

Over the Summer so many fine articles were written by others that I have collected them and submit them here for your perusal. There is also a letter from a brother in Christ who took exception to my letter of October 4, 2005 delineating my reasons for seeking a leave of absence. Conveniently he included his comments (in blue) within my letter. I have reproduced it in its entirety here.

I appreciate your thoughts and comments. Please do not hesitate to write.

Tony

October 4, 2005

Dear Family and Friends,

After more than thirty years of ministry I decided to request a leave from my ministry as an active priest. My reasons are manifold. But stated simply, I am finding it increasingly difficult to effectively represent our church.

I am troubled by the repression of theologians, [Which theologians were repressed? The only one that I know of in the United States in the last 30 years was Charles Curran. I actually think the opposite is true. Don't you remember what happened when Humane Vitae was issued? Who won that battle? And didn't Hans Kung state in the late 80's that dissidents control the seminaries and colleges?](#) and by the definition of discussion, debate, and disagreement as disloyalty; by creeping infallibilism; by the lack of real collegiality within the church ([Pope Benedict seems to be very collegial](#)); by an increasing sectarianism rather than an inclusive, catholic acceptance of even those with whom we disagree; by the centralization of church authority. [This whole sentence is a very general -- could you provide some examples?](#) When elitist, reactionary groups like Opus Dei and the Legionaries of Christ are extolled as examples of true fidelity to the Gospel, [I think that this is the first time I've heard that Opus Dei and LC are elitist and reactionary. How so? Would the Jesuits be considered elite? Reactionary?](#) I know I can no longer cooperate in this endeavor. [Opus Dei and LC are considered faithful, but they are not considered the "gold" standard. In fact, I don't think the Church has such a standard. Who's to say that the charism of the Franciscans is better than the Dominicans? By the way, it certainly seems that you don't like the LCs or Opus Dei, which might be violating your rule from above -- "inclusive, catholic acceptance of even those with whom we disagree".](#)

I am disappointed by the negligent and cowardly refusal to creatively address what is truly important (the priest shortage, many deprived of the Eucharist, fewer going to church, the loss of a generation of Catholics), while we insist that lay ministers of Communion can't fill chalices, which must be made of precious metal. [I agree that the Church has a problem here, and I don't think the reason for the shortage of priests is being adequately addressed. We can discuss this point in more detail, if you like. On a related note, and I'm not trying to be a wise guy here, but leaving the priesthood only exacerbates the problem you are describing.](#)

I am disheartened by the sexual abuse scandal, and in particular by some members of the

hierarchy who failed to deal with the problem expeditiously and decisively. I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. However, the Church has had unfaithful popes, bishops, priests, and laity throughout time. The Church on earth is composed of sinners, but Christ did promise that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. I recall the words of St. Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have words of eternal life..." (John 6:8).

I am offended by the church's tacit support of George W. Bush's re-election in spite of his war, his support of the death penalty, and his theft from the poor so the rich can have a tax rebate. Wow. I'm not sure where to begin on this sentence. It's somewhat sensational, and I sense that some anger might be clouding your judgment. First of all, I don't see how you can state that Catholic Church tacitly supported President Bush's re-election. The USCCB certainly didn't issue any statements that might favor one party over the other. I'm just guessing here, but I suspect that because some bishops have taken a tough stance regarding pro-abortion politicians receiving Holy Communion, this translates into being pro-Bush. While we can certainly discuss the merits of refusing Holy Communion to pro-abortion politicians, I don't think that the primary reason that these bishops advocated this procedure was to re-election of President Bush.

The last part of the sentence deals purely with politics, and we both know that this is a charged subject for many. I tend to be politically agnostic, so keep that in mind when I state the following (I'm not trying to be mean, but make an observation from a somewhat neutral stance). You know, as well as I do, that the NCCB used to be called the Democratic Party at prayer. Most Catholics were Democrats, because the Democratic Party's focus on social justice aligned well with the Church's teaching. However, the Democratic Party has shifted its focus from social justice to issues that are not in alignment with the Church's teaching, such as abortion and homosexual marriage. I believe that this switch has caused much mental anguish among Catholic and true political liberals. I throw out this point of view because I feel that you are in this category and would be interested in your take on this matter. I hear you complain about the failing of the Republican Party (and there are apt failings), but I rarely hear about the failings of the current Democratic Party.

