

DIVINE RENOVATION

SUMMARIZING CHAPTER THREE

“The Experience of a Maintenance Church”

THE COURAGE TO ADMIT WE'RE HURTING. “When any person suffers a deep amnesia, there are always consequences from this loss of identity. The awareness of this identity loss results in an experience of pain. This is also true within the Church, the House of God, built upon the cornerstone of Christ and having the apostles and prophets for its foundation. (Ephesians 2:20) It is a spiritual edifice made up of living stones: the faithful members of our Church. (1 Peter 2:5) If we are confused about our deepest identity, there will be pain: institutional pain, and pain in the individual members. If the Church is to be rebuilt, it must first be healed. The first step in healing is acknowledging the pain.”

FR. MALLON'S COURAGE TO SAY WHAT MOST PRIESTS ARE AFRAID TO SAY. “And then there is the pain of priests who labour in the trenches, desperately trying to hold on to the passion that made them choose to “give it all up” and become a priest. ... Very few of us had dreamed of being priests since we were children. Most of us had strayed from the fold, and some with great aplomb. Our personal experience of conversion and transformation shaped our sense of calling to the priesthood. We were not going to be maintenance priests. We had experienced personal renewal in our lives and believed that we would be instruments of this renewal within the Church. ... If we could be holy priests and preach true doctrine and have the right type of catechetical resources in our parishes, all would be well and we would see revival. Armed with these convictions, we were launched into the brick wall of parish life at a hundred miles per hour. It was not pretty. Most of us had to learn to navigate within a Church culture that was not that interested in conversion and transformation. Those who could not adapt to the new reality did not last as priests or would never become pastors. Personal holiness was expected of the priest, but there was no way that such a calling had anything to do with the average churchgoing Catholic. I will never forget the response of a man in my first parish after my attempts to get him to do Alpha. He said, “Look, Father, I’m just not that religious.” It was as if he was saying to me, “Don’t you get it? I come to church once a week. I fulfill my end of the bargain. Now you do your job and leave me alone.” ... (We invested) huge amounts of energy put into renewing content of programs mostly ended with preaching to the choir. Most Sunday Catholics remained untouched, and our churches remained unhealthy and in decline.”

THE GAME HAS CHANGED. “The game may have changed at half-time, but we are still too often insisting on playing the new game according to the rules of the past. We have witnessed in the last 50 years the most accelerated social change in human history, yet in the world of our churches, we insist on pastoral methodologies that presume bygone ideal cultures of the past. What results is an experience of being trapped. Being caught between an experience of a call and desire for renewal and the weight of Church culture towards maintaining the status quo is painful. Those in pastoral leadership know that our methods no longer work, yet are bound by layers of expectations that demand the continuation of the old, while, at the same time, having to juggle the new realities.”