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Where to find optimism in these days of pessimism

Isabella R. Moyer | Sep. 27, 2012 NCR Today

Fr. Andrew Britz, OSB, was the editor of *The Prairie Messenger* [1] from 1983 to 2004. Sadly, he died in February at the age of 71. (The PM is a Catholic weekly newspaper published by St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster, Saskatchewan.) A collection of some of his timeliest editorials was published in 2010, called *Truth to Power, The Journalism of a Benedictine Monk* [2]. In the foreword to the book, Sr. Joan Chittister described his strong editorial voice as "wrapped in sharp argument and fair dealing -- tasting of justice, sounding like the Gospels, and rooted in faith."

This week's issue of The PM includes a 1986 editorial by Britz, "Post-Vatican II Church." [3] In this editorial, he reminds us of the spirit of optimism of Vatican II:

> Pope John's trumpet call at the council's opening to disregard "prophets of doom" continued to ring forth throughout the council.
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> Optimism does strange things to people and even to huge institutions like the Catholic Church. Suddenly the church found great things in other confessions of Christianity and even in non-Christian religions. Not surprisingly the bishops rejected the centuries-old tenet that error has no rights and espoused instead a profoundly encompassing teaching on religious freedom.
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> The council's spirit of optimism was most clearly seen in its treatment of the church in the modern world. While not closing its eyes to various problems in the world, the council remained upbeat in listing the signs of the times. It found good news everywhere -- and, incidentally, excited people the world over in the process.
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> The clearest sign that the courageous spirit of the council is being rejected is not, as was said above, in the formulation of liberal or conservative theological principles, but in the espousal of pessimism. An institutional church which spends more of its energy condemning evils than convincing its members and the world that Jesus Christ is Good News in every age and every situation has effectively rejected the council.

It's easy to fall into despondent pessimism these days. Those of us who consider ourselves Vatican II Catholics and those who support the "reform of the reform" are both guilty of pointing fingers of blame at the other. Where is the spirit of optimism? Where are the messages of hope? Where is the joyful proclaiming of the Gospel? They are there, if we but look for them. Optimism requires intentionality, the ability to tune our minds and hearts to seek out and gain energy from the positive signs around us.

Yesterday, I wrote a post for my blog [4], Catholic Dialogue, on the recent pronouncements [5] by the German bishops, denying sacraments to those who refuse to pay the church tax. I had to edit and re-edit the piece to tone down the anger I was feeling. Shortly after it was posted, I received a wonderful comment pointing me to another vision of church -- one that gives me hope. It raised my spirits and reminded me the church is greater

than a group of bishops desperately clinging to a need to control both their flock and their finances.

Going back to Britz's description of Vatican II optimism, how do we remain upbeat in listing the signs of the times? How do we tune our radar to seek out the good news? When we find it, how do we share the excitement with others?

How do you nourish your spirit of optimism? Who or what gives your faith a much needed boost of hope and joy?

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[1] http://prairiemessenger.ca/Index.html
[2] http://prairiemessenger.ca/Andrewbook.html
[3] http://prairiemessenger.ca/09_26_2012/AMBed_09_26_12.html
[4] http://catholicdialogue.com/2012/09/26/update-german-court-catholics-who-dont-pay-religious-tax-must-leave-church-national-catholic-reporter
[5] http://ncronline.org/node/32359