I have always believed that the only way I could change the church was to remain in active ministry and be the best possible priest I could be. When you say change the church, are you referring to the points above? I am no longer sure this is realistic.

During this time of discernment, I intend to engage in some form of priestly ministry doing whatever tasks lie ahead.

For the past 32 years, many of you have allowed me the opportunity to serve as your priest. I will always remain grateful to God for that privilege. Amen.

Sincerely,
Tony Ercolano

The New York Times

August 11, 2006

What Are the Lieberman Foes For?

By MATT BAI

A few days before (*Senator*) Joe Lieberman, who was very nearly vice president of the United States, was effectively vanquished from his party by Ned Lamont, an affable cable executive who once played a minor role in governing the town of Greenwich, Conn., I happened to talk with Jeffrey Bell. A political consultant who is as cordial a man as you will find in Washington, Bell isn't as famous as some of his fellow Republicans, but he owns a storied place in the history of the conservative movement. A young aide to Ronald Reagan during his 1976 insurgency, Bell went on to challenge a sitting Republican senator, Clifford Case of New Jersey, in 1978. He stunned the political world by winning that race. And though he lost handily to the basketball legend Bill Bradley in the general election, just two years later Reagan ascended to the White House. If anyone was in a position, then, to assess the significance of the Connecticut rebellion, it was Bell, whose small but noteworthy victory over his party's confused establishment presaged a historic political realignment. "It's tempting for us to underrate Dailykos and Moveon.org," Bell told me, referring to the Web pioneers who launched Lamont's improbable campaign. "It's easy for us to say these guys are nuts. But the truth is, they're on the rise, and I think they're very impressive."

There are, in fact, some compelling parallels between this moment in Democratic politics and the one that saw the ideological cleansing of the Republican ranks three decades ago. In "Reagan's Revolution," an inside account of Reagan's failed 1976 campaign, Craig Shirley notes that aides to President Gerald Ford warned that they were "in real danger of being outorganized by a small number of highly motivated right-wing nuts." Those so-called nuts, meanwhile, waged war on the then widely held belief that "if they were to succeed, Republicans had to be 'pragmatic,' they had to 'broaden the base' and they had to 'compromise.' Otherwise, they would always be in the minority." The very same things might be written now, substituting the words "left" and "Democratic" for "right" and "Republican." And like those bygone Republican leaders, establishment Democrats exhibit a surprisingly shallow understanding of the uprising that now threatens to engulf them.

In the aftermath of the primary, Democrats settled on the idea that Lieberman fell because of his support for the Iraq war. This was technically true, in the same way that a 95-year-old man might technically be said to die from pneumonia; there were, to say the least, underlying causes. The war was a galvanizing issue, but Lieberman's loss was just the first major victory for a larger grass-roots movement. While that movement is identified with young, online activists, it is populated largely by exasperated and ideologically disappointed baby boomers. These are the liberals who quietly seethed as Bill Clinton worked with Republicans to reform welfare and pass free-trade agreements. After the "stolen" election of 2000 and the subsequent loss of House and Senate seats in 2004, these Democrats felt duped. If triangulation wasn't a winning strategy, they asked, why were they ever asked to tolerate it in the first place? The Web gave them a place to share their frustrations, and Howard Dean gave them an icon.

Iraq has energized these older lapsed liberals; for a generation that got into politics marching against Vietnam, an antiwar movement is comfortable space. But it was the yearning for a more confrontational brand of opposition on all fronts, for something resembling the black-and-white moral choices of the 1960's, that more broadly animated Lamont's insurgency. Connecticut's primary showdown (which now appears to be headed for a sequel in November) marked an emphatic repudiation not just of the war but also of Clinton's "third way" governing philosophy - a philosophy not unlike the Republican ethos of "compromise" and "pragmatism" that so infuriated Reagan conservatives.

If history were to repeat itself, this outpouring of new liberal passion would portend trouble for the party's establishment candidates in 2008 (especially one possible candidate whose last name happens to be Clinton). But there is at least one crucial difference between insurgents of the 1970's and today. When Bell ran for the Senate in 1978, he was so obsessed with his plan to slash taxes that he went to the extraordinary length of bringing in Arthur Laffer, the renowned conservative economist, to draw his famous Laffer Curve at a news conference in Trenton. By contrast, Lamont's signature proposal as a primary candidate - and the only one anyone cared to hear, really - seemed to be the hard-to-dispute notion that he is not, in fact, Joe Lieberman. He offered platitudes about universal health care and good jobs and about

bringing the troops home but nothing that might define him as anything other than what he is: an acceptable alternative.

