

## GERARD WINDSOR'S *THE TEMPEST-TOSSED CHURCH*

*Deep night hath come down on this rough-spoken world,  
And the banners of darkness are boldly unfurled;  
And the tempest-tossed Church—all her eyes are on thee;  
They look to thy shining, sweet Star of the Sea!*<sup>1</sup>



Luini Madonna & Child

*The Tempest Tossed Church: Being a Catholic Today* (Sydney, NewSouth Books, 2017) is not so much about the Catholic Church as about Gerard Windsor's own faith and the struggles he has had through the tempest that has beset the Church these last fifty years. He has fared better than most, for the majority of those who shared his faith have lost their way, infected with the tenets of Modernism and the *spiritus mundi*. Almighty God rewards those who serve Him with devotion for some part of their lives and the preservation of Gerard's faith when millions have lost theirs is, likely, part of a benevolent Providence. Yet, as will appear, his faith is not unqualified.

Many a Catholic has observed the loss of faith in his loved ones in the years since Vatican II, with the consequence of the utter loss to the faith of his grandchildren. Gerard writes:

Overwhelmingly people lose their religion because it becomes less and less of their, or their family's, general atmosphere. Without any strong convictions one way or another, individuals gradually drop the practices that demonstrate belief; they become irregular in their church attendance, neglectful of any earlier habits of private observance—prayers, grace at meals. Quite undramatically, religion ebbs away as any atmospheric element in their lives. And to a following generation religion is an alien and archaic phenomenon. And one hard for such deracinated individuals to find a way back to, in the unlikely event that they ever feel any motivation to do so. (*The Tempest Tossed Church*, page 139)

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the text of the hymn *O Purest of Creatures* addressed to the Blessed Virgin.

In contrast to my own approach to Vatican II (which began with qualified enthusiasm, altered to bemusement over the ravaging of the faith and the faithful it precipitated, then hardened to antipathy and studied criticism) Gerard welcomed the Council. But he has his reservations.

Like many Catholics of my generation I feel ambivalent about this change. Many reforms were overdue. The Church has long put itself at a... distance from 'the world'... Polemic not dialogue was its default conversational position. Internally the liturgy, above all the Mass, was an arcane rite attended, but not participated in, by the laity; there was nothing about it of the people of God commemorating and celebrating together. With Vatican II the vernacular was introduced, the celebrant faced the people, they responded to the prayers, they read the lessons. More generally Vatican II invited and encouraged the laity to be more integral members of the Church. Theologically this was just common sense.

In retrospect it also seems to have been either a far-sighted, pragmatic step, or a self-inflicted wound. The youthful revolutions of the 1960s with their rejection of traditional codes and rules, Vatican II's welcome to winds of change and freedom, brought the recruitment of the Church's official personnel to [a] halt. Fewer signed up, many left. The number of priests, brothers and nuns fell away dramatically after Vatican II. The Society of Jesus in Australia, for example, received twenty-one novices in 1962, twenty-three in 1963 and ten in 1964. Far from recovering the numbers continued to slide...

On the other hand it produced the perception that you didn't need to be a brother or nun to be, for example, a good Catholic schoolteacher. As a lay person you could be just as effective... What did the priestly or religious life (one defined by a vowed life ideally in a community) have to offer any longer?

My ambivalence is deep-seated, and maybe located even at some irrational level. I was a Jesuit myself for seven years, in the class of 1963. Of the twenty-three who entered that year, one drowned in the Yarra in the first week... [and] only one still survives as a Jesuit... The little I know of the post-Jesuit life of my fellow novices makes me chuffed to have been of their number... Professionally these men could only be rated as successful, and often enough in high-profile positions—a judge, two diplomats, several writers, a school principal, a scientist, an AFL executive... Yet for all these achieved lives, I can't help but see what a massive haemorrhage of talent the Jesuits suffered. It's just a personal what if; if Vatican II hadn't occurred, if the general ferment of the 1960s hadn't happened, what might all that talent have achieved as Jesuits? (pp. 199-201)

Among the assertions in this extract there is hardly one whose accuracy could not be contested. Let's look at a few of them.

