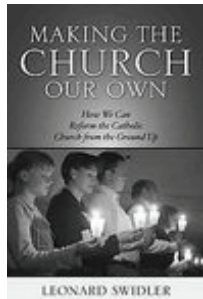


What to Do about the Church?

I was invited to speak at the VOTF national conference at Providence (an apt name!) this October. I recalled that we Catholics have our mandate from all the bishops of the world, including the Bishop of Rome: "To undertake the reform of everything in the Catholic household itself that is in need of it." (Decree on Ecumenism) Hence, it would be irresponsible for us to wait for new leadership from above. We already have it!

We must work – slow and painful as it is – to bring about a Catholic Church that is inculturated in the contemporary world, and that world is one of accountability, transparency, representativeness in decision-making, and due process of law. In short, it is a world of Democracy based on Law and a Written Constitution. Our bishops at Vatican II called for collegiality (code word for democracy), and our lead bishop (Pope Paul VI) called for a Universal Constitution of the Catholic Church (*Lex Fundamentalis Ecclesiae*).

What do we Catholics do to take up this responsibility in late 2007? Many things, but they should prioritize translating this democratization of the Church into the written Law of the Church. Otherwise, whatever gains we make in certain parishes or dioceses will all be washed away in the tides of history (see my *Making the Church Our Own. How We Can Reform the Catholic Church from the Ground Up*. Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2007, for details).



Putting our adult Catholicism into Law needs to start at the parish level. We all need to work to move our parishes to gather together with our pastors and create a written Parish Constitution, ratify it, enshrine it liturgically in the church, publicly reaffirm it every year, live it year after year, and "evangelize" it, that is, get other parishes to do the same, and then form a network of "Constitutional Parishes" to prepare to move onto the level of the Diocesan Constitution, and then....!

In the meanwhile we also need to begin now to work toward an "American Catholic Constitution," which will help to jump-start the work toward Parish Constitutions.

Want to know how to get started on these vital steps? Go to our ARCC Website: <http://arccsites.org>

Leonard Swidler

The Hans Küng Award Celebration

On November 8, 2007, at 7:30 PM in the Foundry Methodist Church, Washington D.C., ARCC presented the third Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award to Sister Joan Chittister, OSB. The ceremony began with an introduction both of ARCC and Sr. Joan by ARCC's

President, Len Swidler. As ARCC's Vice President and the author of the actual document, I then read the text of the framed award document. Next, ARCC Treasurer Sonya Quitslund presented Sr. Joan with a \$1,000.00 check and Sr. Caridad Inda, CHM, gave her a hand-made necklace from Mexico. Finally, Len Swidler presented another small token of our respect and love – a new edition, dedicated to Sr. Joan, of a 1998 presentation given by Bishop Francis Murphy on the topic *Human Rights are the Church's Business*. Then came the evening's highlight – Sr. Joan's powerful address, "Roots and Wings: the Ongoing Renewal of the Church."

I cannot imagine anyone who loves the Church and is passionate about the promise of Vatican II who did not



leave the evening's event with renewed hope for the future and determination to help realize the inspired vision of the Council. Sr. Joan succinctly yet thoughtfully analyzed and interpreted every document of Vatican II, reminding us that like Samuel of old, the "patron saint of Vatican II," we are called to reform the very institution which has formed us. I was reminded of a comment I heard David Tracy make years ago about distinguishing *traditio* from *tradita*, the rooted tree from the transient leaves.

Sr. Joan began her address with a story about God calling Jesus and the Holy Spirit to arrange for a Summit. As they tried to agree on an appropriate location, Jesus objected to Jerusalem because the reception was terrible, God objected to the U.S. because "they still don't know that I am as much She as I am He," but the Holy Spirit squealed with delight at the suggestion that they get together in Rome because, "I haven't been there in years." From this seemingly light-hearted – and yet profound – story she moved right into the heart of the matter with another story – this one scriptural from the Book of Kings about Samuel assuming erroneously that the voice of God he had heard in a dream was in fact the voice of Eli, the High Priest. "Eli, the institution itself," continued Joan, "taught Samuel, ordered Samuel, to hear beyond the institution to the voice of God in his life, and the voice of God to Samuel was that the very institution that had formed him was to be re-formed by him. What Eli had taught him in the old institution he was to choose to use to reshape Eli's world. I have no doubt whatsoever, Samuel is the patron saint of Vatican II. It is what the church is teaching us that is calling us to reshape the church."

