

## Religion



# Holy rolling, papal style

IT WAS STANDING ROOM ONLY inside South Ottawa's Tudor Hall. The FIRE was burning, but the brimstone was strangely absent as a succession of evangelical speakers took the stage. In this case, the FIRE stood for faith, intercession, repentance, and evangelism. The one-day rally had an Old South revival feel, but the 500 or so people raising their arms in seemingly spontaneous outbursts of spiritual emotion and singing their praises to God were all Roman Catholics. If the delivery was something many Catholics might find somewhat—if not completely—unorthodox, the message was undeniably RC.

"If you're shooting for heaven and you fall a little short, thank God for purgatory," quipped leadoff speaker Ralph Martin of Renewal Ministries in Ann Arbor, Michigan. "But if you're shooting for purgatory and you fall a little short, well, that's not much of a fail-safe, is it?"

This isn't your granddaddy's Roman Catholic Church, folks. But it isn't exactly Jimmy Swaggart either. This is the new face of dogma. A kinder, gentler evangelism, if you will, with a decidedly RC flavour. Martin—along with Sister Anne Shields, Father

**Companions of the Cross amassed for a group shot in front of the practice green at Hunt Club Golf Course after being officially established as a Society of Apostolic Life in May 2003**

Dave Pivonka, and Peter Herbeck—is part of a new breed of engaging and entertaining Catholic clergy, theologians, and lay ministers. The four were invited to address the local faithful by the Companions of the Cross, a new charismatic order of the priesthood founded in Ottawa by Father Bob Bedard.

The speakers' messages were unmistakably conservative—a concentrated return to the pursuit of holiness through the sacraments and a devout commitment to the traditional values of the Church—but the event was anything but stodgy. Between presenters, as a rock-and-roll-style band led the congregation in upbeat songs of worship and praise, I ran into Father John Vandenakker, communications director

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Father Mark Goring led a youth rally at Tudor Hall in November 2004

for the Companions. Father John is—forgive me, Editor, for I am about to commit the journalistic sin of cliché—a big, jolly man. “Isn’t this great!” he enthused, his demeanour consistent with the informality adopted by the Companions, which includes the use of given names rather than surnames.

Establishing a new order or, more formally, Society of Apostolic Life, is no easy feat in the Catholic Church. In the case of the Companions, it took almost two decades. In 1985, Father Bob, then a teacher of English and history at St. Pius X High School, started an informal spiritual support group with Father John (then a seminarian) and two other men who were considering entering the seminary the following year: Father Paul Shepherd of Holy Redeemer Parish in Kanata and Alan Dufour, who ended up forgoing the priesthood and is now a teacher with the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board.

Within about a year, the group had established a vision, the cornerstone of which was the renewal of the Church through evangelism and acceptance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and were well on their way to becoming a distinct community of priests. Over the next three years, that vision was articulated into the written statutes necessary for then Archbishop J.A. Plourde to grant them recognition, in 1988, to operate as a public clerical association of the faithful. By 1994, the Companions were able to convince current Arch-

bishop Marcel Gervais that a divine spiritual gift existed within their burgeoning community, and he granted Father Bob permission to move toward becoming a new order. Several more years of community-wide work were required to establish the constitutions and rules that were eventually submitted to the Vatican. Papal approval finally came through in the fall of 2002, and Gervais officially consecrated the Companions of the Cross as a Society of Apostolic Life in an ironically solemn celebration at Notre Dame Basilica on May 2, 2003.

In modern times, at least in North America, evangelism is more associated with Bible-thumping television preachers of the born-again variety, but it is nothing new to the Catholic Church. According to the New Testament, St. Peter was the first evangelist. In Acts, Chapter 2, Luke describes the day of the Pentecost, which Catholics view as the birthday of the Church. In a nutshell: the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus’ apostles as tongues of fire. The 12, imbued with the grace of God, spoke to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Shavuot (Jewish holy day commemorating Moses receiving the 10 commandments) in all the known languages of the day (speaking in tongues). Then Peter called on the masses to follow Christ. It is said 3,000 were baptized that day.

Throughout its history, the Church has gone through many cycles of decline and renewal. At the opening of

the Vatican II Council (1962-65), the announced purpose of which was spiritual renewal of the Church, Pope John XXIII prayed for intercession with these words: "Send upon the Church again, O Lord, as at the beginning, the fullness of your Holy Spirit—a new Pentecost for our day."

It is not surprising, then, that the Companions view their mission as an outpouring of grace from the Holy Spirit. Referring to their more famous brethren, the Jesuits and Franciscans, who, in their respective times, contributed to other evangelical renewals, Father John says, "We see ourselves as heir to that sort of dimension of the Church."

Of course, there are many who don't share the Companions' penchant for demonstrative expressions of faith. In a *Western Catholic Reporter* letter to the editor of March 2004, Paul Kokoski of Hamilton wrote: "Many in the Church today are growing tired of showing up for Mass only to have to endure what often resembles a Dionysus festival complete with maenad worshippers. What is needed today in the Holy Mass is not loudness and movement but silence and reverence—a return to the sense of the sacred."

But their overt style is not to be confused with a lack of fundamentalism, says Father John. "Over the years, [conservative Catholics] have actually come to see us as allies, because one of the remarkable features of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is that theologically, it's extremely orthodox."

