

# CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #4

## FACILITATING GOOD CHANGE IN THE CHURCH: RENEW, RETHINK, REFORM

**RENEW:** The focus is on being transformed in Christ; being drawn into the Trinitarian life through the Paschal Mystery; becoming sacraments of God's liberating love in the world; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Originating Event of the Tradition: ie the Paschal Mystery; it is the heart of good change in the Church and is interdependent with **rethinking** and **reforming**.

**RETHINK:** The focus is on new understanding & articulation of faith; typically this is the work of scholars, but all must contribute; it must be grounded in, expressive of, and always interdependent with the ongoing **renewing** process; it must also maintain interdependence with the **reforming**; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Faith Tradition: ie what we believe.

**REFORM:** The focus is on new forms (structures, rituals, symbols etc) to express the faith; it requires the work of scholars & others to ensure the new forms express faithfully both the authentic Faith Tradition and the social-cultural reality of the people; it must be grounded in, expressive of and interdependent with the ongoing **renewing** process; it must be interdependent with the **rethinking**; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Form Tradition: ie how we express what we believe

### COMMENTS

1. When we speak of **renewal in the Church** - or **facilitating good change in the Church** - we are speaking of the **renewing** and the **rethinking** and the **reforming**; we, the Church, must be dedicated to this threefold process in every age in every place - but we must be especially committed to this in a time of immense cultural and social transition such as the current period of history.

2. Genuine **reformers** and **rethinkers** will be deeply committed to **renewing**. They will be convinced that the **renewing** always begins with their own personal faith journey and that the **renewing** never ends.

3. When the **rethinking** - or more precisely the **rethinker** - becomes more or less disconnected from a genuine **renewing**, the **rethinking** tends to lose its *raison d'être* and becomes more or less dislocated from the Originating Event (the Paschal Mystery) and thus disconnected also from the authentic Faith Tradition and, in turn, unable to effectively support the authentic Form Tradition. In principle, it would be possible to have much **rethinking** within the Church without facilitating good change.

4. When the **reforming** - or more precisely the **reformer** - becomes more or less disconnected from a genuine **renewing**, the **reforming** tends to lose its *raison d'être* and becomes more or less disconnected from the Originating Event (the Paschal Mystery) and thus disconnected also from the authentic Form Tradition and unable to adequately express the authentic Faith Tradition. In principle, it would be possible to have wholesale **reform** within the Church without facilitating good change.

7. When the **renewing** is not authentically, actively and constantly pursued as the source and end for all change within the Church, emphasis on the **rethinking** and/or the **reforming** will tend to lead to certain more or less unhelpful expressions; for example:

a) **reductionism** - the process of change may be reduced to one or more issue, question or idea, to a set of things to do, strategies or behaviours; reductionism may propose that "If only we do this or that ...." or "All we need to do is this ..."; reductionism is about allaying anxiety by reducing life to clear and controllable issues which are then managed by simple answers and strategies; two very common forms of reductionism are *functionalism* and *moralism*:

i) *functionalism* - this form of reductionism says renewal is a problem solving exercise; strategies, skills and finance are the key to renewal therefore; the focus is on getting jobs done,

changing structures; functionalism gives primacy to competence, efficiency, quantification, measuring; functionalism is fundamentally egotistically; it is about allaying anxiety by establishing the illusion of control through problem solving and efficiency. (It should not be confused with functionality!)

ii) *moralism* - this form of reductionism says renewal is about establishing - or in fact re-establishing - disciplined behaviour; the Gospel is reduced to a moral system, Jesus is reduced to a moral teacher, and all we have to do to set things right is obey the rules; moralism is basically about allaying anxiety by having everyone conform to a system of behaviour, thus establishing the illusion that everything is under control; such reductionism is typically angry and punitive towards those who refuse to conform; (It should not be confused with morality!)

b) **politicization** - particular issues are taken to "the people" with a view to forcing the issue by unleashing strong emotional currents - especially anxiety, fear and anger; politicization subverts all else to that struggle for victory; it shifts issues from the rational to the emotional, from the conversational to the confrontational; the politicizer may in fact be innocent of the process or use it cleverly to defeat an otherwise securely entrenched foe; the politicizers might also be simply angry people externalizing an inner conflict to avoid dealing with it as their own (ie by refusing the call of **renewal**).

c) **withdrawal** - the person simply walks away from what seems to be a pointless, irrelevant or unrewarding situation; if my centre of gravity is in the system and the system denies me the power to participate, for sanity's sake fight or flight are the only options - generally the latter option is taken if the fight proves unwinnable; withdrawal - whether it is physical (ie I absent myself from the system and its activities) or psychological (ie I continue to stay in there but withdraw into a private world of indifference) - may in fact be a useful (temporary) strategy to avoid distressing rage and discouragement.