Eventually we plan to post a transcript of the address on the ARCC site. At the moment an early version of the lecture, "Both Roots and Wings Moving the Vatican II

Church Into a New Millennium" which was the concluding address at the three 2001 CTA National Conferences in Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Chicago, can be read in the CTA site at <http://www.cta-usa.org/reprint11-01/roots.html>.



Text of ARCC's Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award presented to Sr. Joan Chittister

Sister Joan, you represent the very best of what ARCC seeks to honor and encourage with the Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award. An acclaimed international lecturer and award-winning author of more than thirty books in addition to a continuous stream of columns and articles, you have been an advocate for the rights of women, children, the poor and generally disenfranchised for many decades. An active monastic, faithful to the Benedictine double-motto, "pax" and "ora et labora," you are among the most powerful visionary voices of contemporary Christian and ecumenical religious life.

Your roots drawing sustenance from the rich soil of one of the oldest continuous institutions in the Catholic Church, your leaves bathed in God's light-energy, your fruit-bearing branches reach out toward, protect, and feed God's People all over the world.

Your love of the Church and your ability to capture, illuminate, and communicate the very essence of Christianity in ordinary, accessible language – written as well as spoken – make you a genuine prophet in the original sense of the term – one who speaks to us for God and challenges us to become the best we can be in such words as: "Vatican II liberated us from the arrogant assumption that we are the only people that God cares about, that we are the only people through whose life God works." The Beatitudes, you say, "call us to attitudes of mind; they call us to mercy, to care for the hungry, to care for the poor, to be peacemakers in life, to hunger and thirst for justice, . . . the Beatitudes call us to care about this whole globe and in this age of globalism we have never needed anything more."

Joan, you are informed, wise, witty, and courageous. You fully deserve the standing ovation you received at the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference in Dublin in

2001 when you spoke in defense of women's rights in the Church despite an attempt to silence you by Rome.

We honor you today for your courageous faith and clear vision. We honor you because you have been a role model for all who work for Pope John's Aggiornamento, a vital and contemporary Church. For these, and a myriad of other reasons, the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church bestows on you the 2007 "Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award."

Ingrid Shafer

American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church

by William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier (2007, Rowman & Littlefield)

We often hear the rueful comment that we get the government we deserve. I have been coming to the conclusion in the past months that the same might be true of religious government - perhaps we get what we deserve. Perhaps we have been too naive, too trusting, too passive, too lazy to fight and struggle for what we really deserve. Or perhaps, gulp, most Catholics believe, and agree with the hierarchy and I and my like-minded friends are a much smaller oddball minority than I had thought! How on earth can one know?

It was in this somewhat depressed state of mind that I picked up *American Catholics Today* by D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge and Gautier to read and review for *ARCC Light*. Here, thanks to the hard work of four professional sociologists, I found accurate and useful information which can help us all develop realistic strategies for getting the kind of religious government we deserve and not what a bunch of scared, ignorant, power-hungry middle-aged males deign to give.

American Catholics Today is the fourth in a series of survey studies of American Catholics conducted over the past 20 years by these researchers, with considerable financial assistance from the *National Catholic Reporter*. The first was in 1987 and was first summarized in the *NCR* and then published in full in *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church* (D'Antonio et al, 1989). The second survey was in 1993 and published in the *NCR* and then in *Laity American and Catholic: Transforming the Church* (D'Antonio et al, 1996), and the third was in 1999, again summarized in the *NCR* and then published in full in *American Catholics: Gender, Generation and Commitment* (D'Antonio et al, 2001). The fourth survey, on which this book concentrates the most, was in 2005. The authors also had access to the results of the very similar 2003 University of Notre Dame survey. The random sample in each, with the exception of the Notre-Dame study, was approximately 875 respondents;



the Notre-Dame study had a random sample of 1115. For the sake of continuity, comparison, and to track developments in opinions, most of the same questions were used through all four surveys with a very few added along the way to keep up with changing events. Due to the rigorousness of the methodology used, and the degree to which opinion sampling has progressed, the margin of error is very small.

