

LESS POPE, MORE JESUS **CALL TO ACTION CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER 2012**

Let us imagine the scene in St Peter's on 8 September 1964. It is the opening of the third session of Vatican II, and there is a new pope, Paul VI, on his throne in the front. Imagine the bishops and cardinals and monsignori filing in, in all their red and purple regalia and taking their seats, over 3000 of them. Among them there are 30 men in business suits, so-called laymen - and a small group of women. (Some accounts say fifteen, others twenty-three.) Yes, women! The religious women are dressed in long black habits and veils; the others are laywomen, like Dorothy Day, Barbara Ward and Patricia Crowley of Chicago, who was on the commission on birth control. It had been Cardinal Suenens who, at the end of the second session of the council, had had the courage to get up and say: "Why are we even discussing the reality of the church when half of the church is not represented here?" His explosive words aroused strong opposition, especially among the Italian bishops, we are told, but the Dominican Yves Congar and the South African bishop, Denis Hurley, were strong supporters of having women present. The women were invited to the Council as auditors and were told that their presence was "symbolical". These women were ready for the Council. They were well-read, had travelled widely and all of them were either presidents of international organisations or heads of their Religious Congregations. They have been called the "mothers of Vatican II". In contrast to the more liberal bishops and most of the laymen, some of the Italian bishops never acknowledged the women's presence and never spoke to any of them. Some of the bishops even covered their eyes! And there was strict apartheid between the men and the women: the women were even allocated their own coffee-shop and dining-room! The women at the Council, in the book by Carmel McEnroy, were later described as "guests in their own house".

During the plenary sessions of the Council, these "mothers" were not allowed to speak, but Father Bernard Häring, nicknamed "Häring the daring" insisted that the women be invited to the sub-commissions, the groups who wrote the drafts of the Council documents. Here the women made some very significant contributions and interventions and had particular influence on *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Decree on the Laity* and on the Commission on Birth Control. A Spanish woman, Luz Marie, who was on the subcommission of *Gaudium et Spes*, played a notable part in changing the attitude of many bishops. The majority of bishops, we are told, viewed sex as a result of concupiscence and sin, not as an act of love. Luz Marie herself had fourteen children, all born in love, she said and she addressed the bishops in the subcommission: "I tell you, when your mothers conceived you, it was also an act of love". When her Spanish words were translated, the bishops who were present first looked wide-eyed and then turned red - and then they laughed. One of them responded: We never thought of that: you have spoken the truth."

It was because of the presence of the women in this subcommission that there is the statement in § 29, that "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent." The same imperative is found in *Lumen Gentium* § 32, establishing the equality and dignity of all human beings, based on Galatians 3, 28, that we know so well: "Hence there is in Christ no inequality ... there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is

neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

It is remarkable to read what Gladys Parentelli, who was 32 years old at the time, wrote about her experience of the Council. It sums up a great deal of what we are now, fifty years later, demanding and working for. Gladys wrote: “I hoped that Vatican II would orientate itself towards an opening to the world, that the church would open itself to the signs of the times, that it would go along with the more active and progressive Christians, that it would give a greater participation to the laity in all the structures of the church, that women would be considered members with full rights in the church, that the hierarchy would be less authoritarian, that the church would have an organizational charter that was more democratic and less hierarchical. On the contrary, however, the current Roman Curia is the most authoritarian, dogmatic, inhuman and hard-hearted that the church has had in this century.”

One of the women at the Council was Sr Mary Luke Tobin. She was a Loretto Sister who was at the time president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women, later called LCWR. (The present leaders of LCWR are following wonderfully in Luke Tobin’s footsteps!) I was privileged to meet St Mary Luke shortly before she died and was very impressed by her and was deeply heartened by her support of us women in RCWP.

Some of the theologians at the Council acknowledged how the presence of the women had changed their understanding of the role of women in the church. Among these were Karl Rahner, Gregory Baum and Abbot Butler from England.

Although they were so few, the women were a formidable presence at the Council. The greatest legacy they left us was a much greater awareness of the deep-seated patriarchy that had taken root in the church over many generations. This new consciousness, among women as well as men, led to the emergence of a new branch of inductive academic theology: Feminist Theology. Mary Daly’s book, *The Church and the Second Sex* was released in 1967, soon after the Council. Since then many feminist theologians have emerged and greatly altered the image and understanding, not only of women and of men, but indeed of God. Among the best of the feminist theologians is Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, who reminds us that feminist theology is not only for women but for everyone: it is a gender-inclusive way of understanding the church and society as a whole. (*Her talk at Conference in Frankfurt, Oct. 2012*).

