not be a Catholic and would not necessarily be, you know, carrying the Catholic Church's bags for them.

When the reviewer puts in their report that still doesn't bind the bishop. The bishop can still, if you like, say thank you for the report but I'm not going to act on that, I'm going to use my own authority.

This, of course, I suppose, highlights the situation of the whole question of accountability on the part of bishops, the whole question of accountability on the part of the Church.

ALI MOORE: Are you in effect saying that Cardinal Pell is in effect above reproach?

DR PAUL COLLINS: Well, look, it's not for me reproach Cardinal Pell. I think the word reproach is perhaps the wrong word there.

I would certainly say as an archbishop or as a bishop he is essentially in the end accountable only to himself and to God and at times in these kinds of situations God can be a remarkably long way away.

ALI MOORE: Of course there's also the Vatican, Cardinal Pell says he's not informed the Vatican. Would the Vatican be aware now of the circumstances of this and what do you think their response would be?

DR PAUL COLLINS: I think that especially in view of the Pope coming next week, or next Sunday, the Vatican would certainly be aware of the situation.

I mean their tendency, especially under Pope Benedict is to say well, this is a local problem, this needs to be dealt with locally. However, a lot of these sexual abuse cases, of course, end up in Rome to be decided by the congregation for the doctrine of the faith which Cardinal Ratzinger before he became Pope Benedict presided over.

So I'm sure they would be aware of what's happening and I'm sure they will be looking at it carefully. What I think it does is that it puts more pressure on them, and specifically on the Pope, to apologise to the victims of sexual abuse. I mean I don't think we can avoid that now.

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[Also from the Australian Broadcast Corporation.](#)

**PM - Concerns old Catholic traditions could repel youth**

July 9, 2008

Reporter: Paula Kruger

EDMOND ROY: As the Catholic Church's leadership attempts to deal with modern day problems, the upcoming World Youth Day celebrations has highlighted the revival of some of the Church's older traditions.

One of the more unusual practices has involved the bones of long-deceased Italian saints that are now on display for pilgrims at two Sydney churches.

While some Catholics are revelling in the presence of these relics, others are raising concerns the emphasis on older traditions could repel younger Catholics from the Church.

Paula Kruger reports.

PAULA KRUGER: World Youth Day is embracing a range of festivities, whether it be a dramatisation of the Stations of the Cross around the streets of Sydney or the Papal Cup soccer tournament.

But there are some events that are surprising local Catholics who aren't used to some of the religion's more macabre rituals.

A church in the inner-west is drawing in worshippers who want to pray at the bones of three Italian saints. Another church in the inner city is hosting the remains of an Italian blessed who died in 1925.

Bernie Quinn is a young musician and a member of the Opus Dei organisation. She says there isn't anything strange about visiting the relics of long dead Italian saints and blessed.

BERNIE QUINN: The relics of Pierre Frassati, who's coming over from Italy. It's very exciting and I think they're relevant because he is a young person who died when he was 24 and I think the saints are an inspiration for us to help love Jesus more, really.

So I think no matter when in the Church's history, I think they'll always be relevant for people.

PAULA KRUGER: The worshipping of relics has surprised Rod Blackhurst, a lecturer in philosophy and religious studies at La Trobe University.

ROD BLACKHURST: The cult of relics and so forth is very specifically Catholic, and many people thought that the second Vatican Council had effectively marginalised or done away with a lot of that, but there seems to be revival of those things.

PAULA KRUGER: Why would that be making a comeback in this day and age?

ROD BLACKHURST: Yeah, that's an interesting problem and an interesting question. I'm really not sure. But, one thing is certain is that contemporary religion seems to be very polarised between liberal elements and a return to more conservative and traditional elements.

And so we are seeing a return to those more traditional forms of worship, what you would effectively call medieval forms of worship, side by side with more liberal and modernising elements.

PAULA KRUGER: The Second Vatican Council or Vatican II was an attempt to modernise the

Church and move away from the biblical literalism of the past. So the young Catholics of today may not be aware of some of the older traditions that existed before the 1960s.

Dr Paul Collins is a former priest and author of *Believers: Does Australian Catholicism have a Future?*

He says many Catholics have grown up with a greater emphasis on social justice than saintly relics.