Obviously, it would be very difficult to even begin to do justice to such a fact-laden study in a summary such as a book review. The best I can hope to do is give a basic orientation and then the authors' own outline of the book. The researchers first needed to determine the degree to which their individual respondents identify with Catholicism—see themselves as Catholic – and then their commitment to the institution of the Church – could they see themselves ever leaving the Church. These two fundamentals about the respondents are both the result of certain influences, the most basic being age, and they also have results, that is, they can lead to certain beliefs and practices. Thus, the correlations of identification as Catholic and identification with the Church with age and belief go in several directions and can become extremely complex. For the 2005 study, the researchers classified the respondents in one of four generations (or cohorts, to use the sociological term): the pre-Vatican II generation, born in 1940 or before; the Vatican II generation, born between 1941 and 1960; the post-Vatican II generation, born between 1961 and 1978; and the Millennials, born between 1979 and 1987. The two largest groups in the 2005 respondents were the post-Vatican II (40%) and the Vatican II (35%) generations. Eighty-four percent were white, sixteen percent were people of color and sixteen percent were Hispanic. Fifty-four percent were women and forty-six percent were men. Seventy percent were married, fifteen percent had never been married, and fifteen percent were divorced, widowed or living as if married. Many other correlations emerge in the course of the book.

The authors' own outline of their book is as follows:

[Chapter 1 is the introduction.] "Chapter 2 examines the nature and extent of Catholic identity, including the centrality of the faith, the beliefs and practices that Catholics consider the core of the faith, and how laypeople perceive the boundaries between Catholicism and other faiths. It also shows how identity is linked to generation and other demographic characteristics. Chapter 3 explores the laity's commitment to the Church. It shows how commitment is embedded in the experiences of different generations of Catholics, and it asks about the relationship between Catholic identity and commitment to the Church. Chapter 4 examines Catholics' views of and participation in the sacraments.

Chapter 5 surveys the laity's views of what constitutes the most serious problems facing the Church today. Chapter 6 explores the laity's views of episcopal authority. Chapter 7 probes issues related to church leadership. Chapter 8 examines the relationship between religion and politics. This is a new line of inquiry for us, prompted by the mixing of religion and politics in the 2004 presidential election. Chapter 9 restates our major findings and explores their implications for Church leaders. "(13-14)

Editor's Note: There are also 3 valuable appendices on Catholic Education, Hispanic Catholics and the entire 2005

Gallup Survey with its numerical results expressed in percentages.

The first major finding that emerges is that being Catholic is central and important to most of these respondents. Because the questions probing this were so intertwined and resulted in answers ranging from 70% to 85%, the researchers created a combined "centrality index" with 1 being lowest centrality of Catholicism in respondents' lives, and 5 being the highest possible. The average (mean) of all the respondents was 3.93, showing that their Catholicism is, indeed, very important in their identity and their lives. 70% even responded that they could not imagine being anything but Catholic. Not surprisingly, older Catholics (the pre-Vatican II group) had the strongest identification with Catholicism, and the youngest (the Millennials) had the weakest.