Developments in the last fifty years

In this year as we celebrate fifty years since Vatican II, we look back on the last half-century and realize that we, as church, are in a very different place than we were fifty years ago. A prophetic church is emerging, a church in which the people speak truth to power, a church in which the people are resisting the backward pull which Benedict XVI calls restorationism. Schillebeeckx, the great Dutch Dominican theologian, believed that the present pope and the previous one have been in schism (Fox, 2011 p 227) by ignoring the rulings of Vatican II and taking the church backwards. A General Council is, after all, the highest authority in the church.

Very clearly, the emphasis now is on “less pope, more Jesus”. I got this expression from Hans Küng, whose latest book: *Ist die Kirche noch zu retten? (Can the church still be saved?)* published in 2011, is a profound analysis of what is wrong in the

church and what can be done about it. In that book Küng wrote that the church is seriously, possibly terminally ill and the malady of the church, he says, goes far beyond the recent sex abuse scandals. At the heart of the problem, says Küng, are:

- the church's resistance to reform,
- its secrecy,
- its lack of transparency, and
- its misogyny.

This year, however, Küng's prognosis is much less hopeful. He is now becoming even more drastic in his criticism of church authority and is calling for a "revolution from below to unseat the pope and force reform at the Vatican... The people and the priests need to confront the Catholic hierarchy, which", says, Küng, "is corrupt, lacking in credibility and apathetic to the real concerns of the church's members ... The Vatican makes a point of crushing any form of clerical dissent. The rules for choosing bishops are so rigid that as soon as candidates emerge who, say, stand up for the pill or for the ordination of women, they are struck off the list. The result is a church of yes-men who unquestioningly toe the line". (Article from *The Guardian*, 5 Oct 2012).

It is a clear sign of the times that we can no longer simply talk about "the church" as a unit. We constantly need to distinguish, these days, between the institutional, hierarchical church, on the one hand, and the church of the people (i.e. the baptized) on the other, because the two are moving in opposite directions.

The well-known woman dissident from Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, has said: It is not power that corrupts; it is the fear of losing power. Power is never handed over – it is "unseated" (to use Küng's word) by a revolution from below.

Three weeks ago I was at a Congress of liberal Catholic groups in Frankfurt, very similar to this one. The theme of that conference was: Signs of the Times: Hope and Resistance and there was plenty of both in evidence. For me, the most important thing that Hans Küng said in his keynote presentation was this: **the main need today is to return to the Gospel, to the way Jesus lived and taught us.** (Less pope, more Jesus!) What the people in the church want is to live the inclusivity and compassion of Jesus and to move away from the clericalism, the excommunications, the silencing, the suspensions, the banning from communion and the condemnation of books such as those by Elizabeth Johnson and Margaret Farley. (However, *The Search for the Living God* and *Just Love* are practically sold out! Just as Bishop William Morris of Australia now has more invitations to speak all over the country than he ever had before he was suspended by Benedict XVI for suggesting that the matter of women's ordination should be considered.) Of course, we have been forbidden, since *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* even to discuss the topic of women's ordination. Bishop Morris should have known better! Isn't it incredible that a pope could actually forbid us to discuss something! Freedom of speech is a basic human right.

Resistance is coming from every side, often in the least expected places.

"The parish church of Amras, Austria, near Innsbruck in Tyrol, was chock-a-block full for the First Communion Mass on April 22nd. Shortly before Communion, the parish priest announced that only Catholics who were in a state of grace should come forward to communion. Catholics who are divorced and remarried and those who do

not attend mass every week were not worthy to receive the Eucharist, he said. When communion time came, not a single adult came forward. The entire congregation demonstratively remained seated. Only the children received communion.”

(ncronline.org)

The situation described here is symbolic of the resistance taking place in the church today. We need only think of the outcry there has been about the sex-abuse scandals and their cover-up: the intrigues reported in *Vatileaks* and the financial revelations in *Moneyval*, available on the internet. The press has been full of the protests everywhere in the United States against the Vatican inquisition of LCWR, the demands for Nunjustice and the widespread support for Sr Simone Campbell's *Network* and the Nuns on the Bus. There is the growing support for Fr Roy Bourgeois and indeed for all of us Roman Catholic Women Priests - and the number of people joining the communities served by our women priests is growing steadily. And there is the resistance to the recent translation of the liturgy, which is another throwback to an outdated theology. The people are being guided by their own consciences - the *sensus fidelium* is becoming ever stronger and we no longer internalize the hierarchical, patriarchal oppression that has characterized the institutional church for centuries.