PAUL COLLINS: Well, they certainly haven't seen them I'd say, especially if they went to Catholic schools where the emphases would be quite different. I do think to some extent that this reflects much more the kind of religiosity of the organisers of World Youth Day, rather than the mainstream Catholic Church.

They would claim, you know, in their defence, that they were doing ... that they were kind of maintaining the emphases that came through from Pope John Paul II, who I suppose is essentially the founder of World Youth Day.

But nevertheless, I think for Australian Catholics, and I think for Australians generally, these are kind of, you know, odd things that are different that people find a little hard to fit into any context and don't make much sense to them.

PAULA KRUGER: But Rod Blackhurst says the resurgence of relic worship and more pious ceremony may be what some Christians feel they need.

ROD BLACKHURST: The liberal agenda of the Second Vatican Council was very successful at taking apart and exposing the limitations of that old 1950s Catholicism that people from that generation would know.

But they weren't particularly good at replacing it with things. And so that there's a yearning amongst young people to go back and experience those things which they felt that had been lost and that perhaps were valuable.

PAULA KRUGER: So, a kind of spiritual element or a mystic element?

ROD BLACKHURST: Yeah, certainly a mystic element and a less of an emphasis on sociological and political religion. More mystical as you say and more devotional, yeah.

PAULA KRUGER: The relics of the Italian saints and blessed aren't a permanent fixture in Australian religious life and will return to Italy after World Youth Day festivities.

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## **A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THINKING CATHOLICS**

Delivered at Sts. Simon and Jude, Westland, MI, on March 11, 2008

### **FR. THOMAS REESE, S. J.**

... the title of my talk is *A Survival Guide for Thinking Catholics*. And when I picked this topic, frankly, I wasn't sure what I was going to say; and by the time I finish, you may conclude that I still don't know what I'm talking about. (Laughter) This is a work in progress. I hope to develop

it into a book; and so I'm looking forward to your questions, and your reactions, and your comments on the book as we go along also.

Let me preface my comments by saying that, if you are completely happy with everything going on in the Catholic Church today, you're at the wrong lecture. If you've never had a doubt about the faith, please leave now; I don't want to cause you any doubts. If you've never disagreed with anything that a bishop or a pope has said, then I think you are at the wrong lecture; and your time would be better spent somewhere else; and I won't feel insulted if you walk out at this point.

For the rest of us, I think it's important to acknowledge that sometimes we question what is going on in the Church. There's no point in pretending that we don't. We have a mind that by its very nature asks questions. A questioning mind is fostered by our education and by the culture in which we live. It is part of who we are and we cannot run away from it. I would insist that a questioning mind is not just an affliction of liberal Catholics; it's also alive and well in conservative Catholics. Liberals may question the ban on artificial birth control, married priests and women priests. Conservatives, on the other hand, question the Church's opposition to capital punishment, its opposition to the war in Iraq, and the Church's support for welfare programs and illegal immigrants. And I could go on and on with the laundry list of controversial issues in the Church today.

In the past people would say, *Roma locuta est; causa finite est!* – "Rome has spoken; the case is closed!" Today, the reality is often, "Rome has spoken; let the discussion begin." How then should we, as thinking Catholics, deal with our questions, our doubts? I will suggest ten guidelines for surviving as a thinking Catholic today.

First, number 1: It's important to understand what the Church is saying.

Is your problem a result of a misunderstanding, or a true disagreement? Many arguments occur as a result of misunderstandings. Look at our families; how many arguments do we have over misunderstandings? We must truly listen to the other person, and try to understand what they are saying, why they are saying it. I really think the ideal is to be able to explain the person's position better than they can. That's the ideal.

Second: Our understanding should be inspired by sympathy, not sarcasm or cynicism.

Whatever a person says should be interpreted in the best possible light. As St. Ignatius says in his Spiritual Exercises, "Not only must we get inside the other's mind, we must also get inside the other's heart and feelings." If we disagree, we should disagree as friends in the Lord, not as opposing armies of fanatics. They should know we are Christians by our love; not that we are Catholics by our fights.

Third: You have to do your homework.

The issues that face the Church today are complex and not solvable by sound bites. Magazines like America and Commonweal are helpful with their articles on contemporary topics – and groups like this that get together. I mean: I read over the list of speakers you've had here; it's a Who's Who of people – really first rate scholars in the United States. And this is the way you really get to an understanding of the issues that face the Church. As Catholics we don't believe it's sufficient to simply listen to the pope and ignore Scriptures, for example; nor do we believe it's sufficient to simply read the Scripture in isolation from a believing community. We're a Church that does both.