But what does being "Catholic" mean? What are the core beliefs and what are the peripherals? The core beliefs of this random sample of committed Catholics are, interestingly enough, pretty sound theologically: helping the poor; belief in Jesus' resurrection from the dead; the sacraments such as the Eucharist; Mary, the Mother of God; having a regular daily prayer life; participating in religious devotions. Deemed less important, in descending order are: the Church's teachings on same sex marriage and abortion; Church involvement in social justice activities; the teaching authority claimed by the Vatican; the Church's teaching opposing the death penalty; and at the very bottom, a celibate male clergy. (24) The respondents see similar creedal beliefs as necessary to being a good Catholic, while believing one can be a good Catholic without obeying the Church's teachings on abortion, divorce and remarriage, being married in church, birth control, without going to church every Sunday or financially supporting a parish. (27)

As expected, the pre-Vatican II group, which shrank from 33% in 1987 to 17% in 2005, constitute the most committed to the Church as an institution, the most regular Mass-goers, and the most frequent volunteer church workers. As their numbers decrease, so does the overall percentages of highly committed Catholics. The "replacements" for these dying pre-Vatican II highly-committed Catholics frequently become medium-commitment Catholics. Interestingly, the percentage of low-commitment Catholics has remained fairly constant over the 20 years of the 4 surveys at 15 to 16%. Thus, over the past 20 years, the "great center," the moderately committed Catholics, has remained the largest group overall and has remained relatively stable, growing from 57% in 1987 to 64% in 2005. Sorry, Chicken Little, but the sky has not fallen in and the great mass of Catholics have not left the Church. 85% of them consider themselves highly or moderately committed Catholics and they believe the dogma but don't see the bishops' blatherings or even getting to Mass very regularly as nearly as important as their creedal base.

In a fascinating chapter on "The Sacraments: Trends and Variations," the authors trace American Catholics' participation in the sacraments through the 20th century and discover that it is not a straight downward line, as sometimes imagined by clerical doomsdayers, but rather an upside down U, with fairly low participation in Mass and the sacraments in the early part of the century, rising

to a peak of participation and of vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the 1950's, followed by the decline we have all witnessed and mourned in the last 40-45 years. The truly important point is that the 1950's were not the norm for the American Church – they were a peak period of American Catholicity, preceded and followed by normally less “fervent” or participatory periods.

Chapter 5, on problems facing the Catholic Church, is fairly predictable, with the sexual abuse of young people by priests ranking as the most serious problem and that “bishops and priests no longer hold Catholics accountable to Church teachings” as the least serious. (69) Without being able to go into a great deal of detail, these “problems” and the others given in the answers raise questions of the possibility of married priests, which is accepted by 75% of the respondents (up from 63% in 1987) and most of all, about the nature and use of authority in the Church. (83)

It is clear from the priorities in essential and less- or non-essential beliefs examined earlier that American Catholics are making choices in what to accept, ie., what to view as core beliefs, no matter what the Church hierarchy teaches. They no longer accept the divine right of kings/popes/bishops preached by Rome. They have been influenced by the increased democratization of our society, by the teachings of Vatican II, by their own higher level of education, by their common sense. The Church has, in addition, taken several heavy hits on questions of authority and the credibility on which its authority rests in the past few years. *Humanae Vitae* tried to characterize as eternal something which was no longer accepted – the ban on birth control. The abuse of thousands of children by priests and its cover-up by a majority of the US bishops made the hierarchy seem hypocritical and self-serving rather than people-serving.

The responses to crucial questions asked in all 4 surveys clearly demonstrate that American Catholics want to be consulted and listened to – they want to **participate** in decision-making in **their** church.

There is no doubt that there is a growing split between conservative and progressive Catholics, but, to quote D’Antonio: “The reality of American Catholics is that the groups at each end of the continuum are small, with a majority of Catholics in the middle.” (90) All of the most recent scientific surveys bear this out. Ironically, as D’Antonio writes in *American Catholics Today*, “The outcome of the tension between obedience and conscience was predicted forty years ago: ‘In the long run the laity will do what seems rational and practical, and whenever the Church is defending a tradition that cannot be sustained by reason, it will probably be ignored.’ (1966, 12).” (88)

