

CHAPTER ONE

COMPELLED TO QUESTION

To survive a basically good institution in the throes of creeping change, we have to forget one kind of church and recommit ourselves to the creation of the other one, the one created by the Holy Spirit, rather than the one created by centuries of political accretions and clerical control.

Sister Joan Chittister OSB

Conscience first, Pope afterwards.

Cardinal John Henry Newman

We follow church leaders only to the extent that they themselves follow Christ....Some situations oblige one to obey God and one's own conscience rather than the leaders of the church. Indeed, one may even be obliged to accept excommunication rather than act against one's own conscience.

Cardinal Walter Kasper
"Leadership in the Church"

Most people seldom take the time to become aware of what structures or influences shape their lives. When I was growing up, much of what I came to believe was not because I immersed myself in regular profound introspective reflections. As a young “born-Catholic” I simply believed as I was told. My early years catechism lessons became baseline beliefs and convictions that the Catholic way of life was the only path to eternal salvation. It was only a question of time when all “others” would realize the error of their ways. To question any of these articles of faith would be regarded as an act of betrayal with the ultimate sentence of “mortal sin.”

Throughout my youth and formative years, accountability within the church meant nothing more than adhering to the “rules.” It was like being given a membership card with restrictions. I was often asked if I was a “Catholic in good standing,” or was I “a practicing Catholic”—simply, did I attend Mass every Sunday, did I attend Mass on every Holy Day of Obligation, did I not eat meat on “fish Fridays,” did I fast after midnight before receiving Communion, did I abstain from all pleasurable things during Lent, did I avoid “forbidden” books, magazines and movies which would lead me to “dirty thoughts” and occasions of sin? The list of codes of behaviour penetrated deeply into the daily lives of all so-called good practicing Catholics. They could not participate in any non-Catholic religious services. If they married before a non-Catholic minister or a justice of the peace, they were excommunicated. Marrying a non-Catholic was frowned on and divorce was condemned. The iniquities of sex were rigorously defined. Husbands and wives were told that birth control was sinful. If they did practice birth control, they went to confession before receiving communion. There was to be total abstinence

from any sexual pleasure during courtship. An occasional “peck on the cheek” or an affectionate touch was acceptable—the latter never in the “sinful places.” Many young Catholics petted and kissed, often to orgasm, but managed to delay intercourse until after marriage. The list is endless. The directives of the institution became the church and the people tended to keep the rules or to tinker with them because they wanted to remain Catholics in good standing.

The last half of the 20th century brought on developments that would shake up the immured belief that the Catholic Church is a kind of a supernatural Roman Empire that had been in existence for centuries. Within this hierarchical notion, the pope stands as the absolute ruler (Supreme Pontiff); then the aristocracy of the bishops; then the gentry of the priests and finally, in a passive function, the subjects of the faithful (laity). Catholicism was in fact a centralized, patriarchal, immutable and sin-consumed patrimony. The system was snug and intact. The institution was defined top to bottom, with the parishes as totally regulated religious and spiritual delivery systems.

I grew up steeped in the Catholic culture of the 1940s and '50s. We lived in a small village and the Ukrainian Catholic (Eastern rite) church to which we belonged to was within walking distance. My parents were devoted to the faith and they idolized the priest as the persona who could “walk on water.” Throughout my youth, my mother was obsessed with trying to influence me to become a Catholic priest. My life was full of Catholic idiosyncrasies. I was compelled to attend all catechism classes taught by nuns. I recall the little red paperback “Catechism of the Catholic Church” that they used to hammer pointed bits of theology with the mundane intensity of a drill sergeant. As

an altar boy, I also became proficient in the Eastern rite Mass responses, which are expansive and repetitive. Besides Sunday Mass, morning weekday Masses were a ritual. The priest and I could speed through the whole morning Mass service in 20 minutes, which would give me just enough time to make it for my first class at school. I became what many in the community would refer to as an acolyte of the priest and my destiny was sealed—I was eventually to become a Catholic priest. This notion would continue until my high school years, when I fully realized that I had to make choices. Was my future as definitive as were the church protocols that influenced me? Was I prepared to sequester myself into a seminary for eight years—to remove myself from the reality of the world, to renounce sex, to forego a lifelong loving partnership and family? Ultimately, to the chagrin of my church community and to the total disappointment of my mother, I sidestepped the seminary.