Fourth: We are a believing community with 2,000 years of history and tradition.

We need to know our history: our triumphs, our failures, our saints, our sinners. I mean, for me, it's quite encouraging to know that there really were worse times in the history of the Church. Remember the Borgia's? And the Church survived. Thus, a study of history helps one take the long view. Things have been worse; things can get better. For example: prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century a Catholic understanding of the bible appeared to be in conflict with science. Today, contemporary biblical scholarship has not only eliminated this conflict, but opened up the Scriptures to a much deeper understanding than we've ever had before. Just think about it: a hundred years from now, how many of our theological doubts will seem as silly as those caused among Christians, who looked through a telescope, and suddenly discovered that the earth was going around the sun; the sun was not going around the earth. Reading history is also an extremely liberating experience.

As a young person, growing up in the fifties and the sixties, I was quite conservative and like, you know, other people of my generation, I could not think the Mass could ever change. The liturgy... I mean, it's always been that way, hasn't it? The beginning of my transformation was reading "The History of the Roman Rite" by Joseph Jungmann. The history of the Mass showed that the Mass had continually changed over the centuries, in response to changing cultures and changing theological trends. If the Mass changed in the past, there's no reason it could not change again in the future. Similarly, John Noonan's book *Contraception*, and his book *Usury* are extraordinary books at cases of development of doctrine in the Church. Likewise, my own books – I have written of the history of the Roman Curia, the appointment of bishops, and the election of Popes. For example, for most of the Church's history, the pope had absolutely nothing to do with the appointment of bishops outside of Italy. This is a very modern innovation in the Church. If people and priests elected their bishops in the past, there is no doctrinal reason they could not do so today.

Fifth point: It is very important to distinguish between law and doctrine.

If you are a conservative, and want to return to the Pre-Vatican II liturgy, don't let anyone tell you, "You're a heretic." If you are a liberal, and believe married men should be ordained priests, don't let anyone tell you that you are a heretic. The questions of married priests and Latin in the liturgy are not doctrinal issues; these are questions of Canon Law and Liturgical Law. So too are the laws governing the selection of bishops, the role of the Roman Curia. Laws have changed over time; laws can change again.

Sixth point: It is very important to understand the level of authority of a Church or a doctrinal position with which you disagree.

Popes have only made two infallible statements since Vatican I: on the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception. An instruction from a Vatican Council, let alone [from] an article in *L'Observatore Romano*, is not on the same level as conciliar documents. Even an encyclical will have parts that are less authoritative than others. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, theologians had a whole system of what they called theological notes, by which they weighted the magisterial authority of various doctrinal statements – Fr. Francis Sullivan, of Boston College, has written extensively on this. And this is very important, because of the tendency of some people to treat every statement that comes from the Vatican as definitive or infallible, when in fact, they're not.

One of the problems is that the Church is very reluctant to ever say it was wrong. For example, at a meeting of theologians and scientists at Castel Gandolfo, John Paul II read a speech – it was written by someone else – and sadly, he had not had a chance to look it over before he got up to the podium. And, you know, as he was reading it, the scientists at the meeting thought that it was quite out of touch with, you know, contemporary thought of the relationship between science and religion. Halfway through the speech, it became clear that the pope was not agreeing (much loud

laughter) with what he was reading. However, a week later, the talk was published in L'Osservatore Romano; but several months later, when all of the talks at the conference were collected together, lo and behold, the speech by the pope was very different from the one he actually gave. No one in the Vatican bothered to point this out, or explain why this change came about. The problem is the Vatican never admits that it, or the pope, were wrong.

L'Osservatore Romano once published an obituary of a bishop who was still alive. He was upset and demanded a retraction. They told him the L'Osservatore Romano does not publish retractions; but they would publish an interview with him, so that all of his friends would know that he was still alive. Today we see that even long standing teachings of the Church can sometimes change. For example, the Church now teaches that capital punishment is wrong; and, you know, we know that popes executed people in the Papal States. You know this was not a problem for the Church for a number of centuries.