As the authors demonstrate in Chapter 6, the majority of Catholics believe that these sexual and lifestyle issues – same sex relationships, choice in abortion, marriage in the Church, divorce and remarriage without annulment, contraception, premarital sex – should be decided by individuals themselves or by a combination of individuals and Church leaders. Few believe any more that these are issues to be decided by Church leaders alone – even 2/3 of

the pre-Vatican II respondents have adopted the laity-with-leaders view in 2005. (101)

On the very important issue of Church leadership and lay involvement, the authors note that quite a few young priests and laypeople have been moving in distinctly opposite directions in the past 10 to 15 years. Many young priests are attracted to the older cultic model of priesthood as a sacramentally separate caste, as opposed to the post-Vatican II “servant-leader” model of priest who works closely **with** the laity. Middle-aged and young laypeople have been moving steadily toward a model of ever more cooperation between the laity and the clergy on almost everything relating to the Church. Lay Catholics believe they should participate in decision-making at all levels: in their parishes, on all administration including finances (89% in 2005) and selection of priests (over 70% in 2005); in their dioceses, diocesan spending priorities (84 %) and parish closings (80%). (111)

Laypeople are particularly intent on participating in the financial management of their parishes. Less than 3% of those polled in 2005 felt the laity should have no role in parish finances, while the other 97 % ranged from 64% who felt they should have input into determining the budget, 19% felt they should have general oversight, and 14% felt parishioners should have the final say in parish finances. (114)

This gamut of views on the role of the laity in what has been a clerical fiefdom particularly strikes me by its extreme reasonableness. Catholics have every right to be shocked and dismayed by the moral and financial revelations of the past few years. Yet, they are not trying to throw out the baby with the (very dirty) bath water: they are asking – demanding – a **role** in decision making. They want to **participate** and have the Church use everyone’s talents, charisms, for the good of all. Most are not trying to eliminate hierarchy but to discipline it and make it responsive and responsible to all the People of God.

This book should be required reading for every bishop in the country. There would doubtless be some who would respond piously in their usual passive-aggressive *clericus profundus* that it is a sign that the United States Church needs to be re-evangelized on the proper relative positions of clergy and laity. Some, however, might read the fundamental message of these surveys and realize that, not only is this truly just: it is also likely to be the best offer they will get. Knowledge is power, and this admirable study gives us a great deal of knowledge.

The authors say in the final paragraph of their conclusion: “We hope and pray for a vibrant Church and a Church that is a blessing for the entire society. We hope that this book will serve as a means for dialogue in the Church. . . . If this book helps to increase dialogue in the Church, it will have served its purpose well.” (155)

Fruitful dialogue requires both knowledge and openness on both sides. Let us hope that those in power in the Church will be open to the dialogue. D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge and Gautier have done their part: this is one of the most important books of the year!

Christine M. Roussel



Minutes of the ARCC Board of Directors Meeting November 8-10, 2007

Washington Theological Union, Washington, DC
R. Schutzius, Secretary

Present: William D'Antonio, Caridad Inda, Richard Lebrun, Earlene Mara, Charles McMahon, Sonya Quitslund, Robert Schutzius, Ingrid Shafer, Leonard Swidler,

Absent: Tom Doyle, Pam Monaco, Hugh O'Regan, Gerard Sloyan.

Thursday Evening: At 7:30 p.m. The ARCC Hans Küng Award was presented to Sr. Joan Chittister followed by her lecture "Roots and Wings" and a reception at the Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington DC. Later we assembled at the Washington Theological Union (WTU) in Tacoma Park and continued to discuss issues. :

Friday Morning: The board meeting began at 9:00 a.m. with a prayer by Caridad. Introductions of the new board candidates Richard Lebrun and Charles McMahon were made as well as brief introductions by each board member present. An election followed to ratify the earlier online election and both candidates were unanimously elected to serve on the board.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. The agenda for the meeting was reviewed and approved.

Reports were made on board member commitments from the previous meeting, and discussion followed. It was suggested that a reminder was needed. Earlene accepted the assignment to monitor and remind members of their commitments made at meetings and other duties. .