I graduated from university in 1960 and became part of an increasingly well-educated Catholic laity that was becoming uneasy with the rigidity of “institutional codes of faith.” I attended St. Paul’s, a Jesuit College on the University of Manitoba campus, and felt the Jesuit influence until my graduation. The Jesuits challenged their students academically and were not reticent to question or at least challenge many traditional church decrees and norms. What I didn’t realize at the time was that I was fortunate to be living at the crest of a forming wave that was about to ripple in different directions. Among laypeople there were signs of discontent. Married couples, those that dared, began expressing that birth control was not always wrong. Studies showed that most Catholic couples practiced some kind of contraception before the end of the women’s fertile years. Intelligent and well-adjusted

married couples realized that sexual intimacy is part of a loving marriage and the church's obsession with controlling sex had no business in their bedrooms. My formative years, the 1950s and early '60s, was a period when laypeople began rationalizing and seeing the institutional church and the "Roman magisterium" as decreasingly relevant to being Catholic. There was slippage in the traditional mentality that "Father knows best." Laypeople were now relying more on their individual conscience as a source of moral authority rather than submitting totally to the moral dictums of the pope. As a young Catholic, I quickly discerned that intellectual curiosity was a God-given endowment and that no one should fear exploring the truth or ask questions when the need arises.

It has been said that history is long-sighted and it is without doubt that in her vision 1962's most pivotal rendezvous took place in the Catholic Church. It was Pope John XXIII, *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1962, who convened the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which began deliberations in October of that year. Unfortunately he died on June 3, 1963 but the council continued deliberations under Pope Paul VI. I had just begun what was to become a lifelong career in public school education. There was a "spiritual buzz" of anticipation among the people in the pews. Vatican II lasted three years and in this short period of time produced a whole Catholic lexicon of uncharacteristic terms like *aggiornameto* (updating), renewal, "people of God," collegiality, ecumenism, vernacular liturgy, to name just a few. Vatican II was John's vision of participation in decision-making, of community rather than hierarchical monarchy, at bringing the church into closer touch with the modern world. The council was a clarion call to the laity to share actively in the mission of the

church. John's vision was to focus on the church as being more catholic and less Roman.

Forty-plus years have passed since the formal adjournment (Dec. 8, 1965) of Vatican II. During all this time, the church has been constantly locked in an internal debate—between the conservatives who maintained using a language of rules and law and the progressives who promoted a language of relationship and discernment. The timing may have been an accident but Vatican II occurred amidst the turmoil associated with the social movements of the 1960s. This was also the “baby boom” generation coming of age when Elvis Presley and the Beatles were the new generational rising music stars. Music like “Love letters in the Sand” by Pat Boone was being overshadowed by the likes of Elvis's “Jailhouse Rock.” The church was also suddenly taking on new forms. Priests began facing the people during Mass, Latin was replaced by English, organs were being replaced by guitars and eating meat on Fridays was no longer under the threat of eternal damnation. As an eastern rite Catholic, I saw little change except that the old Slavonic Mass was replaced by the vernacular Ukrainian.

Notably, the council did not address the sexual revolution. It evaded addressing the role of women. It did not acknowledge the reality of homosexuality. Many clergy anxiously awaited some word on priestly celibacy. It did not happen. The issue of birth control was most pressing for married Catholics. Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical reaffirmed the church's ban on artificial birth control. In the disappointment and anger that ensued, laity embraced the principle of “follow your own conscience.” Throughout these last decades, central authority has faced increasing scrutiny by the laity resulting in its diminishing

credibility.

I am a pre-baby-boomer and have had the fortunate experience of living through the pre- and post-council periods. Experiences, contemplation and conscience searching during my faith journey have significantly affected the developmental stages of my life. The fruit of Vatican II was not the documents but a phenomenon that transformed the behaviour patterns of Catholics with regard to their church. Catholics who decided that birth control was not wrong justified that decision by affirming that God did understand and the pope did not. Then again, if the church of the Inquisition could change the playing field on liturgy, views on ecumenism and fish Fridays, why not (at least dialogue) birth control, role of women in the church and other so-called codes of forbidden behaviours? After all, the council did advocate leadership, consultation and decentralized decision-making. With the God-given gift of intellect and right of choice, it is acceptable to think, question and seek a personal relationship with God rather than conform submissively to an institution. The once submissive minions of the church were coming of age in recognizing the predominance of the individual conscience before God. This was now the beginning of a new spirituality, as Eckhart Tolle, a contemporary spiritual teacher, calls the “transformation of consciousness” where the institutional church no longer has a virtual franchise on spirituality. People were and are becoming increasingly aware of the distinction between spirituality and religion; that religion is about the tradition, the institution, and the system with creeds, dogmas and definitions. It gathers us in rituals of worship and reminds us of conditional rewards of a world to come. Spirituality, on the other hand, begins where religion ends. It is about the human mind and the

heart, transcending rules and rituals towards a focus on meaning. On the Bible, the pre-council mentality was unequivocal; that scripture was only within the realm of clerical interpretation and the faithful were to subscribe accordingly. Scripture reading in a typical Catholic household, including my own, was considered “out of our bounds.”

