

2013 CNWE Conference in Sudbury

Will welcome

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speaking from her own silencing experience



"Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise" - strong words reflecting a firm commitment to truths not acceptable by the institutional Church. Praiseworthy or to be condemned?

Expressed and echoing from the 16th century, these words of Martin Luther, Augustinian monk, theologian and professed reformer of the Roman Catholic Church, resulted in the emergence of Protestantism.

Centuries *earlier*, Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church and reformer within the 14th century Church tells all who would hear: *"Cry out as if you had a million voices; it is silence that kills the world."*

Centuries *later*, another reformer, in the 20th century, Martin L. King, Jr., Baptist minister and recognized contemporary prophet, proclaims: *"Our lives begin to end when we are silent about the things that matter to us."*

Dissent has been and continues to be a significant thread throughout modern church history. Words, filled with pain and steeped in conviction, continue to reverberate in today's church through the voices of women and men who take a conscientious stand for justice and against religious oppression. Why? Many internal and external factors have surely influenced this contemporary, increased dissent; an educated laity being a pivotal

factor - women and men who have imbibed and claimed the spirit, content and challenge of Vatican II (1962-65). In this process both an evolution and a revolution have taken place.

The people of God have been active in a transformation reflecting the vision of Vatican II that continues to call all of us *from* a subservient posture *toward* one of equality. This movement's progress can be measured as we move

<u>From</u>	<u>Toward</u>
<i>Passivity</i>	<i>Active Participation</i>
<i>Parent/Child Relationship</i>	<i>Mature Adulthood</i>
<i>Clericalism</i>	<i>Living Community</i>
<i>Hierarchical Structure</i>	<i>People of God</i>

Countering this movement has been the pervasive paradigm of a patriarchal worldview reflected in Church tradition, doctrine and structure. Evidence, it seems to me that we are indeed in the midst of a paradigm shift; one that needs attention, direction and deliberate participation on our part if this shift is to be realized and to result in an effective, operative, alternative world view.

Church law, Council documents and Lived Experience - both individual and communal - all support conscientious positions on issues that relate to individual human dignity and the common good. The following brief excerpts illustrate the Church's belief if not its policy:

In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they possess, the Christian faithful have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the church.

They also have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence towards their pastors.
(Canon 212 & 213)

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all people should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against their convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others

It is in accordance with their dignity that all human beings, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they know it and to direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth.

(Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae , Chapter 1, #2)

So, what will it take for the institutional church to resolve the inconsistency between its teaching and its practice? To recognize that its very existence is at stake in its stubborn maintenance of the status quo? Will the institution itself have to undergo the Death and Resurrection it preaches? Is this, in fact, what is happening as the popular church and women-church continue to emerge throughout the world?

What stand(s) do we, as women and men of faith, continue to take? What directions do we choose? We know courageous and authentic responses require taking new paths, relinquishing traditional institutions and building new structures which will bring growth and reverence life. This assumes openness and ongoing conversion - not an easy task but a necessary one.