Discussion and evaluation of the Hans Küng Award focused on the relatively small attendance. The Foundry has very limited parking, and perhaps spring might be a better time of the year to make the award. Ingrid will ask Joan's permission to place her presentation on YouTube. Co-sponsorship by CTA, VOTF, and Future Church was suggested and Len agreed to draft a letter proposing this.

Charles McMahon spoke about the VOTF invitation accepted by retired Bishop Geoffrey Robinson from

Australia to come to Philadelphia and lecture about his new book. It was proposed that ARCC seek to co-sponsor the Philadelphia event and help set up a series of lectures around the country with VOTF affiliates. The board voted to offer to do this and Charles will work on it. Bill D'Antonio offered to send Charles a list of publishers who might be interested in publishing Robinson's book here in the US.

Bob presented an idea for an ARCC project to develop a people's version of the Catholic Catechism (CC) which would attempt to better reflect the community's understanding of the articles of our faith. How the faithful interpret and believe the teachings of the Vatican is not always expressed clearly in the official version of the Catechism. He passed out an example article. The board supported the idea. Sonya suggested that the project should focus on the catechism articles that deal with rights in the Church. A committee of Bob, Ingrid, Richard, Len, Sonya and Caridad will work to establish the guidelines for the commentaries and to identify the articles that deal with rights. Bob will coordinate the effort at this point.

Friday Afternoon: After lunch discussion returned to focus on the Geoffrey Robinson project. Bill will send to Charles the contact information for G. Robert

Stewart of VOTF-DC. The spring '08 board meeting (scheduled for May 9-11) might be changed to coincide with a lecture presentation by Robinson in DC. Charles will keep us informed.

Nominations to the board came up next. No one offered any candidates.

Review of the ARCC by-laws was the next topic. Revisions presented by Chris Rousell, and comments by others were recognized. Bob will consult with Guy Schmitz about his involvement in ARCC's incorporation. Earlene will contact Chris and work with her to submit her revisions to the board for comment and suggestions. Gratitude was expressed for the extensive work that Chris Rousell dedicated to this project.

Ingrid then reported on the Publications Committee. ARCC LIGHT (AL) was discussed. All agreed that each

SAY IT AIN'T SO!

Friends,

What the International Board of ARCC looks to its membership for mostly is the active promotion of ARCC's cause: "To bring about substantive structural change in the Catholic Church...in which decision-making is shared and accountability is realized... [T]here are fundamental rights which are rooted in the humanity and baptism of all Catholics." At the same time, as with all volunteer organizations, it takes a certain amount of funding to exist and put our ideas into action. To that end we have customarily been asking, if possible, for \$25 annually for dues.

However, earlier this year we tried an experiment that some nay-sayers said would flop. Some of us on the ARCC Board felt that our members would not only continue to support financially our efforts to implement and protect our rights (and the responsibilities that are their necessary converse) in the Catholic Church, but even increase that support-if....

If what? If we no longer required dues, but asked our members voluntarily to send in support at the customary level of \$25 a year, if possible, or even more.

So far the nay-sayers seem likely to be proven correct.

Say it ain't so!

Leonard Swidler

edition was a work of excellence with only Sonya suggesting a less academic approach in the articles.

Caridad will contact Pam Monaco for a list (and number of each) ARCC publications she has on hand and send this list to the board.

Len will ask Charles to work with Pam to obtain the list and number of each of the ARCC publications she has.

Ingrid will send Bob a list of articles available on the web so he might revise the ARCC brochure to list these.

Richard will contact friends in Quebec about possible interest in a French translation of ARCC articles on the web.

Sonya gave a Treasurer's report. Income from tickets for the H.K. Award presentation and lecture was \$686 while the expenses will amount to \$2500-\$3000 for the honorarium and expenses to Joan (\$1430), ad in the NCR (520), and cost of the Foundry and reception. Sonya estimates the cost of the board meeting at WTU and travel to be \$2000, and she referred to her report sent to the board dated October 24, 2007 for more details.

ARCC's representation at the Catholic Organizations for Reform (COR) was discussed.