First, there is nothing arcane—mysterious or secret—about the old rite of the Mass. What it entails, the sacramental re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, is, and has always been, well known, a subject for composers and artists down the ages for the majesty of what it celebrates. They might reject the Church's assertion as to what takes place but are in no doubt as to what the Church, and the celebrating priest, intends. Gerard's criticism smacks of the Protestants' mockery of the Mass as 'hocus-pocus', a corruption of the words of consecration.

The Mass is not the action of the 'People of God' but of Christ through his anointed vicar, the duly ordained priest. Vatican II's shift in emphasis, Protestant inspired, brought with it a loss of perception of the dignity of the priest and the office of the priesthood. The abandonment of the office of priest by thousands and the failure of vocations was the inevitable result of this degradation. The failure of Gerard's vocation was part of the fallout. The signal effect of Pope Paul's *novus ordo* has been to trivialise the Mass and demean the dignity of the priesthood. Given his familiarity with the Latin tongue<sup>2</sup> and with the majestic periods of the Tridentine rite, it is surprising that he should take so against it. He remedies this, somewhat, later in the book, as we shall see.

Next, the processes the Council inspired may seem like common sense from a secular or Protestant viewpoint, but they were not so from a Catholic view; not from a *theological* viewpoint. He accepts as reasonable the revolution the Council's bishops accomplished. It is worth repeating Peter Kwasniewski's summary of what they did.

[N]othing of Catholic life was left untouched after Vatican II. Every bit of the Mass, every aspect of the Divine Office, every sacramental rite, every blessing, every piece of clerical and liturgical clothing, every page of Canon Law and the Catechism—all had to be revamped, reworked, revised, usually in the direction of diminution and softening: "the Word was made bland, and dwelt in the suburbs." The beauty and power of our tradition was muted at best, silenced at worst. No form was safe, stable, or deemed worthy of preservation as it stood, as it had been received.<sup>3</sup>

In his praise of the achievements of his co-religionists Gerard does not pause to wonder whether, relieved of their vows and returned to the world, they have retained the practice of the faith. There is some quiet mockery of his mother for asking this question of Catholic public figures, but his mother had a better grasp than he of ultimate issues. What is more important, to be a good lawyer, business-man or public servant, or to be a good man? He might respond by saying that a practising Catholic is not necessarily a good man. But if he is not it is unlikely that he will continue to practise his faith, for a man who indulges in evil is antipathetic to the faith Christ established as he is to Christ Himself.

His ambivalence over the Council appears, too, in a passage in his earlier book, *Heaven where the Bachelors Sit* (Brisbane, 1996), where he describes attendance in the 1990s at a convent in the Sydney suburb of Sans Souci prior to the auctioning of its contents by the nuns of the religious congregation of Our Lady of Mercy.

My mother and I meandered our own ways through brassware and glassware and pews and statues and stacked pictures. We came together at the altar. I opened my mouth to speak and my mother spoke before me. "This is very sad," we both said.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Heaven Where the Bachelors Sit*

<sup>3</sup> *The New Synthesis of All Heresies: On Nietzschean Catholicism*, May 16, 2018, reproduced at <https://onepeterfive.com/the-new-synthesis-of-all-heresies-on-nietzschean-catholicism/>

What seems missing from Gerard's analysis is a right understanding of the deference due to Christ as the Son of God, as of the immense dignity of the priest as one anointed to stand in Christ's place. This appears from time to time in his narrative but particularly in his relation of an incident in France. Before I quote him, I will tell of an experience of my own which puts the issue in context. Some months ago I attended High Mass in the Tridentine rite (*forma extraordinaria*) offered by a priest visiting Australia. He was Japanese and spoke five languages including Korean and Latin. When he had completed the first part of the epiclesis—*Hoc est enim corpus meum*—he genuflected with head bowed and remained so for thirty seconds. The lesson for the congregation was electric. It was as if he had said aloud: "*Almighty God, God Himself, has come to us here and now upon this altar!*"

Gerard attended High Mass in the *forma extraordinaria* at the Abbey at Lagrasse in southern France on a Sunday after Pentecost.