One characteristic necessary for establishing an order is a charism. Charisms (or charismata) are spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of these are wisdom, faith, healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Prior to Vatican II, the institutional Church was transcendent over the mystical Church, and very little attention was paid to charisms except in relation to saints or shrines. But the role of charisms in the modern church was affirmed by the Council, as summarized by Jean Hémary in *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis de Monfort* (Montfort Publications, 1994). "The Spirit gives to the Church hierarchical gifts, which are given to priests for the exercise of their ministry, and charismatic gifts, given to the faithful for the common good. The

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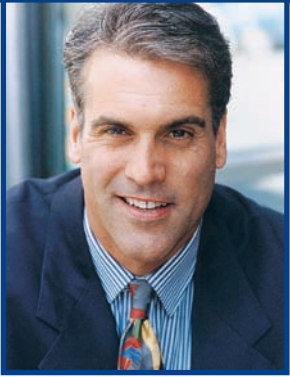
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**Community members from left to right: Randy Hendriks, Rick Jaworski, Christian Riesbeck, Francis Frankovich, Daren Bryk, Ed Wade and Sean Wenger**

faithful have the right and the duty to exercise these charisms as long as they do so in a spirit of order and unity.”

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is considered to have started in February of 1967 when a group of students from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, gathered for a weekend retreat, the focus of which was the first four chapters of Acts (those that deal specifically with the Pentecost and charisms). During that meeting, it is reported, charismatic gifts were manifested within the participants. The movement spread like tongues of fire, growing to an estimated peak of 60 million North American participants in the early 1970s. The faithful believe that this phenomenon is a direct, divine answer to the prayers of the Fathers of Vatican II, that the Holy Spirit has once again been let loose, so to speak, to bestow His gifts where He will. Current estimates of membership in the movement run at approximately 10 million for North America and 120 million worldwide.

Most of that membership is within the laity, but clerical societies like the Companions of the Cross—the first new order of priests in Canada to receive approval from Rome in over 50 years—attest to the fact that the charismatic movement has also found a niche within the institutional Church.

And like the charismatic renewal at large, the Companions have been quite successful in spreading their influence. They now have ministries in Ottawa, Combermere (Ontario), Houston (Texas), Halifax, and Toronto and for the past

several years have had an average of about 30 seminarians from approximately 100 applications.

There is little doubt that Vatican II has gone a long way to addressing many of the grassroots relevancy issues that plagued the Church in the mid-20th century, but it has also caused a lot of confusion among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The multi-faceted appearance of the Church has led to criticism of division and hypocrisy. Father John sees a more philosophical reality. “Like a thousand flowers in a garden, it just reflects the natural diversity of how God has created us, and that’s why every community doesn’t see itself as the answer to what ails the Church but as part of a general answer or new opportunity for growth and renewal.”

And while Rome has become soft on matters of discipline—the ways in which the Mass is celebrated, the role of women and girls as Eucharistic ministers and altar servers, the administration of sacramental rites, and the acceptance of widespread charismatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit—it remains hard-line on matters of dogma and social policy.

Dogma is simply a set of mandatory beliefs. For Catholics, these are the core principles of faith as set out in the Nicene creed: one God, the Father; one Lord, Jesus Christ; the virgin birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascendance of Christ; judgment day; one true Church; baptism; the forgiveness of sins; the Holy Spirit; the communion of saints; the resurrection of the dead; and life

everlasting. It also includes any doctrines that have been dogmatically defined by any of the 21 ecumenical councils (of which Vatican II was the last) or by the Pope. Two of the most famous of these are the 1854 decree by Pope Pius IX of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (i.e., her own birth free of original sin, not Jesus' virgin birth), and the 1950 decree by Pius XII regarding the Assumption of Mary (the raising of both her body and soul to heaven).

Contrary to popular belief, the Church is extremely prudent about dogmatically defining doctrine for both practical and spiritual reasons, and most of what is discussed in the media and general public as being dogma is not. On the practical side, the reluctance of the Church to set its teachings in stone is based on the fact that it is often divisive, as attested by the splitting off of Protestant denominations. Spiritually, it is based on the firmly held belief in the supremacy of God and fallibility of man. Even the Pope realizes that while presumably God cannot make a mistake, he can.

The confusion lies in the fact that Church teachings regarding social policies such as abortion, homosexuality, and the ordination of women, while not dogma, are nevertheless not optional for Catholics. This is because interpretation of scripture, which social policies are invariably based on, remains the sole domain of the Church (i.e., the Pontiff). And while the Church has a history of upholding many long-standing traditions and disciplines, it routinely overturns them as well.

In this context, it is not in spite of their charismatic nature but because of it that the Companions are so in sync with the Vatican. Their fundamentalism is closely tied to scripture and anchored in one of the core elements of dogma: the belief in, as stated in the Nicene Creed, "...the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and Son he is worshipped and glorified."

It is the great dichotomy of the Catholic Church—and a testament to the lack of understanding of the historical—that conservatism can take on the appearance of radicalism. Father John: "For Catholics who say, 'That's not my style of prayer, that's not for me,' our response is: the style may be not for you, but the Holy Spirit is always for you. The Holy Spirit is not optional to Catholic Christian life."

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