Leaders of the Netroots, as the Internet activists have been named, will tell you that big ideas are way overrated in American politics - that you first have to master the business of getting elected before you can worry about how to govern. (Most powerful Democrats in Washington now believe this too.) But even with legions of outraged conservatives at his back, Reagan would not have taken over his party in 1980 - let alone the White House - had he not articulated an affirmative and bold argument against his party's status quo, vowing to devolve the federal government and roll back détente with the Soviets. Passion and fury started the revolution, but it took a leader with larger vision to finish the job.

Matt Bai, a contributing writer who covers national politics for the magazine, is working on a book about Democratic Party politics

A Christian Moral Creed

by Daniel C. Maguire

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We believe in the **Reign of God**, a God who loves us "with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31:3) We believe that we are called to join God in creating a world in which oppression gives way to justice, a world where "justice and mercy kiss," (Ps. 85:10) a world that will be like a "new heaven and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17) a world where "they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, (Isa. 65:25) and we believe it can be done.

We believe that wholehearted biblical **JUSTICE** (Tsedaqah) is the hallmark of the reign of God, a justice that sees the ending of poverty and its evils as the prime moral challenge and mission for Christian peoples. We believe that we are called to be "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18), that making the interests of the poor our interests is the only holiness.

We believe in **PROPHECY** and that we are to be prophets, the social conscience of our society, specialists in the art of cherishing the earth and its people, joining with the prophetic movements of all the worlds' religions.

We believe that **PEACE** can be achieved by justice (Isa. 32:17) not by the horrors of war, a peace in which the hostile barriers between "Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female" are dissolved for we "are all one person" in the sight of God. (Gal. 3:28).

We believe that our God is a "**God of TRUTH**" (Ps. 31:5), that we are missionaries of truth in a world awash with self serving lies where "truth stumbles in the market-place and honesty is kept out of court, so truth is lost to sight." (Isa. 59:14)

We believe that we are "called to **FREEDOM**" (Rom. 5:13) and that freedom is a virtue only when it is married to justice and compassion.

We believe in **HOPE**, that "what we shall be has not yet been disclosed (1 John 3:2), that the plan of the "**GOD OF HOPE**" (Rom. 15:13) for us has not yet been realized. Hope drives us to dream and work for a better world where the cries of the oppressed are no longer heard and where tears are wiped from sorrowing eyes.

We believe that "the whole law is summed up in **LOVE**" (Rom. 13:10) that "God is love" (1 John 4:16) and that loving like God whose "goodness knows no bound," (Matt. 5:48) is our mandate and model. That commits us to loving our enemies and persecutors for "only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest." (Matt. 5:45) We believe that love is the solvent that can end all enmity.

We believe that joy is our destiny, that the appropriate response to the promises of the **REIGN OF GOD** is "sheer **JOY**." (Matt. 13:44) and where joy is not present because of poverty or prejudice, our work is not done.

All of this we believe and to all of this we commit ourselves. Amen

The Ambivalent Church

By Bishop John Shelby Spong

There is something fundamentally flawed about institutional Christianity today. I see it in two distinct places. It was clearly present when I listened to ecclesiastical figures talk about the election of a female bishop to be primate of the Episcopal Church in the USA. The other is found both in the tone and content of the debate on the issue of human sexuality that consumes the energy of the Christian Church today. In this column, I want to examine both of these phenomena with the suggestion that they are deeply related.

A chorus of less than celebratory comments by Anglican Church leaders greeted the election of Katharine Jefferts-Schori to be presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

Seeking to be positive, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, sounded more like the sympathy seeker he seems to have become. "Poor Rowan Williams" is the way people refer to him today across the United Kingdom as he describes how difficult his role is. Instead of being the leader he is capable of being, he has become a chronic whiner about the task of keeping Anglican unity as if that is an appropriate vocation for its titular head. In his statement about America's new primate, he welcomed Bishop Jefferts-Schori to her new responsibilities and promised to be supportive of her ministry but proclaimed that her election would place a strain on the bonds of Anglican unity. I presume that he thinks the continued oppression of women throughout the Communion would somehow strengthen the bonds of Anglican unity. Surely, any student of history will tell you that as new consciousness and values emerge, those who have built power bases on an old consciousness and dying values will be threatened and will seek to defeat the new ideas. History does not move backwards and once any prejudice is debated publicly, it has already begun to die. There are no exceptions to this rule in history.