Richard agreed to contact CTA about representing ARCC at their fall meetings in Milwaukee and Sonya will ask Bill D'Antonio to represent ARCC at the spring COR meetings in DC.

Len agreed to write a Christmas fund-raising letter for the next issue of AL. Should this appeal not be successful, he agreed to ask for dues in the spring issue.

The meeting broke for dinner, pizza was ordered in, and the conversation continued.

Saturday: New Business: The Lay Synod project undertaken in the St. Louis area, Texas and California was mentioned and especially their focus on the best practices. It was considered a worthwhile project, but did not deal with reform in the Church.

Caridad expressed her concern about the Church's reaction to sexual abuse in Mexico. SNAP has helped in her quest for documentation which indicates that the Church there considers itself unaccountable to civil authority in this matter. She will continue to pursue the issue.

As mentioned above, the spring board meeting is scheduled for May 9-10 at WTU in DC, but is now tentative depending on the Bishop Robinson project.

ARCC's 800 number will remain the same but will be directed to the ARCC headquarters in St. Louis. We thank Gaile Pohlhaus for handling the calls for ARCC during the past few years.

The meeting ended at 10:54 a.m., Saturday Nov 11, 2007.

Robert Schutzius, Secretary

Kaiser Has Done it Again! Hit Home and Given Us All a Christmas Gift Besides!

How do you get impeccable ecclesiastical history, theology, canon law, psychology, and a rollicking good read that won't let you put the book down in one package? Get Robert Blair Kaiser to write the book!

We have been reading Kaiser's excellent analyses of the Vatican, of Popes John XXIII through Benedict XVI, and the Second Vatican Council for over 40 years. He is a first rate journalist and religious analyst with a fluid and eminently readable style. Now, for the first time, he has turned his years of knowledge, experience and his writing skill to fiction, in *Cardinal Mahony: A Novel* (Humble-bee, 2008). One reviewer in Australia has compared him to Morris L. West of an earlier generation, who, by revealing accurately and eloquently the inner workings and problems of the Church did eventually change Catholics' opinions. But Kaiser's new book is a thoroughly modern thriller – also called reality fiction – so modern, in fact, blending presently living, well-known characters with perfectly plausible imaginary ones, writing events only one year in the future, that in reading, one is drawn into it, to the point that periodically, you must look up and remind yourself that this is 2007 and these things are not happening – yet. It's all so vibrant and factually accurate that it becomes plausible and even logical.

Without giving away the plot, the book is premised on Cardinal Mahony being kidnapped near his mountain retreat, whisked away to Mexico and put on trial for his crimes as archbishop before a television audience of over 500 million. He is found guilty by a jury of his peers – six bishops – and sentenced to be a Christian. He protests that he has always been one, but, clearly, what he has always been is a hierarch. The rest of this witty, fast-paced adventure story is the fascinating process of Mahony coming to realize what he actually is and honestly if painfully trying to change himself and his Church – changing the Church of the Powerful into the Church of the People. And it all rings true – from the difficult, sometimes humiliating process of learning to listen to the not powerful but wise, to the two- and three-faced clerics with whom he must interact, to the Machiavellian methods everyone uses to achieve their ends, it all rings painfully true. Finally, there is a surprise ending that almost reduced me to tears, and the promise of a sequel.

Bob Kaiser has been a friend of ARCC for many years and he even served on its Board of Directors. As a special for ARCC *Light* readers, if you purchase a copy of *Cardinal Mahony: A Novel*, Kaiser will send you a free copy of his ebook *Rome Diary, 1999-2005* free. Go to his website at www.robertblairkaiser.com for details on how to order an autographed copy of *Cardinal Mahony* and obtain your free ebook. Be sure to identify yourself as a reader of ARCC *Light*. Two good reads for the price of one. Thanks Kaiser.