The hierarchical church needs to move from *power over* to *power with*. Diarmuid O'Murchu has coined the phrase: "The Companionship of Empowerment". This is his phrase for the "kingdom of God", the "reign of God". Jesus was a deconstructionist, says O'Murchu (p.10): he set out to name, unmask and dethrone all structures of patriarchal power. And we in our time are called to do the same: deconstruct the patriarchal power structures that oppress us all and to bring the vision of Jesus back to the church. This is prophetic witness. Walter Brueggemann describes prophetic witness as follows: *The primary task of prophetic ministry is to criticize in order to energize.* (O'Murchu, p.6.)

Robert Blair Kaiser, in a recent edition of NCR, puts it well: "Rather than whine over what Daddy won't let us do" he says, "we can put the Council into play ourselves... Vatican II has given us a new view of ourselves. It has made us more free, more human and more at the service of a world that Jesus loved. It has given us a new view of the church. It's our church, not the pope's church or the bishops' church, or a priests' church". (Robert Blair Kaiser: Vatican II has already made us free, NCR Aug. 7th, 2012)

It is a great sign of hope that the priests no longer allow themselves to be intimidated into silent abjection. They are changing and are discovering that together they are strong - and they are finding enthusiastic support from the people. It started in Austria, as you know, where more than 500 priests under the leadership of Fr Helmut Schüller, have issued their *Call to Disobedience*. The same is happening in Switzerland, in Ireland, in many parts of Germany, in Belgium and now also in parts of the USA. Hundreds of so-called "dissident" priests are standing together to take a stand against hierarchical oppression and for a different kind of church. Their demands include allowing divorced and remarried people to receive communion, allowing lay people to lead services in the church and the ordination of women. These demands have been flatly refused by the Vatican but neither the priests nor their supporters are backing down.

What was clear to me at the Frankfurt Conference and is equally clear at this one, is that while we need to retrieve much of Vatican II that was very valuable and important, we have already moved far beyond Vatican II in some important ways. Let me highlight four of them:

1. We have a much broader understanding of Church as the “People of God”.

At Vatican II this was a huge paradigm shift when the official church declared that the church is not the hierarchy. This had been the ecclesiology of Vatican I and earlier. No, the church is the people - and in *Lumen Gentium* the chapter on ‘The People of God’ was placed before the chapter on the hierarchy. The new realization, however, is twofold:

- a) What we are experiencing is the end of the male, clericalist, hierarchical system in our church. We are building a democratic church that respects the human rights of women and men, including freedom of conscience and freedom of speech.
- b) We are not the only “people of God” and it is offensive to people of other Christian churches and other religions, such as the Protestants, the Jewish people and the Muslims, to claim this for ourselves exclusively, for they too are the ‘people of God’. We do not accept Benedict XVI’s public statements which have been so hurtful to, and so antagonized the mainline Protestant churches, the Jewish people and the Muslims.

2. A new understanding of priesthood as well as new forms of priestly ministry:

Since the major problem in our church is clericalism and hierarchy, what we desperately need is a new theology of priesthood and new forms of priestly ministry. Both of these need to fit into the emerging picture of who we are as church. One of the most insidious teachings about priestly ordination - and I know it is taught in the seminaries - is that there is a so-called “ontological change” that comes about when the Sacrament of Order is conferred. This, so they say, makes the ordained person superior to those who are merely baptized and gives them the right to stand *in persona Christi*, so that they henceforth represent Christ in a way that no-one else can. It also gives them automatic admission to the “Old Boys’ Club” so that, now that they rank among the clerics, they have authority over the rest of us. (Of course, let me hasten to add, this ontological change takes place only in the men, since, I’ve been told, ordination does not “take” in a woman!)

This dreadful teaching is behind the whole clericalist, hierarchical system and it must go. I need to add that the good male priests I know, and there are many whom we all know and deeply respect, would have no truck with any such arrant nonsense. They are humble people who want to serve, not to be served.

