



Boston Catholic Journal

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The Death of Two Monasteries



... and a "Renewal" that became a Requiem

The Real Legacy of Vatican II

The **Franciscan Seraphic Seminary** *and* the **Poor Clare Monastery** blankly face each other on one single street in Andover, Massachusetts

**"Francis, repair My house
which, as you can see, has fallen into ruin."**

(The Statue of St. Francis which greets the visitor at the entrance to the Franciscan Seraphic Seminary in Andover Massachusetts was donated by St. Leonard's Church in Boston – which itself has been closed as part of the "Reconfiguration" of the Churches in the Archdiocese of Boston)

The magnificent Franciscan Seraphic Seminary and Monastery, and the Poor Clare Monastery, face each other across a quiet street in Andover, Massachusetts. The Franciscan Seminary was built around 1940, the Poor Clare Monastery in 1959 – the year that Pope John XXIII (on January 25, 1959) called for a general council of the Church, in what has subsequently been called an "Aggiornamento" for "updating" the Church in light of its contemporary cultural and social milieu.

The following brief pictorial history of two erstwhile thriving institutions filled with vocations is a silent testimony that needs little comment.

The enormous Seraphic Seminary is now a "Retreat and Conference Center" for a variety of programs, non-religious, inter-denominational, social and, as the name implies, retreats. A handful of people, mostly lay, staff the largely empty building. Not one Franciscan habit is seen by a visitor.

Across the street, the expansive and once lovely Poor Clare Monastery built in 1959 is in a state of complete abandonment and ruin. It is unoccupied. Not one Nun. A private investor has acquired the property for a commercial enterprise.

It is a deeply disturbing pictorial, for in the plaque on the statue in the picture above, one sees a list of names, benefactors, who had ultimately made a very poor investment in the very best of faith. We cannot avoid seeing a reflection of our own faith and a catastrophic failure to authentically understand – and respond to it. These sacred places were built, and thrived, on "the faith of our fathers" – and fell into ruin and emptiness through an attempt to articulate that faith on the terms of the world, in the mistaken belief that if we become like the world, the world will become like us.

It did not happen. The world did not become like *us* – *we* became like the world. **When two things become alike, it becomes a matter of indifference which one we choose. Ultimately we realize the redundancy, the superfluity, of one of them, and discard it as a duplicate.**

It calls us to question many things, troubling things, from a vision of "renewal" to the reality of vacancy; of the tremendous hemorrhage of vocations, and renounced vocations following a terrible miscalculation, an astonishing misunderstanding, in the breathless pursuit of contemporaneity, of accommodating the Church to the world, and finding, in the end, that not only the have the seminaries and monasteries been emptied, but the pews as well.

The pictures speak for themselves.

We can only stand back in astonishment and ask, "*Who will rebuild the Church that St. Francis rebuilt ... and which we have let fall once again into ruin?*"

If we do not ... no one will.

A Nun's Response

An abandoned, disused, Poor Clare Monastery,
Fallen into ruins ... Its hours of Glory Passed.
Its walls and halls wrapped in silence.
The death of a Community.

And yet for the time appointed
it carried on the light of Christ.

To Faith, all things are possible,
all things have their purpose if we do but believe.

Behold, the universal mystical body of Christ,
In many lands, new communities are being planted
It is their hour of Annunciation.
In yet other areas young women enter the House of the Lord
and are espoused to Christ,
Jesus is born anew.

To some is given the witness of Christ's mission.
And to so many, in war torn countries,
in areas scourged with aids, and even communities,
struggling with internal conflicts,
The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ
is being lived and prayed through daily.

And to some at this moment of time,
by their very silence
speak of the dead Christ,
Laid in the arms of Mary,
Mother of the Church
The Pieta.

This is Christ's Pascal Mystery
being enacted in the Universal Church.
Rejoice, for many Sisterhoods have risen out of the ashes of war, famine
and adversity,
They proclaim the Risen Life of Christ!

A Poor Clare Colettine Nun

Editor's Reply

" ... to some at this moment of time, by their very silence [they] speak of the dead Christ ... "

Yes. Eloquently. Poignantly ... they speak of a Christ Who is no longer alive in our midst, in our lives, in our vocations, in our homes, in our societies, in our governments -- yes, a Christ Who is dead to us ... and Who no longer has a place, a purpose, in our lives.

Yes, they speak of a Gospel, an evangel, that has become so distorted, so detached from its *Kerygma*, that it has evolved into something largely "social"; a call, not to conversion and God, but to "social consciousness" and the world;

Let us look soberly, objectively, at the aftermath of this transvaluation:

- Devastated seminaries
- Devastated monasteries
- Devastated Religious Orders

- Dead Religious Orders
- Absence of vocations
- Rampant homosexuality in the clergy and seminaries
- Bishops in defiance of the Holy See
- Priests in defiance of Bishops
- Laity in defiance of Priests
- Closed Churches
- Vacant pews
- Empty Confessionals despite being re-anointed "Reconciliation Rooms"
- Habits and Clerical Collars as artifacts
- Dissident theologians in contempt of the Church that pays them ... to teach *contra Fide* (against the Faith)
- Catechists who know little more than the catechumens.
- Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament evicted from the Altar as an embarrassment and relegated to obscure niches in remote corners of the Church
- The sterilization of the Church through the removal of sacred statuary and art in favor of unadorned walls, fake organ pipes, and insipid banners.
- The total abandonment of 2000 years of Sacred Music and Chant in favor of irksome and distracting pop music, guitars, pianos, drums, trap sets, flutes and fiercely competitive divas.
- We no longer recognize sin ... only "our faults and failings" (sin *uniquely* pertains to God, "faults and failures" to social and market deficiencies).
- Our children no longer know even the most basic tenets of the Catholic Faith
- Neither do our adults.