Likewise the Church has rethought its position on limbo – you all remember limbo? You know, I mean, for the past few decades, most theologians didn't believe in limbo; they believed that unbaptized children went directly to heaven. Well, Pope Benedict seems to agree; so we see a change coming about.

Many theologians, including some conservatives, have questioned the Church's position in opposition to the use of condoms as a protection against AIDS. There's a good chance that this position will change sometime in the future, probably by the time the AIDS epidemic is over, sadly, but true.

Likewise, shortly before he died, John Paul II read an allocution on the care of patients in a persistent vegetative state that seemed to depart significantly from traditional Catholic teaching. When Catholic hospitals in the United States questioned the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith with Cardinal Ratzinger, about the magisterial authority of this statement, the response was, they didn't have a clue, because they weren't involved in drafting the statement. Likewise, it was learned that the papal theologian, who is supposed to review everything the pope says was bypassed. So the questions were raised, who wrote this speech, who gave it to an ailing pope, who short-circuited the normal curial processes? However, since similar statements have continued to come out of Rome it appears that the Vatican is attempting to change traditional Catholic teaching on the treatment of dying patients.

Seventh point or guideline: It's important to know how to interpret the words in a doctrinal statement.

Catholics have learned from scripture scholars that it is a mistake to understand the bible in a fundamentalist way. It's important to understand the historical and cultural context of the writing, the literary style, and the audience to which it is addressed. The same is true of doctrinal statements. For example, we profess that there are Three Persons in One God. My guess is that there are very few people in this room who could explain that statement correctly. Why? Because our psychological understanding of the word person is quite different from the metaphysical understanding of the word person, which was held by the bishops at the council that defined it; they're just living in a totally different world than we are.

Likewise, when a Vatican document says that homosexuals are intrinsically disordered, we tend to think of this as a psychological description when the authors meant it as a philosophical description. You still may disagree with the description, but it's best to understand what you're disagreeing with.

Another misunderstanding is that when neo-conservatives cite John Paul's support for free markets as an endorsement of Republican attacks on government; John Paul was looking at Poland when he sang the praises of the free market, not at the United States. Who was his audience?

Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, has been famous for using words in ways that upset people. Often, this is because he defines the words quite differently than the normal person on the street. For example, he says that the gays are intrinsically disordered; women are not equal to men, but complementary; Islam is an irrationally religion; Buddhism is auto-erotic; colonialism was a blessing for Latin America; Harry Potter is bad for children. Now, those make terrible headlines – or great headlines if you are a headline writer – but, you know, understanding what exactly he meant in all those statements is something a little different from our immediate reaction to those statements. I don't think he was really trying to insult people.

You know, it was the same thing when he said that most Protestant churches weren't true churches. Do you remember that? We can't call them sister churches; they're Christian communities. Well, once you define a church as something that has episcopacy, all the sacraments, well, that leaves out everybody but the Orthodox; and us you know, so you just wiped out all the others; and they have to become Christian communities rather than churches. Well needless to say, they weren't pleased; that was not a step forward in ecumenical dialogue. But he speaks like that because, I think, he still believes he's still a German professor in a classroom, where he can define the vocabulary, and all the students take notes, and understand it the way he gives it; and that's just not the world in which he lives anymore; and I don't think he recognizes that.

Eighth guideline: It's important to understand that sometimes the Church uses words that are open to multiple interpretations, as a way of covering over differences and maintaining unity. This was certainly done at the Second Vatican Council. A lot of times they picked a word that was vague enough and said, "Well, you know, we'll just worry about that in the future; you know, so that everybody could kind of agree." Yes, this is a wonderful example. This was done because Paul VI wanted the documents approved, not by majority vote, not by two-thirds majority; he wanted practical consensus, you know, in support of these documents. Compromise and ambiguity were important in gaining the conservative votes at the council.

Problems arise today when this historical fact is ignored, and conservatives go back and give unambiguous interpretation to these words, these ambiguous phrases, as if the Council fathers completely agreed with the conservative minority.

