

Beyond The Story

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*To Saint John E
as Jesus*

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INTRODUCTION

Unravelling the Church's Quandary Before the Quandary Unravels the Church

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Jesus of Nazareth could have chosen simply to express Himself in moral precepts; but like a great poet He chose the form of the parable, wonderful short stories that entertained and clothed the moral precept in an eternal form. It is not sufficient to catch man's mind, you must also catch the imaginative faculties of his mind.

DUDLEY NICHOLS

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Like my book, *Flying in the Face of Tradition – Listening to the Lived Experience of the Faithful* (2012), I have attempted to make this work more approachable and readable to a wider audience; therefore, I do not approach the subject matter with a formalised, academic research structure. In that previous book I presented my conviction that a quandary exists in today's institutional Catholic Church. I explained that at the core of this quandary is the institutional church's reluctance to embrace tradition by effectively listening and learning also from the lived experience of the faithful followers of Jesus Christ. I attempted to establish a context and candid perspective for a reawakened understanding of Catholic tradition because this could help us unravel the quandary that is taking place in the church today before the institutional church itself unravels.

Throughout the book I refer to "the church" or "the Catholic Church" and use the two terms interchangeably. Specifically I am referring to the Roman Catholic Church, of which I am: a lifelong faithful believer in the Catholic Church; a Catholic educator, administrator, consultant and trustee in Catholic organisations, and a De La Salle Christian Brother for over forty years. I am

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not a theologian. So, I write this book as a committed and engaged thinking Catholic using reasoned and informed “common Christian sense”.

Catholic tradition unfolds over time as the church interprets Holy Scripture and those sacred stories within the Old and New Testaments while listening to the lived experience of the faithful. Tradition is the dynamic that propels the story of the faithful’s response to Jesus throughout the millennia since the Word came into the world. The powerful biblical story of Peter as the Rock upon which the church is built is considered a true and timeless justification for the institutional structures that have evolved over the centuries. Indeed, that compelling sacred story and image have been the dynamic that the institutional church embraces to justify the transitions and paradigm shifts that have emerged.

However, some ambiguity exists with this image. Does tradition inform the faithful that this inspired, sacred story substantiate that when the institutional “church” speaks, listeners are hearing the voice of Peter, the Rock, on which the church stands; or are we hearing the voice of the church on which Peter, the Rock, stands? There is ambiguity when we try to clearly answer, the “Who, what, where, and why?” of when the church speaks. Some in the church are still seeking clarification while others see this as “blessed ambiguity” needing no answer. This ambiguity is not resolved because *Roma locuta, Causa finita!* (Rome has spoken. The question is closed!)

In today’s world, because the actions of the institutional church are reported immediately throughout the globe, there are very few secrets that stay secrets. Therefore, there are very few questions that are “closed” just because “Rome” says so. There is no ambiguity in the social media as to who is to blame for any misdeeds – the fault is “the church”, without any clarifications or distinctions. Consequently, the undeniable fact is that there is a growing number of those who have been faithful for all their lives who are having difficulty experiencing the tradition of Peter as the Rock that Jesus established within the institutional church. Rather they now experience these “man-made” organisational structures and modus operandi that have evolved as a departure from that tradition – to say nothing of seeing Christ in many of its actions.

Unfortunately, the stories that have been in the global press and social media will be part of the tradition inherited in the evolving future church: mis-

management, mistakes and response to sexual abuse incidents about the insensitivity of the that its hierarchy does not give will fill his [Bishop’s] heart with the pain of every man and woman that every lost sheep will be found.

Many faithful ask, “Why an institutional church showing every suffering man and woman church through the official ac passion in situations such as:

- The priests who married while they see Anglican and the Catholic priesthood
- The remarried Catholics had to end their marriages be welcomed into the church
- The gay people who are are “disordered” when seen as a matter of choice; yet, they are not “disordered” but rather in Rome after his cover-ups of pedophile priests
- The women who are con ordained to the priesthood if they do?
- The over fifty thousand ship Conference of Women by the Vatican’s Congregation in its opinion these Sisters and causes of the poor, in church than with what they

- The vast majority of dedicated priests throughout the world who are forced to remain silent as they view the actions of many bishops and Vatican leaders exonerating themselves from their now exposed “cover-ups” of clergy sex abuse of children and subsequently making the priests the “fall-guys” who must take the blame.

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Seeking “oneness” through “inclusion” rather than “exclusion”.

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In essence, are today’s actions of the institutional church (not its words or pietistic exhortations) making us a church of *communio* (that we may all be one) through the tradition of inclusion as Jesus established on the Rock; or are its actions making us a church where all must be “the same” (not necessarily

ly one) by excluding those who differ or question the Rock? Seeking “oneness” through “inclusion” rather than “exclusion” is the tradition so clearly unfolded by the sacred stories in Holy Scripture.

