

## **Sad News from the Roman Catholic World**

The Orthodox Churches certainly have many problems. Sometimes there is indeed little cause for rejoicing. For example, there is a general lack of faithfulness to the Orthodox Tradition. There is a divisive modernism, with its lightweight, over-intellectual 'Diet Orthodoxy', which justifies a less than serious attitude to the Church. And at the other extreme there is a pharisaic sectarianism and ritualism. Both tendencies persecute the faithful and faithfulness, constantly creating new 'jurisdictions'.

Also, in the sometimes westernised new calendar Churches, in Greece, the Middle East and sometimes even in Bulgaria and Romania, there are simony, corruption and freemasonry, especially in the Diasporas dependent on those Churches. Elsewhere, there are other forms of local political interference in Church life, for instance in the Russian Church, in the Ukraine, Estonia and Moldova. In the Slav Churches more generally there is often a lack of infrastructure, a lack of money and means to restore Orthodoxy after the evil Communist ravages of the twentieth century. Among the clergy there are poverty and overwork, on account of the need to have a secular job merely in order to survive. Everywhere the Orthodox world is threatened by Western secularism, which attracts people away from supporting the Church. Nevertheless, the mere survival of the Orthodox Church is proof that it is governed not by human-beings, but by the Holy Spirit.

Stories from the last few weeks concerning Roman Catholicism in Western Europe should at least make us realise that the situation could be even worse. In England we are used to hearing anecdotal evidence about this. For example, we hear that the average Roman Catholic priest can only rely on a fixed salary of £3,000 per year with additional collections at Christmas and Easter. Or else we hear that without Polish priests, imported from Poland by budget airline for the weekend, and Polish parishioners, living and working here, many Roman Catholic churches would have closed in Great Britain. But below are some concrete facts.

In 2008 in Holland a special survey conducted by the Harlem and Rotterdam Roman Catholic Dioceses and released this month found that 927 Roman Catholic churches have closed in Holland since 1970 and that another 1200 churches will close in the near future. One third of the closed churches have been demolished, the rest have been used for other purposes, from being turned into old people's homes and exhibition halls to their transformation into shops, hotels and night clubs (rather like many closed Anglican churches in this country).

According to the above survey, sociologists predict that the number of Dutch people who will consider that they belong to no religion at all will climb to 72% by 2020. At present, already over two thirds of the Dutch population of 16 million are atheists. Although fifty years ago 42% of Dutch people were Roman Catholics, this figure is now below 17% and, it seems, it will fall to 10% by 2020. The situation in Holland is said to be the same for the Protestant denominations, with 34% belonging to them in the 1950s and, as predicted, only 11% by 2020.

Meanwhile in neighbouring Belgium, with nearly 8,000,000 nominal Roman Catholics, the German-language Catholic News Agency has reported that Roman Catholicism there is short of 1,000 priests and the average age of active clergy is nearly 70. Many Catholic churches are closing or are up for sale in Belgium, either because there are no priests or else because there is no money to pay them. In France, probably just as secularised as Great Britain, there is now a movement among former Roman Catholics to ask for 'debaptism'. In other words they wish the fact they have renounced Roman Catholicism to be officially recognised. In Poland, as in Slovakia and Hungary, Roman Catholicism used to be looked on as the heart of the resistance movement to Communism. However, with Communism gone and Western European

pornography, abortion and divorce taking over, the situation is now going the same way as elsewhere in the so-called 'free world'.

According to a report from the University of Poznan, carried out by the Professor of Theology, Josef Baniak, almost half of Polish Roman Catholic priests would like to marry and a third admit to having mistresses. (In France the figure for Roman Catholic priests with mistresses is only 20%, though the figure is much higher in Spain, Portugal and Italy and the practice is almost universal in Latin America and Africa). Such was the result of the Professor's study, carried out among 823 priests and monks all over Poland. The Professor considers that compulsory celibacy is bad both mentally and physically for the clergy and it also isolates them from their parishioners. The Professor reminds his readers that clerical celibacy was made compulsory only in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries (after the Schism, when Roman Catholicism was founded) and was not at all required by the Gospels.

<http://orthodoxengland.org.uk/sadnews.htm>