In 2005 we saw ambiguity at work in the Vatican instruction on homosexual seminarians, when it said that those with homosexual tendencies could not be ordained. The document was greeted in the United States on the right with joy, because conservatives interpreted tendencies to mean orientation, and thus thought it banned even celibate homosexuals from ordination. The document was greeted on the left with horror, because they interpreted it exactly the same way as the conservatives. On the other hand, the middle, represented by most American bishops and seminary officials, interpreted the word tendencies differently from the right and left. Their interpretation left room for mature celibate homosexual seminarians. L'Osservatore Romano ran an article interpreting the instruction in the same way as the right, but it was simply ignored by the bishops, who felt they had greater authority to interpret the Magisterium than any newspaper writer.

Ninth guideline: In my parents' day, there were only two options when facing questions about your faith, accept what the Church taught or get out.

Schism was the route taken by Lefevre on the right, while liberals tend to drop out, or join liberal Protestant churches. I would suggest that this is in fact, more Irish or Northern European than Catholic. Certainly this is not the way Italians or Africans live their faith. If you ask a typical Italian male if he is a Catholic, the response will be, "Of course." But if you ask, "Do you go to Mass on Sunday?" the response will be: "*Sole Catholico; non sole fanatico!*" Italy also has one of the lowest birth rates in the world; and it's not because Italians don't enjoy sex, or because they are practicing Natural Family Planning. They also, overwhelmingly, voted in a referendum to legalize abortion. Italians pick and choose like any cafeteria Catholic in the United States; they invented this long before we got in line. The only difference between Italians and Americans is that Italians don't question Church authority publicly; they simply do what they want. The difference between Italian Catholics and American Catholics is more cultural than theological.

In most European schools the lecture method is alive and well; the students take notes and memorize them. If you ask a European student about the French Revolution, they can spout off what they heard at class; and they just sound like the brightest kids in the world, you know, the names, dates, everything that happened. But if you go into a European classroom, you rarely hear a probing question from the students. If the teacher ignores economics, no student would ask about the economic causes of the French Revolution. It is considered impolite and insulting to challenge the teacher. Even the other students would say, "What are you doing? Who do you think you are?" because the teacher is the magister, the term from which Magisterium comes. American educators on the other hand, try to stimulate questions and discussions in their classrooms; Europe hasn't heard of (John) Dewey.

An American seminarian, with a master's degree in theology from Yale, a very bright kid, was studying philosophy in Rome. He had his master's degree before he entered the seminary. He was taking a course on Hegel; and the professor commented briefly on an essay written by Hegel. So, you know, the student was kind of intrigued; he went to the library, got the essay, read it in German, and afterwards he still had some questions about it; so he made an appointment to go see the teacher. And after explaining what he had done, the professor looked at him and he said, "Why are you reading Hegel?" And so the American thinking, "My Italian must not be good; I must not be explaining myself;" so he started, "Your class, and you know, you mentioned this essay, and I went to the library," And the teacher interrupted him and said, "Why are you reading Hegel? I will explain to you what Hegel means." This is how many bishops and Vatican officials view their role as teachers, as the Magisterium.

Tenth and final point: We need to recognize that there will always be disagreements in the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles disclose that Paul disagreed with Peter at the Council of Jerusalem; you know, they had this whole argument about how the Gentiles were going to be integrated into the Church, and whether they had to follow all the Jewish laws and prescriptions. Well, this story is not described by Luke simply as an historical footnote, but as an example of the reality of the Church. There is always going to be disagreements. What I find so delightful about this story is that the disagreements were resolved through compromise. Gentiles would not have to be circumcised, but they would have to abstain from blood sacrifice to idols and from adultery. Now what would have happened to the Church if Peter and Paul had not been able to work out that compromise?

And you look at the Church today, and how difficult it is to get people to compromise, when that is the model that's presented to us by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Catholic Church

we believe that an informed conscience is our highest authority. We also believe, however, in the importance of humility. One must pray not simply for the conversion of one's opponents, one must pray also for our own conversion of heart. Humility and charity are the virtues that are necessary for any community, whether it is a family, a parish, a diocese or the universal Church. These virtues are needed at every level of the Church; without them we have anarchy, witch hunts, schisms and clericalism.

Church history teaches us that there are periods of progress when the Church responds with intelligence, reason and responsibility to new situations; but there have also been periods of decline when individual and group bias blinds people to reality, hinders good judgment, and limits true freedom. Although this is true of any organization and community, what distinguishes the Church is its openness to redemption, which can repair and renew Christians as individuals, and as a community.