At Communion... I watched the celebrant put the host on the tongue of every other individual on the altar. I had long had an objection to this practice. My grandfather, a doctor who had died at the age of ninety in 1976, had always said that the priest's laying of the host on one protruding tongue after another was a most unhygienic practice... When the celebrant came to me I extended my left hand, resting it on my right. The deacon tried to manoeuvre his plate. The celebrant hesitated and waited. The deacon again tried to edge his plate in. I said, '*La main, la main*', but the celebrant ignored my hand. Then I began to say, '*l'église permet...*'—although it was not a moment to be struggling with my French. But the celebrant put the host into my hand and moved on... (pp. 214-5)

There is more to the incident but this will suffice. His conduct involved a breach of customary law, was offensive to the priest, offensive to his hosts and, inevitably, entailed scandal to the faithful. It was, moreover, an exercise in pedantry.

The reception of Communion in the hand is an abuse. Its licensing by Paul VI in May 1969 under pressure from various conferences of bishops was of a piece with the abandonment of the deference due to Christ that Vatican II promoted and which that Pope oversaw to the universal harm of the faith and the faithful. Gerard's attempt at self-justification is childish. Is he serious in the contention, implicit in his complaint, that the God of heaven and earth, Who gives Himself freely to the individual faithful Catholic in Communion, Who gives us life and breath, is incapable of preventing the transmission of disease to one who submits himself in obedience to receive Him as the Church commands? Christ told us that among the signs associated with believers is this, that they will be unharmed should they drink deadly poison (*Mark 16: 18*). Is a priest distributing Communion in a slovenly manner likely to defeat Him?

He rightly condemns the abuses committed by priests and religious against the young and the conduct of bishops and superiors in covering it up. But he does not see, as American commentator George Weigel sees, that *the burgeoning* of these aberrations (for there were always one or two deviates) to plague proportions is an

effect of the crisis of priestly identity that Vatican II precipitated.<sup>4</sup> Again what is missing is the sense of the holiness of the priest as one anointed by the Holy Spirit to stand in the place of the Anointed, Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, and a sense of the immense dignity of the office.

He narrates something further of his attendance at *Lagrasse*.

I have never seen a liturgical ceremony performed with such style. Enormously high camp, of course. The communal bows and genuflections on the altar were performed with such rhythmic precision. The simultaneity was that of an elite military parade unit. But there was no sharpness about it; every movement was graceful, no movement was hurried... It was a performance, choreographed and practised and polished. Yet it was something we merely watched... We sang the classic texts, the Kyrie, the Gloria, Sanctus and above all the Credo, all in their Gregorian settings. I have a poor singing voice, but the church was full, the Canons and their congregation knew their music and went to it with a zest. It was nearly forty years since, as one of many full-throated enthusiasts, I had sung those texts with the melody and I left the Canons' church exhilarated. (pp. 215-6)

This is very revealing. He is preoccupied with the spectacle, the reality it signified seemingly hidden from him. His analysis is materialistic; he does not penetrate beyond what appears, an exercise in poietics, human making or doing. The reference to behaviour typical of homosexuals is gratuitous and inappropriate. Despite his attendance at the altar rails he is not a participant, merely an observer. Perhaps the saddest thing is the comment that he had participated forty years prior as no more than an enthusiast.

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What is it all for, this life of faith in adversity that we enjoy as members of Christ's Church? The word 'end' has two meanings: *purpose* and *termination*. It is God Who determines the end (purpose) of every human life as He gives it essence (*what* it is) and existence (*that* it is) and provides it moment by moment with vigour and all that is necessary to sustain it—(one cannot repeat the formula of Aristotle too often "For living things to live is the same as to be" *De Anima*, Bk. 2 Ch. 4, 415b 12-14). It is God Who determines the end (termination) of the human soul's earthly existence, a fact succinctly put in one of the hymns of the office of *Morning Prayer* in the *novus ordo* attributed to St Columba:

My destined time is fixed by Thee and death doth know his hour,  
Did warriors strong around me throng they could not stay his power;  
No walls of stone can man defend,  
When Thou Thy messenger dost send.