It will take past sacred stories from Scripture and present good stories from institutional church actions to inspire the faithful to go beyond the story and to respond and to act so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes vital and relevant in the real world at this moment in history. Certainly it is not just the Pope, cardinals and bishops alone who take Christ’s church “beyond the story”.

It is all the faithful who put flesh onto the church’s sacred bones of its cherished relics that take the institutional church beyond the story.

It is all the faithful who make God’s grace and loving care real to the challenged elderly, the infirm, and the lonely that take those unfortunate ones beyond the story.

It is all the faithful who daily serve the poor, the weak and the marginalised in this world that take those suffering ones beyond the story.

With this realisation I observed in *Flying in the Face of Tradition*:

Sexual abuse, corruption, authoritarianism, lack of transparency, and cover-ups have all been collapsing into and on top of the institutional church. It does not matter whether one is liberal or conservative, orthodox or unorthodox, believer or non-believer. One cannot help but be amazed that the prestige, reverence, and esteem that once belonged to the institutional church and its leaders are no longer

there. The “tipping point” honour, and respect that till most peoples and secular institutions longer exist.

If we do not unravel this quality of actions, the resulting negativity with the institutional church’s the faithful, will cause the church vision. We will not be able to ; church actions to better reflect the people of God. Peter once again Rock; but, not with a distorted some nostalgic past; rather, with a inspired tradition that creates a globalised world. The core truth Peter seeking to control real rather, it is a tradition of pre-emptive transparent, candid and open they may freely respond to Christ the freedom, forgiveness, acceptance not people to a regal and rigid

An abiding love and respect only to the degree that the Rock same Rock that Jesus gave to our future – not to duplicate loving response to Jesus’ invitation recreate the historical details of tradition to act out of love and self of excommunication. It is that in which the future for the People will take the institutional church and transform itself to be the tradition has always called it to be. some possible ways for the institution *elling the Church’s Quandary*

In Part One, *Beyond the Story: Future Catholic Education*, I present a case for the role of Catholic education as a major source to help the institutional church establish its human relevance and vitality, while being the “exemplar” of a spiritual dynamic that is so needed in this new, globalised society. The term “Future Catholic Education” is essential, since I believe there must also be a transformation in how we “do” Catholic education in this new world of ours. I believe it is a very realistic possibility for Catholic education to respond to this need for transformation, since in its history it has always responded with great effectiveness and dedication to the needs of the church. I do not hide my respect, admiration, and confidence in Catholic education as an instrument for transformation in the institutional church. At the same time, I believe that my strong faith and devotion to Catholic education makes me present a realistic view of its possibilities to be a dynamic and beneficial source of transformation in the institutional church.

New and rapidly changing technologies have transformed communication and information availability to be had with the click of a finger. The globe is shrinking; distance is fading; time is collapsing; and the world is flat according to Thomas Friedman! This is nothing like the world that Jesus experienced when he passed the “Keys to the Kingdom” to Peter, the Rock upon which he built His church. This is nothing like the world that church leaders and the faithful experienced over these past two millennia of building up the church and its structures. No wonder the institutional church has a quandary on its hands!

I will explore the future, seeking two paths: how the church can begin to unravel the difficult situation that has become part of its current existence; and how to improve its relationship with its own members and the world at large. Vital to reaching an agreeable solution will be a new appreciation of the role that Catholic education can play as a catalyst in bringing about a transformation in the institutional church.

Although this overview presents a case for the role of Catholic education in general, it will be obvious that there is a distinct focus on Catholic higher education. Even with this “slant” to higher education, my hope is that the basic principles – with adaptations – could be applied pedagogically, in appropriate and relevant ways, at all levels of Catholic educational institutions.

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For an intentional transformation to take place, specific and effective dynamics and qualities must be utilised in order to accomplish a new and vital existence for an institution. These basic and foundational assumptions must first be identified and then incorporated into the culture of institutions – Catholic schools and the Catholic Church included.

Transformation is always difficult and there will always be those who resist efforts to do things differently. However, in a world that is quite different than the past, it is important for all to understand the basic qualities that are essential in order to be responsive to a world that exists in the here and now. It is my hope that the institutional church that cherishes so dearly its beautiful, rich traditions will also embrace the “now” and live in the new emerging world and church and will not try to “recreate the past” but will “invent a future” that makes the Gospel alive “now”.

As I started to write this book and as I worked my way through the quandary and the unravelling beyond the story, I constantly kept in mind and heeded the advice from – of all people – that wonderful woman and comedian, Gracie Allen, when she said, “Don’t place a period where God has placed a comma. God is still speaking.”

So I begin now and write this book with many commas!