Many, and I would venture to say most, Catholics born after the 1970s know little or nothing of the events of Vatican II. Many of them were a consequence of the sub-group of 1960s counterculture movement known as the “hippies.” Hippies rebelled against established institutions, criticized middle class values, opposed all wars, promoted sexual liberation, which led some to describe the hippie sub-culture as a new religious movement. I am not suggesting that hippies were the sole source of the church’s woes today but having lived through these periods, it was obvious that there emerged a changing attitude toward authority in general. I began my education career as a teacher and administrator at a large senior high school in Winnipeg during the 1960s. Unlike my high school years, these students not only expected, but insisted that teachers accounted for what they said and taught. It has been said that the “great generation” is not of the 1940s but of the 1960s, which saw major changes in attitude towards fellow human beings, especially women, homosexuals and those racially discriminated, disenfranchised, or marginalized.

Contemporary Catholics live in a different world since Vatican II. More of them are attending colleges and universities, getting married later, having two-career families, bearing fewer children and using contraceptives to limit family size. More young Catholics are marrying non-Catholics. This puts a whole new

twist on such matters as pre-marital sex, birth control, divorce, abortion and remarriage. These circumstances are by no means direct products of Vatican II, but the faithful are less intimidated by church authorities and the disciplines they promote. New moral situations are often complex and call for an informed conscience, not blind acceptance of moral decrees handed by a male celibate caste. The new reality here is that those Catholics making these kinds of decisions do not feel jeopardized from membership in the church or that they are unfaithful Catholics. Pope John Paul II, in his 26-year tenure (1978-2005), was labelled by many progressives as a fundamental conservative who shut the doors from the “fresh air” intentions of Vatican II. As a global champion of human rights, he denied them within the same institution he led. Reputable thinkers and theologians exploring the consciousness of modern time were muzzled and cast out of Catholic institutions bringing moral theology almost to a standstill.

As a result, many Catholics are confronted with an intolerable set of options: “play the game, or leave.” Progressive pundits have considered the failure to democratize and make the church more collegial as a major failure of the John Paul papacy. To date, the 2005 installation of Pope Benedict XVI has not evidenced any significant changes in the horizon. In matters of sexual morality, mixed marriages, ecumenism and status of modern women, a significant number of pastors and the faithful discreetly do what they have determined as right in the spirit of the gospel and in accordance with the impulses of Vatican II. They are no longer ruffled by pope or bishops.

Much of what has been written about the church in the last 20 years has been under the headline of “Crisis in the Church.”

The greatest crisis that any institution can face is the crisis of thinking it doesn't have one. The presumption that a stagnant organization can continue to serve a contemporary dynamic and pluralistic culture is institutional myopia of the worst kind. The priesthood, once the most respected dimension of the Catholic community, is greying and dwindling drastically. Then, far more than priest shortage, is the credibility issue facing the church. It wasn't until allegations of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy surfaced in the U.S. during 2002 that a moral panic shook an already shaky institutional foundation. Initially, Boston became the epicenter of the scandal, but as public furor grew other dioceses began confronting abusive clergy in their ranks. By the end of 2002, some 1,200 priests had been accused of abuse nationwide, according to a survey by *The New York Times*. In July 2003, the Office of the Attorney General of Massachusetts published an executive summary that concluded:

The widespread abuse of children in the Archdiocese of Boston was due to institutional acceptance of abuse and a massive and pervasive failure of leadership. For at least six decades, three successive Archbishops, Bishops and others in positions of authority within the Archdiocese operated with tragically misguided priorities. They chose to protect the image and reputation of their institution rather than the safety and well being of the children entrusted to their care. They acted with a misguided devotion to secrecy. And they failed to break their code of silence even when the

magnitude of what had occurred would have alerted any reasonable, responsible manager that help was needed. Still, the failure of the Archdiocese leadership has been too massive and too prolonged, and the Archdiocese has yet to demonstrate a commitment to reform proportional to the tragedy it perpetrated. (1)