The Episcopal Bishop of Fort Worth, Texas, Jack Iker, greeted Bishop Jefferts-Schori's election as primate by immediately appealing to the Archbishop of Canterbury for protection of his institutionalized sexism. There were two things pathetically pitiful about this appeal. First, the Archbishop of Canterbury has no authority whatsoever over the American Episcopal Church. Second, the ordination of women has been in effect canonically in the American Church for 30 years. Forty percent of the Episcopal clergy are now women, sixty percent of our theological students are women, and 15 of our bishops are women. All of those steps were achieved according to the canons that bind the membership of this church and especially its bishops. There is no authority beyond that of the national governing body of any province of the Anglican Communion. This part of the Christian Church is now and always has been a confederation of national bodies with no central authority. The once-every-ten-years gathering of Anglican bishops of the world is for consultation only, with the power to speak to the churches but never for the churches. Jack Iker knew all of these things when he was ordained priest and promised to conform "to the discipline of this church." He accepted election to the Episcopal office in a church that already had both women priests and women bishops. I helped him be confirmed in his Episcopal post both with my vote and with my public support among progressive bishops. He needed every vote he could get and squeezed in by the narrowest of margins. I supported his election because I treasure the catholic broadness of my church. We are and must be broad enough to welcome and include the Jack Ikers of the world. Now he struggles to narrow the boundaries of this church that

had to be stretched to include him, to the place where only he and his few acolytes are members. It is strange logic but religion produces quite irrational manifestations from time to time. Now, instead of facing reality, he wants someone to protect him from having to adjust to reality, but adjust he must. If he cannot do so, he should vacate his office instead of begging for special treatment.

He is joined in this sad chorus made up of a handful of malcontents, who have cultivated negativity for some years now. They have not won on any issue before this church in the last century, from desegregation, to prayer book revision, to women priests, to women bishops, to inclusion of gay and lesbian people. They portray themselves as God's sole supporters in a world going to hell. They remind me of the lament of Elijah in the book of Kings where the prophet bemoaned the fact that he alone was faithful to God. That story says that the Lord opened his eyes to see thousands who "had not bowed the knee to Baal." It is a peculiar form of mental illness to think that everyone other than you is wrong. The Church has every responsibility to love those that the world has left behind. They are hurting people, fragile people, living in pain. However, the Church has no responsibility to accommodate them, to promise them that their dying point of view and their dated prejudices will be respected. They have no reason to expect that either the Church or the world will slow down so that they can catch up. People complained that the unity of the Church was violated when black people demanded access and equality. Would this present group of unity seekers want the Church to accommodate racism by trying to keep the slaveholders happy? Of course not! In a similar manner, unity is not served by tolerating the sin of patriarchy or the sin of homophobia.

I remember well the rhetoric of the era when race dominated the church's debate. In 1948, when I dared to suggest that all Episcopal young people, black and white, should be invited to the Youth Convention of the Diocese, my bishop, Edwin Anderson Penick, said to me: "Jack, the people of the Church in North Carolina are not ready for integration." Which people were not ready, I wondered? The black people were quite ready. The younger clergy, whose consciences had been raised to the evil of segregation, were quite ready. The people who were not ready were the bigoted ones who were unprepared not just to give up but even to face their prejudice. "The Church," in the name of some bizarre definition of unity, coddled them by a continued rejection of people of color and their allies until that stance became absurd.