The litany is endless and in the end pointless. If what we have arrived at after 2000 years is a "dead Christ" in our midst – even if He is alive in other continents less affluent and "enlightened", and even *thrives* there – *here*, in *this* place, in *this* time, our own faith is a smoldering wick ... because we did not have the conviction to pass on the torch – and those who passed it to us, first snuffed out the flame.

Letters to the Editor:

Praised be Jesus Christ! I was stunned by the photographs on the site of the Franciscan Seminary and Poor Clare Monastery in Andover. It is not that I am unaware of these sad happenings: however, your pictures and captions paint a poignant scene of too many of our once vibrant religious communities ... the departures, the demise and the inevitable disrepair of the properties.

What can we do, for as you say, who will affect a reversal of the present conditions and the rebuilding, renovating of these holy grounds leading to a renewal in Religious life and the Priesthood, if we don't!

When I entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1962, there were 102 postulants, 78 went on to the novitiate and the entire Motherhouse was home to over 500 women. I recently saw pictures of some of the changes that have been made to the Motherhouse; the chapel, once so grand, reflecting the glory of God, had been completely redone, no pews, comfy chairs and no kneelers. And I do realize that most of the sisters at the Motherhouse are elderly, nevertheless, it was a shock to me!

What can we do? Bring our dear little sisters from Ty Mam Duw to Massachusetts to begin a new foundation? Wouldn't that be lovely for us? These now deserted or converted buildings are so large that to begin again would require an enormous amount of money to fix and maintain even if there were nuns, priests or brothers to inhabit them. But nothing is impossible with God, I read recently that five of Mother Angelica's Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration are establishing a foundation in Arizona!

In reality, I think we must continue to pray, fast, sacrifice for the renewal of religious life. I have great hopes for our Holy Mother Church with Benedict XVI at the helm. I truly feel that his papacy (and, please God, let it be a long one with good health for our Holy Father) will be a springtime for the Church.

Do you think that we can ever go back to those days of certainty? Clocks don't run backwards, but I think we can take the good, solid foundation of Truth and one brick at a time ... like St. Francis, rebuild. I would be interested in more of your thoughts on this matter.

I want to again compliment you and our sisters in Wales on a magnificent website. There is a wealth of information there ,and I sense a growth the context of the articles. The world is hungry for the truth whether they are aware of it now or not, but I have great hopes that the time will come when they will be eagerly, if not frantically, searching ... and the site in there! ... all for Jesus and souls!

Thank you and may God reward you for your work for the kingdom.

In the Hearts of Jesus and Mary

CG

EDITORS REPLY:

Dear CG,

Thank you for your letter. I grieve with you also ...

But I also have hope! I was in Rome when Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II died. I sat in the square praying with, among, hundreds of thousands. ... and of the many around me, what struck me most were the Religious that I saw, both men and women: Roman cassocks, full Priestly attire, full habits – and **all** on young, young, men and women. **All!** And so, so many! It was stunning! The bright, young, cheerful, eager faces, of those young women and men, filled my heart with joy and great, great hope. The men were manly and of all races and nations. The women were lovely and chaste. It was medicine to my heart.

It also caused me to deeply question America, the Catholic Church in America – which is effete and anemic. There probably *were* American priests and nuns in St. Peter's Square – but I would not have known them, for most do not wear Clerical suits or Religious Habits. It is so sad. So very sad. They seem to have lost their vocation, or to hide it in shame – the shame of association with Christ and His Church. **BUT – only the Americans.** Not the Europeans, the Asians, the Africans, the Indians – all were Christ's Priests or Brides – **CLEARLY.**

Immediately I was struck by the fact that the *spiritual* is a deeply lived reality to them. They appear to understand that their mission is *spiritual*, to bring Christ to the world ... not to bring social justice, equal rights, women's rights, animal rights, rent-control, etc, to the world. That is for laymen and laywomen. America – and increasingly, Europe – is, in a word, ashamed of Jesus Christ, and therefore of His Church. They are not ... "correct" ... to the world, and do not pander to the "sensitivities" of every depravity possible. They want heaven on earth – and each to be a god unto themselves and, as gods, to make the world accord with their own desires, and a reflection – a perverse image, if you will – of themselves.

A renewal *is* at hand. A *genuine* renewal. Not the largely superficial "renewal" following Vatican II ... a mere rearranging of furniture, a wholesale trashing of Church art, liturgy, and teaching, a large-scale burning of Habits and Clerical Collars. The Church in America did not change its heart, only its clothes. It did not renew its zeal for Christ but translated it into zeal for the world. It did not "renew" God's image in man, but largely erased it.

I truly believe this is changing. I think that Catholics have grown spiritually sick and realize that the medicine they have been offered will not heal them. They are looking for depth – they are beginning to look beyond the contemporary furniture and a changing of

clothes that had nothing to do with a changing of hearts. They are spiritually starving ... and a new generation is finding its way to the true Christ, the true Church, the real Gospel. We are sick of the world. The world has made us sick. Why attempt to make the Church in its image? These young people appear to see this, to know this – they go beyond the superficialities (and there are so many) ... unlike their parents. Perhaps they have simply looked around and saw what has resulted in the world, in their parent's lives, in schools, and in governments as a result of such a tremendous defection from Christ and His True Church.

*May our **children** bring **us** where we have been unable to bring **them**.*

God keep you.

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