

The Church of the 1950s Revisited

THE YOUNG FOLK of 2009 who are still under sixty years of age find it hard to imagine what the Catholic Church of the 1950s was like in Australia.

THEY ARE TOLD IT FELL TO BITS...

They are told its widespread collapse, 1970-2009, proves it was really only a flimsy empty shell after all and **TOO WEAK TO COPE WITH CHANGE**:-

- secularization of civil society, i.e. atheism/amorality
- revolutions in culture, family life, sex and education
- reforms from the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65
- rise of a highly educated laity and Religious
- married women working outside home.

EVIDENCE adduced for its decline/collapse

- Empty convent buildings from collapse of the nuns
- Empty novitiates built only a few years before
- Fewer and fewer vocations to nuns and brothers
- Selling off their properties donated by the laity
- Fewer and fewer diocesan priests; combining parishes
- More and more priestly laicizations, even scandals
- Empty seminaries, few priestly vocations
- Rise of contraception and fewer children
- Collapse of stable marriages and family prayers
- Rising divorce rate to match that of unbelievers
- Giving up regular Confession
- Sacrilegious reception of Holy Communion
- Far fewer at Sunday Mass — 10-15%?
- Dissent from Church discipline and doctrine.

SAME EVIDENCE correctly interpreted

THE CHURCH of the 1950s was not flimsy or flabby, nor did it buckle up and fail.

Rather, she was assaulted by Satan who orchestrated persecution and execution.

There was treachery, "the spirit of wickedness in high places" as St Paul put it (Ephesians 6:12)... espionage, sabotage and subversion... Many theologians, bishops, priests, educational bureaucracies, learned laity, Religious brothers and nuns corrupted each other and the faithful — and it is still going on.

SHE WAS HUNG, DRAWN & QUARTERED!

JUST as the vibrant Catholicism of 15th century England was ruthlessly and systematically hacked to death in the 16th century by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, so too was the vibrant Catholicism of the 1950s in Australia systematically butchered.

The real history of the 16th century so-called Reformation has been replaced by a **Protestant myth** that Christianity in England was riddled with ignorance and corruption before the English 'Reformation' in 1534.

This myth is definitively exposed in the carefully researched *THE STRIPPING OF THE ALTARS, Religion in England from 1400-1588* by Eamon Duffy.

EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY

THE MYTH after VCII is that Catholicism in Australia was only a flimsy hollow shell before 1962. **I know this is not true. I know, because I was there and I saw the situation for myself.**

First, I saw the Catholic Church in Australia from the outside when I was a communicant member of the Anglican Church, 1950-1955.

Then, from the end of 1955, I saw the Catholic Church in Australia **from the inside**, and was priviledged to live by and within its impressive strengths.

For two complete years, 1956-1957, I was a parishioner of Pennant Hills in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

From 1958, I was a seminarian: three years at Springwood, four at Manly. I was ordained in 1964.

My first priestly appointment was in 1965.

From 1970, **I witnessed the Anglicanization** of many Catholic bishops, priests, Religious and laity. **For 40 years I have lived through much murdering, rape and rapine of the Catholic religion.**

GREAT AND UNDENIABLE STRENGTHS

HERE IS the real state of affairs of the Catholic Church in Australia in the 1950s:-

- vibrant parish life and 60% at Sunday Mass
- real faith and reverence for the Blessed Sacrament
- vibrant family life, big families, family Rosary
- Sunday night devotions (prior to evening Masses)
- minimum ideal of monthly Confession/Communion
- Solid Catholic identity and loyalty to the Church
- Sodalties of Piety and Societies of Charitable Works
- public witness to non-Catholics of Friday abstinence
- public witness to non-Catholics of no contraception
- lots of converts from mixed marriages
- some converts from the intellectuals
- Catholic Hospitals and Charitable Works esteemed
- lots of faithful priests, brothers and nuns
- priests clerically dressed visited door-to-door
- seminaries and novitiates overflowing & extending
- Aquinas Academy and Young Christian Workers etc
- Vibrant Catholic Schools primary and secondary
- Sound practical faith and piety, and apologetics
- Battles with Communism — hence "The Split" in 1955
- Civil, social, inter-Christian conflict over "State Aid"
- University Newman Societies: intellectual apostolate
- Bible read in Douay, Confraternity, Knox, Schuster.

WEAKNESSES

THE evidence of collapse is correct but it was **not due to intrinsic weaknesses** in the 1950s Church. Rather, in the 1950 there were **FIXABLE FLAWS**:-

- Reforms in liturgy and some catechetics were overdue
- Parish Latin Mass — yes, it had its plus and minus...
- Popular devotions seemingly unrelated to liturgy
- Some confused the Church's doctrine with discipline
- Formal marriage prep was weak, informal quite strong
- Ecumenism weak but not fraudulent
- Churchmen compromised and blinded by their politics
- Some Religious pushed beyond limit of endurance
- Some abuses of authority by authoritarian superiors in parishes, seminaries and Religious houses.