Peter Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, probably the most backward and fundamentalist Diocese in the entire Anglican Communion, says that the battle over homosexuality is a battle about "the authenticity and authority of Scripture." That is absolute balderdash! It is about the misuse of scripture in the cause of continued ignorance! For centuries the Bible was quoted on the wrong side of every public issue. It was quoted to oppose the Magna Carta, to condemn Galileo, to discriminate against Jews, to justify war, to uphold slavery and segregation, to oppress women and to persecute homosexuals. The Bible lost every one of those battles. Peter Jensen is so afraid of reality that, more than anyone I know; he tries to control access to truth in his archdiocese. He made his brother the Dean of the Cathedral in Sydney, appointed his son to the faculty of Moore Theological Seminary in Sydney and employed his wife on the staff of the

Archdiocese of Sydney. For a priest to serve in that diocese, he (no she's are allowed) must be a Moore Seminary graduate. For a professor to teach at Moore Seminary, he must be a Moore graduate. Moore Theological Seminary would make Bob Jones University look moderate! Can truth ever be engaged by those who believe they possess it and are afraid to listen to anyone else? I view that as hysteria, not confidence. Archbishop Jensen does not know the difference between freedom and bondage, between power and truth, between himself and God. Why any institution, with leaders like these, would appeal to anyone other than frightened, insecure people who hide from reality, simply escapes my imagination.

The second question is what is the basis of the Church's claim to possess some expertise on the issues of human sexuality? This is the same group that said: "Celibacy is the pathway to holiness." It is far more often the pathway to sexual guilt and to the sexual violation of the weak and vulnerable. This is the institution that said the ideal woman is a "virgin mother," reducing all women to a sense of inadequacy. They defined virtue in women as being a "permanent virgin." I suppose that made sense to the celibate males who did the defining, but it makes sense to no one else. This is the institution that tells us that birth control is evil, that condoms used to stop AIDS even among married people is sinful, that women are defective males and that homosexuals are morally depraved or mentally ill. Is that a track record to inspire confidence? This is the institution that wants to root out homosexuals from studying for the priesthood, but is not about to purge gay men from the ordained ranks, where they now serve at the highest levels and in numbers that are breathtakingly large but real.

The debate on sexuality inside institutional Christianity is revelatory of the fact that this institution parted company with reality years ago. It is on the losing side of this battle. It is doing the dance of the dying, exhibiting the final shake of rigor mortis.

What hope do we have for the future of the Church? My hope is in an increasing number of people in groups around the world who want to be Christians without closing their minds to new truth. They want to embrace the real world, not some fantasyland of make believe. They are small cells watching the Church they love from within as it flails away in the losing battle of trying to suppress every controversy that emerges when new truth demands attention. They are ready for a new day. That new day is coming no matter how desperately the Vatican, Canterbury, Church Synods and Councils try to hold it back. I welcome it.

From Daniel C. Maguire

(For the benefit of non-theologian readers, I will offer, in brackets, explanations of some of the Latin and technical terms of theology. [I did not offer explanations in my original letters to the bishops.]

To the Catholic Bishops:

Given the great divide that exists in the contemporary Church between bishops and theologians, I think that communication, even if it leads to little agreement, is a human good.

In this spirit, I am enclosing short pamphlets on two topics on which hierarchical teaching has become impaled, abortion and same-sex marriage, to the neglect of the needs of the increasing militarism of our nation, our neglect of the poor of the world, racism, sexism, and the wrecking of the earth's ecology through greed.

Cardinal Mahoney's recent prophetic intervention on the human rights of immigrants shows that the authority of Catholic bishops is welcomed and respected when they speak out courageously on basic Gospel values. There are other moral issues on which *auctores scinduntur*. [Catholic theologians are divided on these issues.] On those issues, if you do not wish to use the hallowed Catholic expression *consulas auctoribus probatis*, [check with established theologians] you could well use the model of teaching that the American Catholic bishops used on the life/death issue of the Vietnam War in November 1966:

We realize that citizens of all faiths and of differing political loyalties honestly differ among themselves over the moral issue involved in this tragic conflict. While we do not claim to be able to resolve these issues authoritatively, in the light of the facts as they are known to us, it is reasonable to argue.

Since there is no infallibly defined position on either abortion or same-sex unions, a similar modesty would enhance episcopal teaching. The Second Vatican Council wisely said: Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however, complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission (*The Church in the Modern World*, n. 43). It should cause no wonder that the laity do not take it as obvious that celibate bishops are necessarily more reliable experts on sexual and reproductive issues than the laity, anointed as [the laity] are by the holy One (*Constitution on the Church*, n. 12) and experienced as they are in their grace-filled lives.

This modesty would acknowledge, with the previous code of Canon Law, that the bishops, whether teaching individually or gathered in particular councils, are not endowed with infallibility (Canon 1326). The canon asserts that bishops are *veri doctores seu magistri*. [the bishops are teachers] That teaching ministry would best be conducted by recognizing that modesty is called for when one teaches in areas where infallibility is not an issue, where the teachers have no privileged expertise, and where good people from all faiths reasonably disagree.