The purpose of human existence—of *all* human existence—is union of the soul with God. St Augustine expressed it in a sentence in his *Confessions*: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are not at rest until they rest in Thee". The French poet Léon Bloy put it more trenchantly:

"Il n'y a q'une tristesse; c'est de n'être pas des saints".

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<sup>4</sup> George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic*, New York, 2002, pp. 22 et seq.

Our bodies corrupt but we do not die. This is why the Church uses as antiphon for the invitatory psalm in the *Office for the Dead* the line: “Let us adore the Lord for Whom all men are alive”. We do not die; we will live forever—in heaven or in hell. This is the ultimate verity that answers the question why men should be ordained as priests of Jesus Christ. “The harvest is great but the labourers are few...”

The chief problem with the modern world is that there are too many atheists in it, too many believers in no-God—for atheism is a belief system, one based in carelessness to the point of gross negligence. The most significant contribution to the flourishing of atheism in the present age was made by the popes and bishops of Vatican II when, purporting to open the Church to the world, they betrayed the principle that the Church is the one necessary means established by Almighty God for man’s salvation. This betrayal, implied in various Council documents, was made explicit in the last of them, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom.

What is the Church? In his *Letter to Dean Inge*, published originally in *The Evening Standard* in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Hilaire Belloc put it succinctly:

One thing in this world is different from all other. It has a personality and a force. It is recognised, and (when recognised) most violently loved or hated. It is the Catholic Church. Within that household the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it, is the Night.<sup>5</sup>

That the Church is different from all other earthly institutions few would deny. Its persistence against all adversity—much of it from within its own halls—over twenty centuries gives it a longevity matched by no human institution, certainly no empire. Its focus differs radically from the focus of other human institutions. The Catholic Church is not concerned with worldly ends but with the eternal destiny of its members. It is different in its founding. It claims, and the claim is historically supported, that it was founded by the God-man, Jesus Christ. The head of the Church, contrary to popular belief, is not Pope Francis but Jesus Christ over Whom, as St Paul insists, death no more has dominion (*Romans* 6: 9). Its head is the living and triumphant Christ, and its soul—since it is a living thing—is the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The reason the Catholic Church differs from all others is that it is not a human institution but a divine one. It may be human in its ministers, but *the thing* itself is not human.

This understanding is lost on the majority of modern Catholics. Having no metaphysical understanding of reality, they are blind to the influence of the immaterial in material things. They do not trouble themselves with distinctions. Like William of Occam they are absorbed in the concrete singular, and eternal verities are reduced to the banal. Windsor ascribes to the Church the follies and evils committed by her members. He is not alone. Cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and laity persist in laying the blame for the evils committed by those who have

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<sup>5</sup> *Essays of a Catholic* (London, 1931, reprinted by Books for Libraries Press, Inc., New York, 1967). The full text of the letter is reproduced at [http://www.superflumina.org/PDF\\_files/belloc\\_inge.pdf](http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/belloc_inge.pdf)

refused to follow the Church's admonitions at the Church's door, instead of laying it, where it belongs, on the heads of those who have betrayed her teachings. There is no understanding of the theological truth that the Church is the spotless Bride of Christ.

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In 1954 Gerard Windsor and I were school fellows together at Sydney's Riverview College. After leaving school at the end of 1962 he was with the Jesuits for seven years—and is, in a sense, a Jesuit still—as I was a Dominican for a year and more and have remained a Dominican. The great influences of our formative years have not ceased to direct us.

Michael Baker

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018—16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (*forma ordinaria*)

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (*forma extraordinaria*)

*St Mary Magdalen*