

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 18, 2012 at 10:26am

Recalling memories of the pre-Vatican II era

by Isabella R. Moyer

NCR Today

Maureen Weber is the Canadian news editor of the *Prairie Messenger*, a weekly Catholic journal based in Saskatchewan, Canada. She is one of those gifted writers who weaves together visual descriptions with heartfelt, honest emotions. Doing so, she gently places you smack in the middle of the story she is telling.

This week, she describes her childhood experience of the pre-Vatican II church. Maureen and I are the same age. Although I spent my early years in England, her descriptions are eerily similar to my own:

To this child of the 60s, God had a terrible face, and I didn't know if I had a friend in Jesus. Supposedly the message was of love, but I couldn't reconcile that with the fact that the nice girls from the public school couldn't be included in it because they were born into the "wrong" families. Maybe there was secretly something wrong with me too, and God darn well knew it, because he knew everything.

The church of my childhood had all the answers, in stark black and white. Answers but no questions. It should have been easy, but even as a child life had many shadows.

She wonders about today's young adults who yearn for these "good old days" in the church.

Perhaps they seek a transcendent experience to alleviate the societal pressures of being on 24-hour twitter call, the dehumanizing marketplace where people are disposable and worth is measured by possessions, the uncertainty of tough economic times and the pressure to compete in a high-priced world. And that's OK. Prayer is necessary, but it was never meant to supply us with railings of false security, or thick curtains that ultimately can't be drawn against real life. It is meant to pull us into the mystery of the questions, knowing that though there are no magic answers, we need not be afraid.

On the plus side, the younger Maureen knew the direct line to God. It was 8-cum-spiri-2-2-0!

If you are old enough to have lived through the pre-Vatican II years, what memories do you have? If you are a post-Vatican II baby, what images do these years conjure up in your mind?

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