Christine M. Roussel

Christmas 1944-2007

As I am sitting at my desk, in front of the computer, putting together this issue of ARCC *Light*, concentrating on the text on the screen I am absent-mindedly looking at the tall Christmas tree in the wide doorway between my study and the living room. The tree looks and smells much like the wondrous trees of my childhood, trees that I believed – as an Austrian child in the 1940s and 50s – had been brought

directly from heaven in a flying golden sleigh by the *Christkind*, assisted by a flock of angels. Instead of white wax candles with their flickering flames, today's tree is lit by hundreds of tiny colored electric bulbs, much safer I am sure, but not nearly as fragrant and mysterious. I can still remember standing behind the locked door, my ear pressed against the cool smoothness of the white enamel paint, straining to hear the sounds of wings as the *Christkind* and his entourage arrived through the open windows.

An eternity seemed to pass until finally, FINALLY, I heard the sweet sound of the tiny silver bell that was the signal for me to open the door. I kept hoping I would catch a glimpse of the *Christkind* or at least an angel, but the only trace I ever found was a white feather or two near the window. I still have a few of the old ornaments – delicate, fragile glass, their bright colors almost worn away by some six or seven decades. In my imagination this was the only perfect season of the year, my very favorite time.

For a few days the terrors of war, the howling sirens and distant explosions, the adult stories of air-raids and people being blown to bits were replaced by something different, something I only intuited dimly at the time, something I would come to know as HOPE. That HOPE arrived on angel wings and in the glow of candles. It came with the scent of *Lebkuchen*, with carefully wrapped gifts, and the sounds of my father playing *Stille Nacht* on the piano. It meant that the adults in my life were temporarily kinder, gentler, happier, more caring. That HOPE was brought, I came to realize, by the Christ Child, a child much like me and all other children on earth but a child who was so filled with God's love there was no room for cruelty, greed, and selfishness, a child who came into the world to heal everyone's pain and celebrate his birthday by making us happy and showing us how to make one another happy.

Almost fifty years later, in 1993, I wrote the following poem, a meditation on Mark 5:21-43. While the passage is not a Christmas text, I believe it captures what for me is the very meaning of Christmas and of Christianity.

The Healer

I step across
 the gangplank onto shore
 hoping for
 solitude
 silence
 rest
 Not yet!
 They crowd around me
 eyes and arms and voices raised
 screaming for me
 to feel and heal their pain
 mend their mangled flesh
 and make their broken spirits whole
 devouring me
 body and soul
 I am the spring
 that flows for them
 I am the coal
 that glows for them

to keep the drought and cold
 at bay
 until I am
 all
 spent
 dust and ashes
 blowing
 on the wind
 A man is pushing through the crowd
 toward me
 loose robes fluttering
 hastily tied
 his voice a shrill wail:
 "Teacher, hurry, hurry, hurry to my house
 and lay your hands
 on my dying daughter's head!"

I WADE
 through the throng of vendors and hawkers
 and goats and whores and donkeys and gawkers
 I HEAR
 the cackling of hens in baskets
 the shrieks of gulls
 the bleating of sheep
 the clunk-clank of cart wheels
 the hum of the crowd
 I LISTEN
 to the stillness within
 I SMELL
 green onions and garlic
 and rancid olive oil
 and sour sweat
 and sweet wine
 and roast lamb
 and rotting fish
 I WALK
 on toes encrusted with dung
 and dust and death
 I FEEL
 faith faintly
 feebly fearfully fingering
 my cloak
 trust tendrils timidly
 tenderly tearfully tugging
 at my heart
 I KNOW
 myself a reed
 and the power
 flowing
 flowing
 flowing
 down
 through
 the hollow center
 I WANT TO NURSE THEM ALL . . .
 I SEE
 their thirst slaked
 their yearning stilled
 and the dying child
 as she will be:
 free of pain
 alive

radiant
dancing in
the Father's fragrant flower garden
laughing

Another crowd has gathered
in front of the parents' house
flutists playing
dirges
women weeping
praying
wailing
ripping their robes
and veils . . .

"She is dead" they say
"go away!"

BUT I HAVE COME
TO STAY.

Ingrid Shafer

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