By 2006, justice at any price became the accountability factor when settlements to abuse victims exceeded \$1 billion and four dioceses claimed bankruptcy. It soon became clear that clergy sex abuse was, in fact, a systematic pedophilia crisis that would manifest itself as a global phenomenon. The American scandals were prey for the media, front page and center. On July 14, 2007, the Associated Press reported that the United States' largest Catholic archdiocese would settle its clergy sex abuse cases for at least \$600 million. The settlement would be the largest by a Roman Catholic diocese since the clergy sex abuse scandal erupted in Boston in 2002. The largest payout so far had been by the Diocese of Orange, California, in 2004, for \$100 million. The settlements push the total amount paid by the U.S. Catholic Church since 1950 to more than \$2 billion, with about a quarter of that coming from the Los Angeles Archdiocese. In a July 16, 2007 release from "The Voice of the Faithful" president Mary Pat Fox is quoted, "If Bishops had not placed institutional reputation above the harm to children, we would not have to seek help from the courts. It is a sad day because the Catholic Church was forced to follow the Gospel by the courts."

In an April 24, 2005 article, the U.K. newspaper *The Observer* produced evidence that newly elected Pope Benedict

XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) was directly involved in obstructing justice in the investigation of pedophile priests. The article details how Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger “issued an order ensuring the church’s investigations into sex abuse claims be carried in secret.” The order was sent to American Bishops in May 2001 and “asserted the church’s right to hold its inquiries behind closed doors and keep the evidence confidential for up to 10 years after the victims reached adulthood (18 years old).” The attempt to protect the institution in the face of the damage done to the children became the scandal of the century for the church. Historian Gary Willis, in his book *Papal Sin*, refers to this as the institutionalized “conspiracy of silence” that exists from pope to priest and all those within the hierarchical domain. The sexual abuse scandal is only one variation on the subject of clerical sexual duplicity that goes back centuries. The only thing that has changed is the capacity of this clerical culture to foster the duplicity.

The consequences of the sex scandal in the church will continue to unravel for some time. Extrinsically, the crisis in the church is about sex and sex abuse. In reality, the crisis is about power, i.e. the loss of trust in the hierarchy and its teaching authority. Inexorably linked with the church’s feudal culture is the clerical psyche of privilege, entitlement and sacred power of control. Within this male authority caste is a clericalist culture that is rooted in the idea that in whatever pertains to religion, it is the right and responsibility of clerics to make decisions and give orders and the job of the laity is to subscribe to them accordingly. Clericalism in the Catholic Church is like the pattern in old wallpaper; it has been there so long you don’t see it anymore. Realistically, clericalism cannot be labelled as the

sole cause of sex abuse any more than sexual indiscretions cause clericalism. However, it is disturbingly evident that attitudes and ways of doing things associated with clerical elitism came into play when priests were found sexually abusing children. The scandal has badly damaged the church's public image, caused a loss of confidence in the leadership of the church, undermined relationships between bishops and priests, and made it much more difficult for good and credible priests to carry out their ministry. Most significantly, the scandal jarred the consciousness of the people in the pews who were shaken off the age-old aura of the priest as semi-divine to a priest as only very human.

There is a time in everyone's life when one discovers that the so-called truths or absolutes we have been so certain about for years become less and less certain everyday. Old answers do not work any more. Within the heart and soul of every committed believer comes a time when we find ourselves asking, as I did, "Why do I believe what I believe?" It is the moment when we reflect back over all the questions, all the rules, all the decrees and begin to analyze the originating circumstances that underlie them. In order to feel truly free to question old traditions and to seek new vistas of consciousness, Eckhart Tolle states that people must first "lose the density of their conditioned mind structures." With my conditioned "Catholic" upbringing, I initially struggled with the tension between my need to question with an embedded tradition of accepting institutional answers. And then, one at a time; issue-by-issue; experience-by-experience—I questioned them all. I realized that my religion and my spiritual life were not "in sync." There is such a thing as a spiritual dimension that is infinitely larger than the intransigent routines of religious discipline. I was angry at the institution and I needed to ask

questions in order to find answers for the sake of my own spiritual accountability. I was embroiled in a struggle between truth and power, faith and institution, and in the final analysis, questioning whether I was really Catholic (of the institution), or catholic (universal).