Despite our weaknesses and sinfulness, we have faith in the Word of God that shows us the way. We have hope based on Christ's victory over sin and death, and his promise of the Spirit. We have love that impels us to forgiveness and companionship at the Lord's Table. Any survival strategy for thinking Catholics must be based on such faith, hope and love.

From the Web site: [elephantsinthelivingroom.com](http://elephantsinthelivingroom.com)  
The presentation was transcribed by Bev Parker.

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KPAX Romana  
by E.R. Bills  
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So let me get this straight. Space aliens are now an acceptable part of God's creation, but homosexuals are not? What if the space aliens are gay?!

It's only June and the Vatican has had a busy year. On March 10th, it added seven additional deadly sins to the original seven. To the list of lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride, we are now expected to avoid pollution, genetic engineering, obscene riches, drug dealing, abortion, pedophilia and social injustice.

On May 13, Rev. Jose Gabriel Funes, the Jesuit Director of the Vatican Observatory, said that rejecting the possibility of life on other planets would essentially put limits on God's creativity. And on May 30, the Vatican drew a line in the sand regarding gender and the Catholic priesthood. Apparently a woman can be a president or a prime minister, but not a priest or pope. Any woman attempting to do so will be excommunicated.

Is it just me, or is the agenda of His new Holiness characterized by some serious holey-ness?

Making pollution a deadly sin is a fine idea, but environmentalists have long argued that deforestation, air pollution, global warming and tainted water supplies are all symptoms of overpopulation. Last time I checked, the Catholic Church frowned on birth control and, as previously noted, declared abortion a deadly sin. Obviously, then, the Catholic Church's stance on birth control contributes to pollution. But it also fosters social injustice. The more scarce land and natural resources become, the more simple, decent and underrepresented folks (i.e., indigenous groups) are marginalized and disenfranchised. No one knows this better than the

Vatican; Catholics demonstrated such tactics again and again in their conquest of Central and South America.

Making obscene wealth a deadly sin is curious because “greed” already capably designates this vein of immorality. The Vatican’s intent wasn’t to create a double-whammy. It obviously wanted to wink at capitalism by creating precedents of “good” greed and “bad” greed. Making “greed in moderation” permissible allows the church to finally expand Matthew’s (Matthew 19:12) problematic needle eye enough for camels and wealthy folks to squeeze through en route to heaven. This watering down of the Word is obviously great news for the “haves” and the “have-mores,” but it highlights one of the glaring paradoxes of Catholicism. How can the Supreme Pontiff preach against obscene wealth when the church itself is obscenely wealthy?

Research suggests that the Vatican is a larger landowner than any organization or government in the world with visible title to over \$300 billion of property (churches, schools, hospitals, etc.) and around \$3 trillion in investments concealed by hundreds of complex networks controlling thousands of trusts and front companies. Surely, any serious Christian would have better luck finding the Ark of the Covenant than getting the Catholic Church to release its financial records, so does the Vatican have any business formally listing much less addressing obscene wealth as a deadly transgression?

Making pedophilia a deadly sin is a good idea, but isn’t the Catholic Church’s condemnation of pedophilia akin to the Bush Administration’s renunciation of torture? Does anyone really believe either will ever completely extricate themselves from past modus operandi?

As far as God’s creativity goes, if ET isn’t an unnatural creation that threatens the moral and philosophical pillars of the church, then neither is Ellen DeGeneres, Boy George or Richard Simmons. The most awe-inspiring expanse in the entire Vatican City is the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel where a homosexual named Michelangelo created his greatest masterpiece, *The Last Judgment*. How could centuries of priests and popes worship and pray in this transcendent space and still continue to reserve the divine spark of God for heterosexuals, relegating homosexuals to sub-humanity and social exile?

And how is it that the Vatican sees fit to threaten female candidates to the priesthood with excommunication when the Catholic Church has for decades harbored and, in many cases, protected pedophiles within their ranks of which very few (if any) were ever excommunicated for their sins—sins which the church now deems deadly? Why are women considered such a threat? Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II after her death. How is it that women can be candidates for sainthood but not priesthood?

As long as the leadership of the Catholic Church is rabidly patriarchal, the acknowledged lay small-mindedly heterosexual and the Vatican’s commitment to its own tenets pitifully lax, Catholics should be fearful of judgment, not hypocritically passing it.

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