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One soul's 'movin' on'

Thomas C. Fox | Sep. 10, 2012 NCR Today

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Jesus taught us how to live, not what to think. Of course, as people began to gather in his name, the ?what to think? group seemed to have the greater say.

That?s perhaps understandable and is an essential part of our Catholic heritage. However, it becomes a problem when the ?thinkers? become so rigid they edge out the ?living? message ? how we act in our daily lives. When this happens the Catholic tent shrinks, for two reasons. Some people are told to leave; others, no longer feeling comfortable, decide they no longer want to stay.

I was pondering these dynamics after I received an email over the weekend from John Chuchman, a name familiar with anyone who?s spent more than a few minutes in the Catholic blogosphere. Chuchman?s the author of a number of books and blogs, including ?Is God Laughing or Crying??? [1]Speaking My Truth [2]?? and John Chuchman Events??.
[3]
Loss, grief, and care giving counselor, this is one empathetic soul. Poet, illustrator, writer and speaker, he has more than one creative center. A graduate of John Carroll University, his first career was as a Ford Motor Company executive. After nearly a quarter century in the auto business, he switched gears and started a ministry to the bereaved by volunteering with Hospice.

He started by working with men who had lost their wives. Chuchman went on to help Hospices train new volunteers, conduct staff and volunteer in-service programs, and organize retreats. He has also helped churches and dioceses organize bereavement programs while conducting workshops and parish missions. He once said he works to ?help grievers, caregivers or anyone on a spiritual quest.?

Affable and open-minded, an explorer of the Spirit, it must be said he has not always precisely towed the line of strict contemporary church orthodoxy. In July, 2010, for example, he took a leap and was ordained a priest by the Catholic Diocese of One Spirit. Today he is pretty much *persona non grata* on Catholic properties. This is sad because Chuchman has a lot to offer.

I asked him recently to sum up his life?s journey. His response:

Twenty-two years of formal education in Catholic Institutions.
Thirty-two years with Ford.
Twenty-two years of Bereavement Ministry.

Fifty-four years of marriage with four children, one deceased.
Twenty years of awakening and anger and disgust at what the hierarchs have done to my Church.
Too many years of Paying, Praying, Obeying.
Seventy-five years of Spiritual Growth.

Spiritual expansion, we know well, can spill over the limits of acceptable church orthodoxy, especially ?orthodoxy? in matters not tied to the creed, such as, say, priestly celibacy or preferences for birth control.

Two months ago Chuchman lamented online that nearly everyone in his close family had left the church. ?The American Catholic exodus is gathering momentum,? he wrote. ?Dioceses are closing parishes across the country.?

When he brought this to the attention of an archbishop friend, the prelate told him it is ?a necessary purification.? Oh, Sure.

Chuchman now says he, too, is, ?Movin? On.? What?s sad here is a person with so much to give to others finds our church too unbearably small-minded to stay within.

I don?t suspect we?ll stop hearing from the ?poetman.? But he has removed the ?Roman? before the ?Catholic? in his identity. Maybe this represents growth for our friend, but I feel sadness nevertheless.

Here?s how he shared the sad news, as he often does, in the form of poem.

> **Movin? On**
> I no longer believe
> that Catholic Church Hierarchy
> is in sole possession of the Fullness of Truth
> and that they are the sole representatives of
> the Creator
> or Jesus Christ.
>
> I refuse to
> put down, demean, and exclude people
> who are different than I
> or
> who have different views.
>
> I refuse to support an organization that
> discriminates against
> women, gays and lesbians, married people,
> anyone not baptized Catholic and abiding by all its rules and regulations.
>
> I refuse to abide by the notion that
> Our Creator is only masculine.
>
> I refuse to support an organization
> that abuses children and protects the abusers.
>
> I no longer believe
> I am fallen and responsible for the death of Jesus.

I refuse to support an organization
that is not transparent and accountable to us
and that misuses my freely donated monies.

I refuse to support an organization
that reneges on its own promises (Vatican II).

I refuse to support an organization
that lobbies for religious freedom,
but tramples on the religious freedom of its own members.

I refuse to support an organization
that rejects change
and persists dwelling
in the middle-ages.

I?m moving on because
my Faith tells me that:

God is revealed in all of Creation.
God?s Goodness is poured out on all creatures.
God is immanent in Creation.
A touch of the Divine exists within us all.
I am a beautiful creation of God.

Though God is perfectly revealed in Creation,
God is also perfectly hidden,
Transcendent.
God is an unfathomable Mystery.
I cannot fully know God.

In recognizing the presence of God in Creation,
We are called to Celebrate life
in all we say and do
and to offer Thanks for
the Gift of Life.
The sense of the Presence of God within
calls us all to
Express our Joy
in Art, Poetry, Music, and Dance
and
to spend or lives
seeking Justice and Truth.
My life is Celebration, Thanksgiving,
and Quest.

The indwelling Spirit
and the Gifts of the Spirit
lead to Transformation

by leading us to respond
to God?s Grace
with Love and Compassion
in all human activity.

I strive to
Live in Love.

For those not familiar with Chuchman's writing you can find some of his books on Amazon [4]

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