Recent dissertations challenging the institutional church have included such headings as “Dare to Speak” or “Courage to Question”—which intimates that there is audacity or fear to openly speak one’s mind. When I had made up my mind to write this book, I asked myself, “What am I really afraid of?” In response, my greatest fear was: “to say absolutely nothing.” Writing is an audacious act that makes one vulnerable, open to criticism, ridicule and even rejection. On the other hand, my new awareness compelled me to question certain non-dogmatic issues and matters the church hierarchy holds untouchable. The laity, the 99 per cent of the church, has both the right and inalienable obligation to question structures, practices and disciplines that no longer serve the pastoral needs of the church. Revealing the truth can only stir more voices of conscience demanding accountability, transparency and for appropriate roles in the governance in the church.

In my 28 years in educational administration, I found that most people who question authority are not trying to create havoc. They seek to be an integral part of the organization, especially, in times of turmoil. They need to be part of the solution. Unfortunately, there is a growing distrust today between the people and the “corporate” church. When there is duplicity between institutional, religious, and most importantly spiritual ideologies, loss of trust sets in. Intelligent laypeople are now asking sound questions, such as:

- Why has the church such a clerically legalistic image—its rigidity, intransigent stands on sexual morals, and its lack of openness that represents a regression from the perspectives advocated by Vatican II?
- Why is there such a lack of regard to the role of women in the church or to married clergy? Can we not re-evaluate mandatory celibacy, knowing full well it is merely a man-made discipline of the church? Are these underlying causes of the vocations crisis?
- Why is there a lack of receptiveness, openness and initiative by the church in helping people to cope with difficult situations they face: separation, divorce, unwelcoming attitudes towards homosexuals, etc.
- Why is there an inherent reticence to dialogue with other churches, other religions, other cultures and marginalized people?
- How do we heal the pains caused by priest pedophiles and those who deliberately covered up for the sexual pleasures of these priests while trying to constrain the moral sexual intimacies of married laypeople?

There is absolutely no doubt that the church is in dire need of renewal and reform. Organizational pundits are clear when they say the church must adopt contemporary organizational methods if it hopes to thrive at a time of declining vocations, discontent among the laity, decreasing Mass attendance, and

the financial aftershocks of the clergy sex scandals. It's all about effective leadership. Good leaders understand that people represent the greatest resource to an organization and who emphasize the importance of "serving" others. My experiences in organizational development were influenced immensely by the late Peter Drucker—writer, teacher, consultant and "Father of Modern Management Theory." One of his most noted sayings is, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." In the case of the church, where do we start the change process? Removing the CEO and/or certain department heads may be an option in a smaller organization but tackling the hierarchical structure of the church in the same manner is beyond the scope of any human endeavour. Religious leaders who are chosen non-democratically profess a personal pipeline to God, placing them above criticism and question. They are reluctant to grant the same freedom to their subjects.

The current crisis is pregnant with the graces of the Holy Spirit and the path of deliverance for the church must be charted by the initiatives and leadership of the people of God, the laity. Leadership incompetence and scandals has finally and irrevocably deposed the "pray, pay and obey" mentality of the past. We must start from the beginning by revisiting the profound messages clearly stated by the first Pastor in His first Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 3-10). The Sermon on the Mount was destined to become the universal charter of ethics, the epitome of His moral teaching, that were to shape the ethical principles of the civilized world. It is unfortunate that the lessons of the beatitudes are the most overlooked and underdeveloped aspect of Christian scripture. We must step back and re-examine where we are in our journey of faith. We need to adopt the mentality and

humility of that first Christian community on the mountain who heard and heeded the message:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit...not those caught up in the world of power and the need to control...but those with a free heart to give and to humbly receive.
- Blessed are those who mourn...not those who whimper...but those who have learned to be compassionate.
- Blessed are the meek...not the subservient... but those who have the courage to speak out.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice...not those enslaved by ego and power...but those who are accountable and transparent.
- Blessed are the merciful...not those who forget or ignore... but those who genuinely forgive.
- Blessed are the pure in heart...not those who use and abuse for personal pleasures...but those with integrity and hearts of universal love.
- Blessed are the peacemakers...not those who create conflict... but those who are creative in resolving it.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice...not those who are silent or never “rock the boat (barque)”...but those who practice non-violence with conviction and love.

Change of any kind is often a slow and painful process. Whatever time it takes, we have plenty of it. What we do know for certain is that we are beyond the point at which the hierarchy has the credibility to get the church back on the right track. Only the people can do that.