

Openings to Renewal



Peter J Cullinane

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Letters to the Church

Peter J Cullinane

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Dedicated to Pope Paul VI
to whom was entrusted the helm
where the river meets the sea.

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Foreword

Cardinal TS Williams DD

Renewal must be first and foremost *the work of the Holy Spirit*. In his opening message to the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII said

We are lacking in human resources and earthly power. Yet we lodge our trust in the power of God's Spirit who was promised to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In line with that reminder, every session of the Council and every meeting of its Commissions commenced with the prayer 'Adsumus' composed by St Isidore of Seville in 619:

We are here before you, Holy Spirit . . .
come to us, remain with us,
and enlighten our hearts.
Give us light and strength to know your will,
to make it our own, and to live it in our lives . . .
Unite us in the bond of love,
and keep us faithful to all that is true.

The pope also identified a second crucial element of renewal: it is *impelled by the love of Christ*:

As we undertake our work, therefore, we would emphasise whatever concerns human dignity, whatever contributes to genuine community of peoples. 'Christ's love impels us' (2 Cor 5:14) . . .

Renewal impelled by the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is *undertaken in joy and hope*—sure signs of the Holy Spirit. The poem by the Jesuit, Gerard Manly Hopkins, known by its opening line 'The world

is charged with the grandeur of God', expresses in its final lines the source of the Church's joy and hope:

There lies the dearest freshness deep down things . . .
Because the Holy Spirit over the bent world
broods with warm breast
and with ah, bright wings.

Renewal enlivened by hope and joy strikes out in new directions, explores new pastoral approaches, confronts with new initiatives the problems emerging in a rapidly changing world. A return to pre-conciliar methods will not respond adequately to today's challenges and difficulties. Renewal is impeded when it is mistaken for novelty. It is hampered by less than willing acceptance of the dictum *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. It is rendered impotent when maintenance is preferred to mission.

John XXIII challenged the Church to open the windows and let the breath of the Holy Spirit blow through. But now, as then, some see in the refreshing, invigorating, liberating breath danger of a destructive hurricane, and plead not only for the windows to be closed, but for the shutters to be secured as well. Their nostalgia for the past can be so pervasive that it drains them of all energy and enthusiasm, diminishing their ability to serve the Church of here and now.

Renewal doesn't require a 'new programme'. As Pope John Paul II insisted in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 2001:

The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. This is a programme which does not change with the shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication.

Bishop Peter Cullinane's book explores the implications of this. He is well qualified to do so from his thirty years of episcopal ministry, not only serving his own diocese, but also representing the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference in a number of areas central to the mission of the Church. Together with his fellow bishops he has taken part in four 'Ad Limina Apostolorum' visits to meet with the Holy Father and with officials of the Vatican Dicasteries, and has taken part in two Synods of Bishops.

Careful scholarship, pastoral sensitivity and compassion permeate each Letter. There is no one responsible for pastoral care in parish or chaplaincy who could not profit from the analyses, explanations and insights contained in each 'opening to renewal' discussed by Bishop Cullinane. It would not be out of place for some of these letters to be issued as pastoral letters intended for every parishioner, and for some to be addressed to Synods of Bishops.

Readers, whatever their roles in the Church and its renewal, through study of these Letters, will be encouraged to contribute to warm, inclusive and collaborative community, wholeheartedly and joyful celebration of Mass and sacraments, ready willingness to open themselves to growth and transformation, eagerness to serve those in need, enthusiasm to proclaim the good news of redemption, and readiness to witness to their faith by the manner of their lives, their efforts to advance Church unity, and their concern to build a just society.

Preface

These are not letters previously sent to individuals and now being brought together. They were written for this book. I have called them ‘letters’ instead of chapters to allow for their different lengths and the different levels of scholarship required by each topic. It also allows for a more personal style of writing.

I have chosen a few topics relevant to renewal, and my comments are limited to how they open up opportunities for renewal, or illustrate the ongoing need for it.

But renewal is not primarily about topics and issues, as some so tediously seem to think. Those who think the Church would be stronger if it changed some of its teachings don’t seem to take seriously enough the experience of those churches that have already changed those same teachings.

The Church, and therefore its renewal, are part of the mystery of God’s grace at work in the world. Yes, the issues matter, but how we address them depends on how radically we open ourselves to God in our own continuing conversion, contemplation and compassion.

Add to that: co-responsibility—the shared responsibility of all of us for the Church and its mission in the world. This in turn requires transparency and genuine dialogue at all levels. These letters are offered as part of that.

P J Cullinane
Bishop of Palmerston North
New Zealand

Letter One

In The Midst of Weakness—A Time of Grace

Dear Theophilus,

Much water has flowed down the Orontes since Luke wrote to you recording the Acts of the Apostles. Those were heady days. Didn't we catch a glimpse of that excitement ourselves after the Second Vatican Council? Sometimes, though, I wonder whether Luke, Barnabas and Paul would recognise us...

I know well the sacrifices that Catholics have made for the faith down to our own day. Now, with sad hearts many have seen their own children walk away from it, some of them in search of God elsewhere! What is that saying to us?

Ancient wisdom has it that the Church is always to be reformed (*ecclesia semper reformanda*)—always called to be more faithful to the gospel. That is what I mean by 'renewal' in this letter. Love and loyalty require it.

I have had the privilege of living on both sides of the Second Vatican Council. I was formed by the Church of the 1940s and 50s, and I am grateful to it. I know its mindset intimately. But my thirty years as the bishop of a diocese (in New Zealand) and as a member of the universal College of Bishops have been since the Council, and from this vantage point I recognise why Vatican II was so necessary.

Yet forty five years after the Council's conclusion, there are still some who need assurance that it was necessary, and others who need to be assured that the hope it gave them was not, and will not, be in vain.