#### **Reflect on the following references to Church documents:**

1. *(The following prayer (in its Latin form) was used at the Second Vatican Council before every meeting of preparatory commissions and conciliar commissions. It is thought to have been composed by St Isidore of Seville for the Second Provincial Council of Seville in 619. It was used during the Fourth Provincial Council of Toledo, Spain, in 633. This prayer was also used at the beginning of the sessions of the First Vatican Council in 1869:)*

We are here before You, O Holy Spirit, conscious of our innumerable sins, but united in a special way by your Holy Name. Come and abide with us. Deign to penetrate our hearts. Be the guide of our actions, indicate the path we should take, and show us what we must do so that, with Your help, our work may be in all things pleasing to You. May You be our only inspiration and the overseer of our intentions, for You alone possess a glorious name together with the Father and the Son. May You, who are infinite justice, never permit that we be disturbers of justice. Let not our ignorance induce us to evil, nor flattery sway us, nor moral and material interest corrupt us. But unite our hearts to You alone, and do it strongly, so that, with the gift of Your grace, we may be one in You and may in nothing depart from the truth. Thus, united in Your name, may we in our every action follow the dictates of your mercy and justice, so that today and always our judgments may not be alien to You and in eternity we may obtain the unending reward of our actions. Amen.

2. *(The following words are excerpts from the first "document" of the Second Vatican Council - "Message to Humanity" - issued by the Council Fathers on October 20, 1962, as the Council was beginning:)*

In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we might be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ. We shall take pains to present to the people of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and assent to it. .... We as pastors devote all our energies and thoughts to renewal of ourselves and the flocks committed to us, so that there may radiate before all, the lovable features of Jesus Christ, who shines in our hearts. ... Faith, hope and the love of Christ impel us to serve our brothers and sisters, thereby patterning ourselves after the example of the Divine Teacher who "came not to serve but to be served" (Mt. 20:28). Hence, the Church too was not born to dominate but to serve. He laid down His life for us and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Accordingly, while we hope that the light of faith will shine more clearly and more vigorously as a result of this Council's efforts, we look forward to a spiritual renewal from which will also flow a

happy impulse on behalf of human values such as scientific discoveries, technological advances, and a wider diffusion of knowledge. ... We urgently turn our thoughts to all the anxieties by which modern humanity is afflicted. Hence, let our concern swiftly focus first of all on those who are especially lowly, poor and weak. ... We would emphasise whatever concerns the dignity of humanity, whatever contributes to a genuine community of peoples. ... The Supreme Pontiff, John XXIII in a radio message delivered on September 11, stressed two points especially. The first dealt with peace between peoples. ... We are giving witness that all are brothers and sisters, whatever their race or nation. ... The Supreme Pontiff also pleads for social justice. ... To be sure, 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. Hence we humbly and ardently call for all to work along with us in building up a more just and loving city in this world. We call not only on our brothers and sisters whom we serve as shepherds, but also upon all Christians, and all people of goodwill. ... For this is the divine plan, that through love God's kingdom may already shine out on earth in some fashion as a preview of God's eternal kingdom.

3. By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind. She is also an instrument of the achievement of such union and unity. (*Lumen Gentium*, n.1)

4. The Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal. (*Lumen Gentium*, n.8)

5. While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the people of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation (cf *Lumen Gentium*, n.15) simultaneously manifesting and exercising God's love for humanity. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.45)

6. All the Christian faithful must make an effort, in accord with their own condition, to live a holy life and promote the growth of the Church and its continual sanctification (*The Code of Canon Law (1983)*, n. 210).

7. In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all co-operate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function. (*The Code of Canon Law (1983)*, n. 208).

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Having read carefully both sides of this sheet, what questions does it raise for you?
2. Explain in your own words, with reference to your life experience, the differences between *renew*, *rethink* and *reform*.
3. In what way do you think *you* can promote good change within the Church?
4. Recall an experience which typifies for you the Church at its best.
5. Is prayer a regular part of your life? What is happening?
6. What caught your attention about the "Message to Humanity" (#2 above)?
7. What does it mean for you to say that "the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God" (#3 above)?