MISINTERPRETATION

Attempts at *improvement* made some new problems and worsened others, **because** they were made by:-

- **misinterpreters** falsifying VCII's documents
- **demythologizers** of doctrine
- **relativizers** of morality
- **desacralizers** of liturgy
- and **enforced by episcopal authority ill-used**, in:-
- **catechetics**, especially in Catholic Schools
- **liturgy**, especially for the Mass and Confession
- **theology/philosophy/scripture** in seminaries etc
- **adult education** for lay apostolate (incl. marriage)
- **schooling** by half-believing half-practising teachers
- **Religious life**.

DRUGGED DREAMS and IGNORANCE

A background to our present malaise is people still living in a **dream of post-Conciliar euphoria**.

Too readily we forget *whom* we are up against. We forget that we are war with Satan. He hates God and wants to populate Hell with haters. Don't let him!

We tend to forget the daily spiritual warfare is with Satan, selfishness and sin — sin both original and actual. It is not just a past battle: we are in the middle of it, right now! What is more, it is life-long — that is why we renew our Baptismal Promises every Easter.

Today's problems in the Church in Australia (and in many other places) include two in particular:

FIRST, we have so many Pretend Catholics who do not know that their *mindset is actually protestant* — in the original meaning of that word: they are in a state of protest against the Pope and Catholicism.

They do not know that Blessed Pope John XXIII's **greatest concern** in calling an ecumenical council (of the bishops in peace and union with the Holy See) was to have a **pastoral council with a basic doctrinal aim**. Thus, on 11th October, 1962, in his speech opening the Council, he declared that:

The greatest concern of the Second Vatican Council is that the Sacred Deposit of CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE SHOULD BE GUARDED AND TAUGHT MORE EFFICACIOUSLY.

Documents of Vatican II, Abbott, p. 713.

This is the **key text** for the *aggiornamento* (the updating), and its sloganeering of *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, "The Church is always to be reformed".

Thus far, the implementation of the Council has not achieved its greatest concern. Don't despair and weep, but pray and work! It is the dissent of the dissidents that hinders it, that Christian doctrine is not guarded or taught, or only poorly and in part. They have 'lost the plot', and no longer believe there is a 'deposit of faith'. To them, we say, "Repent! Stop being part of the problem; become part of the solution."

We are not called to "kick out" the dissenters, but to convert them. The first two spiritual works of mercy are a call to "Repent! Believe!" (cf. Mark 1:15).

SECOND, those who are indeed quite Catholic in faith and piety so easily forget that the Godly solution to our problems is SPIRITUAL RENEWAL: **the life of grace and virtues, the quest for holiness** — the only way forward. There never was any other way.

Hence Blessed John XXIII intended that VCII would:-

- Renew all Catholics with saintly fervour
- Hence reunite Christendom in the Catholic Church
- Thereby convert the whole world to Christ's Church.

We need 3 Theological Virtues + 4 Cardinal Virtues:

FAITH HOPE CHARITY (1 Corinthians 13:13): with charity towards God first; then towards neighbour by the Seven Spiritual and Seven Bodily Works of Mercy; and **PRUDENCE-JUSTICE-FORTITUDE-TEMPERANCE** (cf. Wis 8:7)

We must practise them daily according to our state in life. The details are **not** the same for the laity in the myriad circumstances of their lives, nor for bishops and priests in theirs, nor for Religious.

We need to build up and encourage each other, not to tear others to shreds with unconstructive criticism.

RISING FROM THE RUINS

Hopeful signs to give us joy and courage:-

- Plethora of prayer groups
- Lots of family prayers, especially Our Lady's Rosary
- Plethora of lay apostolate groups
- Signs of revival of reverent liturgies
- The hope of more Reform of the Reform in the liturgy
- Some return to Confession and Friday abstinence etc
- The new orthodoxy among the younger priests
- The rising orthodoxy among the remnant youth
- Family catechetics
- More really big families again
- The rising of the Catholic homeschooling movement
- The setting up of family-run really-Catholic schools
- The setting up of independent adult education
- The beginnings of revival in Religious life
- A growing rejection of society's Culture of Death
- Some reforms in diocesan bureaucracies.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

"Be not overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" — and with God! (Romans 12:21; cf. 3 John 11)

To restore Catholic faith & piety, we heed the 3 Cs:-

- **Catechetics** — clear, brief and easily assimilated
- **Confession** — repent & believe, humble & contrite
- **Contraception** — saying 'no' to it, and restoring a Godly desire for children, and to welcome becoming a father or mother (again).

Help is at hand from the Magisterium's 4 Cs:-

- **Council** documents
- **Code** of Canon Law
- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**
- **Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church**.

THE WAY FORWARD

FROM time to time we need to glance over our shoulders and learn lessons from the 1950s, but not blindly seeking to go back. We should build on former strengths, including insights and inspirations from the Church of our forebears in Australia and worldwide.

Father James Tierney