New forms of priestly ministry are emerging. Bishop Fritz Lobinger of South Africa proposes ordaining the community’s natural leaders. Most of these are married people with families and jobs, which they would keep after ordination, so the person who works in the post office, the bus driver or the local school teacher could be priests in the community. This would radically change the image of a priest.. Lobinger also proposes having different kinds of priests: those with full theological training and those with less, and there could be full-time and part-time priests. He also suggests that these community priests would be ordained for a specific community only. (p.167) It sounds refreshingly normal.

3. Women: their place in the church:

Both in society and in the church, we have come a long way in this regard in the past fifty years. Anthony Padovano describes the situation in society well: “The role of women has been so radically altered that language has changed to recognize inclusivity and nations freely elect female leaders. Women are ordained in Christian churches and in Jewish congregations. The universities, the professions, the military and corporations admit women and are led by women to an extent one no one would have predicted fifty years ago. (Corpus Reports, Nov-Dec 2012, p.4). This is true of the Western world. However, in countries like Pakistan, where a young girl was shot for calling for equal education for boys and girls, and in some churches, including the Catholic church, women are still excluded from full human rights. This is paralleled by the way the hierarchical church still insists on excluding women from priestly ministry and from having any official voice in church affairs, but the people of the church are claiming the full inclusion of women in all aspects of church life and ministry. In fact, what is happening now among the people is a paradigm-shift with regard to the feminine, says Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza. (Talk in Frankfurt at Congress of Reform Groups, Hoffnung und Widerstand, 18 – 21 Oct. 2012) The people are beginning to understand that feminism is not an addition to the church but an essential part of it. WE are church – it is not an object - we, women and men together, in full and equal human dignity, are the church. Women’s rights are finally being seen as human rights.

A broad understanding of feminism has led to a major change in language about God. We all know that when God is spoken of only in male terms, the fact that women are created equally with men in God’s image is forgotten. As Sandra Schneiders has said: “God is not two men and a bird!.” (*Article in US Catholic, May 1990*).

The RCWP model of ministry:

In the paradigm-shift of our times, we need a new model of ministry that fits the emerging new model of church. The community to which I belong, Roman Catholic Womenpriests, (RCWP), has a different model of ministry. We are ordained in apostolic succession, because this is the only form of ordination used for the men and by doing this, we claim equality for our ordained women with the male priests. But we do not follow the clericalist model . The question I am most frequently asked is: Patricia, how can you join the ranks of the clerics, become part of the hierarchical, clericalist system? The point is that we don’t. We have a different model of priesthood and we want to show that a different, non-clericalist model is not only possible, but necessary - and we believe it is much more according to the mind of Jesus, whose model of ministry included footwashing, teaching, healing and seeing that people were fed.

Our model is the servant-leadership model. Our structures are non-hierarchical, democratic and non authoritarian, (“non-matriarchal”, if you will!) We are anti-clericalist and do everything possible not to have that “unbridgeable gap” between the ordained and the laity. The communities served by our priests in fact organize themselves and ministries are shared. And in order to be non-hierarchical, we have divided ourselves into Regions, not dioceses - and the bishop, although there is a woman bishop in each RCWP Region, is not the “boss” of the Region. Instead, there is an elected Administrator who administers the Region. The bishop’s ministry is mostly pastoral and unitive. When matters concerning the Region need to be

decided, this is done by vote and the woman bishop has only one vote. Each RCWP region has a leadership team consisting of the Administrator, the bishop and the Program Coordinator, together with others who may be co-opted.

In other ways, too, we are creating a forward-looking model of ministry. Most of our women priests and -bishops are married, since we believe there is no intrinsic link between priesthood and celibacy. Our women priests are self-supporting, like most other people. And although we use the Roman Rite of Ordination, we omit not only the promise of celibacy but also the promise of obedience to the bishop. Instead we promise to try to live in what we call prophetic obedience, i.e. we strive to follow where we believe the Spirit is calling us, both individually and as a community. We are also inclusive, not only in language but in membership: we have some male priests among us, although our priority is the ordination of women, but we do not want to exclude men; we also have gays and lesbians among us and in the communities to whom we minister. We have an open table at communion: all are welcome at the table. We are also ecumenically inclusive, welcoming members of other churches to our liturgies and in our communities.

These (or similar) structures can be found in almost all the reform groups that are coming into being in the church today. Some of these groups celebrate Eucharist as a community without an ordained priest. The priesthood of the baptized is being more and more recognized. And there are different forms of laying-on of hands in ordination: sometimes it is by the community rather than the bishop. The Vatican, however, while it takes no notice whatever of these "community" ordinations, seems forced to sit up and take notice of our RCWP ordinations. It is our claim to apostolic succession that really seems to cause weeping and gnashing of teeth among the hierarchy, who, for this reason, are unable to ignore us and keep excommunicating, not only us, but (in some dioceses) even our supporters.