Cardinal Dulles made a crucial theological point, deserving close attention at this time. Avery Dulles, S.J., in his Presidential address to The Catholic Theological Society of America said that the Second Vatican Council implicitly taught the legitimacy and even the value of dissent (Presidential Address: The Theologian and the Magisterium,

Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 31 (1976).

The council, says Dulles, conceded that the ordinary magisterium of the Roman Pontiff had fallen into error, and had unjustly harmed the careers of loyal and able theologians. He mentions John Courtney Murray, Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac, and Yves Congar. Dulles says that certain teachings of the hierarchy seem to evade in a calculated way the findings of modern scholarship. They are drawn up without broad consultation with the theological community. Instead, a few carefully selected theologians are asked to defend a pre-established position. Dulles aligns himself with those theologians who do not limit the term magisterium to the hierarchy. He speaks of two magisteria that of the pastors and that of the theologians. These two magisteria are complementary and mutually corrective. (He neglected the third magisterium, the *sensus fidelium*, the experience-fed and graced wisdom of the faithful.) The theological magisterium may critique the hierarchical magisterium. Dulles concludes: we shall insist on the right, where we think it important for the good of the Church, to urge positions at variance with those that are presently official...[i.e. taught by the hierarchy]. These are not the words of some fringe theologian; these are the words of a theologian who is now a cardinal of the Catholic Church and nothing in his subsequent writings refutes these basic and broadly accepted assertions.

On the two subjects of these little pamphlets, we have produced an Oxford University press book (*Sacred Rights*, 2003) on the debated issue of abortion in world religions and I would be pleased to send you a copy if you were interested in further discussion. We will also produce two books, now with publishers, on the sin of heterosexism. These books contain chapters from distinguished scholars in Judaism, Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Sincerely,

Daniel C. Maguire

The Response by Archbishop Timothy Dolan

Dear Professor Maguire,

As the bishop of the archdiocese where you reside, I am obliged to reply to your circular form-letter, sent to the bishops of the country on June 19, 2006.

The opinions expressed in the two pamphlets enclosed in that correspondence are totally at odds with clear Church teaching. Sacred Scripture, the Magisterium, and Natural Law are consistent in opposition to abortion and so-called same-sex marriage.

You speak of your duty to dissent. Well, at least call it such. To claim that support for abortion and same-sex marriage is consonant with Catholic moral teaching is preposterous and disingenuous.

I, too, have a duty: to teach what the Church clearly believes. Your opinion on these two matters is contrary to the faith and morals of the Church.

Faithfully in Christ,

(Signed)

Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan
Archbishop of Milwaukee

ARCC spot LIGHT

(commentaries on current issues in the Church provided by the ARCC Publications Committee, R. Schutzius, Ed.)

God Does Not Have Faith!

God IS, so there is no need for faith. Humans need faith because we do not have certitude. If you meet one who has certitude - run. It is either God, or a very stupid person. Humans have a need for certitude. We strive for it and come very close about some things. I am certain that the sun will rise tomorrow, but then I am not certain that I will be around to see it. Always, there is that uncertainty with us humans.

Then there is the so-called "certitude of faith" that people claim and proclaim. At first this might appear to be an oxymoron, like a square circle. But by hedging a bit one might claim that "I am pretty certain that I have faith," or "I am certain about my faith." But this is more like a wish than certitude which demands observable proof. Mysteries are not subject to proof. It is much like saying "I know that space is up there and I have faith in what scientist say about it."

Certitude is so comforting. It is much like the warm blanket of your childhood. Jesus advises us to accept the kingdom with the faith of a child. But then Paul says when you grow to adulthood you can no longer keep the faith of a child, but must have the faith of an adult. Like it or not, doubt is always the test of mature faith. A thinking adult rarely has great faith without first having great doubts. The astute scripture scholar Fr. John McKenzie wrote, "It is true that the price of maturation is that the simple joys of happiness of childhood must be renounced. They are renounced because maturity offers far deeper joys and happiness; and the adult who looks back with genuine longing on his or her childhood is in serious trouble."

