

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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CHOICES

The only hope left for a vigorous Vatican II Church in my life time is a new pope with the spirit of Pope St. John XXIII. Soon. I assume that is not going to happen.

That would be fun to see, though. Collegiality at all levels. Subsidiarity throughout the church. De-Latinized liturgy, led by ordained men and women, with meaningful local adaptations. Courageous champions of social justice all over the world. The church greeting the modern world with open arms and intelligent dialogue. Vocations to priesthood, religious life, lay ministry everywhere. Ecumenical and interfaith collaboration on multiple fronts. Evangelization thriving because of all of the above. What could have been... what could have been!

But it's not going to happen. Nostalgic, wishful thinking. But one fun side-effect of another John XXIII would be to see how the current crop of bishops would respond to this new pope. Most of them have been selected because of their loyalty to the pope. Would that loyalty transfer to a very different pope? Do they do an immediate about-face on core issues and follow their new leader, or do they fight back to preserve their pre-Vatican II power and privilege? Intriguing to watch. An HBO mini-series, at least.

But since it isn't going to happen, what choices do we have, those of us who will never see our leadership adopt the vision of Vatican II? I think they can be narrowed down to three:

1. Leave. Like so many before us, we can say "the hell with it" and just leave the church. For most of us, that simply means stop going to Mass. Maybe keep enough of a tie for weddings and funerals. Or, join another denomination. Or, no faith community. This is a viable option, not only out of anger at church leadership, but because the official, hierarchical Catholic Church no longer provides spiritual meaning or anything resembling faith, hope, and love. Just doctrine and more doctrine.
2. Stay and ignore. This option is also viable. Concentrate on your local parish. Find a pastor you can relate to and respect. Become active in whatever ministry you find attractive and where you are needed. Nurture your spiritual life through whatever means works for you. But ignore whatever the hierarchy says or does. Their credibility is shot and you need to take care of your own spiritual journey, and you can do it without them, even within the Catholic Church. We have rich and varied spiritual traditions you could follow.
3. Become prophets. Stay and confront. This option generally takes some real thought and practice, unless you already are a prophet. But many of us are peace-preferring people, and we know what prophets are. Scary! We read the Scriptures; we know what happened to the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and his apostles. If our times call for more prophets, we would rather it be other people. Maybe more outspoken priests and perhaps a bishop here and there. But we laypeople who know things are seriously wrong - we too can be prophets.

We can speak up boldly on local and national issues. It's okay. Do it your way, on the problems you care about. Not every issue is worth a picket sign, but some are. Do it alone or with others. Join Call to Action, Faithful of Southern Illinois, Voice of the Faithful, or a similar group. Confront without expecting change. Confront because it is the right thing to do. Passive resistance. An active, passive resistance. Study Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and, of course, Jesus. Sign petitions. Make statements. Protest.

In any case, stick to your belief in God, Jesus, the Church, and Vatican II, and when you die, you will die with dignity and integrity, a life well-lived and a death well died.

And when you enter into paradise it will likely be Pope St. John XXIII who will greet you with open arms because the first Pope, Peter, will be too busy explaining to some bewildered bishops and popes why their entry into heaven has been delayed.