We all need to respect different ways of moving towards a renewal of ministry in the church. In the future, I suspect, the main issue will not be ordination as such, but ministry. What is emerging is a greater recognition of different ministries within the community, all of which we do as baptized persons "*in persona Christi*"

4. The Catacomb Pact

This seems to have been the best-kept secret of Vatican II but is becoming ever more widely known and accepted as part of the new kind of church we want to be. We were privileged, at the recent Frankfurt Conference, to have present among us Bishop Luigi Bettazzi, who is now 90 years old and who was one of the bishops who signed the Catacomb pact. His personal witness about this, and the simplicity and love that flowed from him, was very moving.

On November 16, 1965, close to the end of Vatican II a group of 43 Conciliar bishops met at the Catacomb of St Domitilla to sign a pact intended to do away with the wealth, pomp and luxury among the hierarchy. It was a pact to live a life of simplicity and poverty according to the Gospel and to renounce riches and a lifestyle that only the rich can afford. This applies especially to housing, vestments and insignia. The Catacomb Pact bishops pledged financial accountability, promising to hand over the financial and material administration of their dioceses to competent laypeople, so that they could be pastors and apostles rather than administrators. They also renounced titles like Your Eminence, Your Excellency, Monsignor (in fact, Bettazzi told us that

they called themselves “Piccoli Monsignori”.) They pledged to avoid, as far as possible, privilege, priority and expecting the best seats and preferential treatment. (We recall that Jesus had some thing to say along those lines in Luke 14,8.) They promised to have a heart for the poor and to promote social works based on justice and charity to assist all, not just Catholics, who are in need. The Catacomb Pact was not one of the official documents of Vatican II. The 43 bishops who signed it were mostly from Latin America or they were bishops who followed the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld. Later they passed the Catacomb Pact around to other bishops and about 500 more signed it. At the Frankfurt Congress, we asked Bishop Bettazzi why it had not been included among the official documents of Vatican II. He said: “Because it would never have been passed”. The 43 original bishops who had signed the pact, kept in touch with one another and had annual meetings. Bettazzi is almost the last one still alive. It was an honour to meet him. I think Jesus would have signed the Catacomb Pact.

The people in the church today are not impressed by titles such as “Your Holiness”, nor by the cult of the person of the pope, nor by priceless vestments or red Prada shoes. What we want in our leaders is the simplicity and compassion of Jesus, as expressed in the Catacomb Pact.

A church/world with an alternative to capitalism?

There was, at the *Hope and Resistance* Congress in Frankfurt, a keynote address by Susan George on capitalism as one of the great problems and challenges of our time with the call to us, as church in our present global society, to find different ways of managing and sharing money, financial solutions that will not reward those who are guilty and punish the victims. The Catacomb Pact would very much support this.

Vatican III?

There is a lot of talk today about a possible Vatican III. On the other hand, many are proposing something quite different to the kind of Council that was Vatican II.

I believe that the next General Council will be a Council of the People, of the Baptized. Priests and bishops will be represented but only proportionately. The curia, as many have said, should be abolished. This would include the rank of cardinal. Rather than a Vatican III, consisting mainly of the pope and the bishops, we need a very different gathering: a General Council - a Synod - of the People. And it should not be in the Vatican, not even in Europe, but in Sao Paulo or Mexico City, or Manila or Lagos or Bangladesh, or perhaps New York or San Francisco or Chicago or Toronto. It would consist of representatives of the people from every country in the world.

But first, let us work much more on the local and national level, allowing for diversity and finding ways, with today’s technology, to communicate across national and cultural boundaries until we are ready for a large global council of the people

We want less pope, more Jesus;
Less Canon Law, more living the Beatitudes,
Less excommunication, more compassion,
Less secrecy, more transparency,
Less pomp and luxury, more concern for the poor,
Less exclusion, more welcoming at the table,

Less power-over, more empowerment,
Less allegiance to the pope, more obedience to the Spirit,
Less lording it over us, more servant-leadership.

Let us continue to build this emerging church as we gather in conferences such as this one at CALL TO ACTION to change what must be changed, so that we have less and less pope in our church and more and more Jesus.

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CALL TO ACTION, Louisville KY, 11 Nov. 2012

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