The Church teaches its dogma with infallible certitude. Every church, every religion, must do that. Otherwise they could not touch the human longing we have to join with the divine certitude of God. But alas, they all must deal with the inability of humans to achieve certitude and thus they all require faith. Hence it is that a mature faith involves a mature conscience which must sit in judgment over what constitutes the truths of faith without the benefit of certitude. Someday when united with God we will have it. But in the meantime, uncertainty is the undeniable gift that God gives to every person so that there is always room for doubt and hence growth in wisdom, knowledge, and faith.

Think about it! Would you have it any other way? Jesus is our model and like him, we have room to grow in wisdom and knowledge, and while sharing our human uncertainty (Matt 27:46), Jesus demonstrated his human faith.

Thank you for your support. Please encourage your friends to join the ASSOCIATION FOR THE RIGHTS OF CATHOLICS IN THE CHURCH at <http://arccsites.org>

We welcome your comments. rschutz1@prodigy.net.

Excerpts from an article by Michael McCarthy in *The Tablet*, March 25, 2006

The Church never used to get caught out by history. The reason is obvious: for much of its existence the Church has itself been at the heart of the historical process in its Eurasian homeland. From the time Constantine adopted Christianity in the 4th century, it was the defining institution of the continent.

Even when Martin Luther split the Church asunder in 1517 its centrality remained. And even after the bloody period of Christian religious wars officially came to an end with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the Church was still an essential part of how Europe saw itself for another century and a half.

Since then there have been times when the Church seemed out of step. From the French Revolution to the emergence of socialism and its codification by Marx, the Church stood its ground against a changing world. Sometimes the Church caught up; it finally came to terms with social questions with *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII in 1891. But it was gravely embarrassed and floundered in its response to the emergence of fascism in Europe in the Twenties and Thirties.

Now history is taking another, even more peculiar, turn and the Church appears to have not the faintest notion of it. And if it does get caught out this time, the damage to its relevance will be profound. In the past six months three books have been published by distinguished authors that share a common, momentous concern: the possible end of our civilization.

Just 25 years ago this would have seemed mere fantasy, science fiction, even. But these books are perfectly serious, based on rational calculation: *Collapse* by Jared Diamond; *Plan B* by Lester Brown; *The Revenge of Gaia* by James Lovelock.

Their appearance marks a significant historical moment. The underlying theme of all three is the same: the now-monstrous scale of the human enterprise, in terms of the earth's ability to accommodate it. Increasingly, it cannot. The facts are by no means widely appreciated but they are available, and they are remarkable.

We are already using half of the planet's photosynthetic capacity (its ability to convert sunlight into plant material); by the midcentury we will be using most of it. More than half the world's original area of forests has been converted by us to other uses, and the amount is rapidly increasing.

Most of the world's fish stocks have now collapsed because of our depredations, or are in steep decline. Most of the world's fresh water in rivers and lakes is already being used by us for irrigation, industry or people's homes.

Most of all, we are pumping into the atmosphere at a rapidly rising rate enormous volumes of waste gases, principally carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil, resulting in an increased retention of the sun's heat; and the temperature rises this global warming is bringing about threaten (among much else) to make agriculture unviable in much of the world.

The three books each contend, in a complementary way, that this ever-growing human assault on the Earth's natural systems cannot be sustained for much longer, and is likely to produce disaster on a global scale in the coming century.

...

I wrote here two years ago about the Church and its failure to take on board environmental concerns, suggesting a number of reasons: a principal one was that there was a deep, virtually unshakable tradition in the Church itself that the world was put there for our use, with a corresponding lack in centuries of Catholic thought, of much reverence for the planet as having its own independent worth. Although Pope John Paul II made numerous environmental statements, I suggested that they were essentially reactive to circumstances, and that the environment was not for the Church a core issue. Benedict XVI has certainly taken no steps to alter this position.

When the environment was merely a quality-of-life issue the Church could get away with this. It was a disappointment, but it did not irretrievably damage the Church's relevance and moral authority. But as the environment becomes a life-or-death issue for the world, the Church is going to find itself overtaken by the historical process, helpless and uncomprehending, just as it was by fascism.

How can the Church hope to help its children cope with the strange, terrible crisis of the 21st century if it cannot see it coming? How can it hope to advise those who wish to take the urgent steps that might still stave off the worst? What excuse will it give for its failure, for being caught out by history for a third and fatal time?