

## Priests move to counter church exodus, domestic violence, AIDS

By Edwin Thaddeu SJ

People are not quitting the Catholic Church in Guyana because of the sex scandals that have rocked this institution in countries throughout the world nor are they leaving because they no longer believe in God.

When this issue of Catholics leaving the Church was examined by the priests of the diocese at their annual conference last week it was concluded that; unwelcoming communities, religious needs not being met, passive religious ceremonies, poverty, and a lack of knowledge of the bible were among the main reasons why people abandon their Catholic faith.

On the second day of their encounter the clergymen took some time to discuss and reflect on the

phenomenon of people leaving the Catholic Church. Jesuit priest Father Joachim D' Mello led the session by presenting his observations of this in Region 9. Though there are many reasons behind this exodus, the following, drawn from observation and articulated in the discussion article

"The hidden exodus", are the top five reasons given for the leaving:

1. Religious needs are not met. When people are sick, the other denominations come to their aid economically and spiritually. The priests have no time.

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## PARAMOUNTCY PLUS

By Mike James

At the beginning of the 1970's President Forbes Burnham invented a word that never attracted international recognition or support and therefore never found a place in recognized English dictionary. "Paramountcy" was defined by President Burnham in his famous

"Declaration of Sophia" (1974) speech, in which he declared that the PNC "party should assume apologetically its paramountcy over the government which is merely one of its executive arms." The word, and all that it implied, dominated and determined Guyana society at every level for the next decade. The Party and under his personally crafted 1980 Guyana constitution the Executive President himself, closely controlled all aspects of life in Guyana, including the media.

However, even President Burnham had his limits. He attempted the squeeze out of existence the only 2 media houses he did not directly control, the PPP's Mirror Newspaper and the Catholic Standard, by severely limiting their access to newsprint. When this failed the House of Israel "activists" were unleashed, killing Catholic Standard photographer Fr. Bernard Darke. When this did not deter the Catholic Standard and Fr. Andy Morrison from speaking out clearly and consistently on the violation of the rights of the Guyanese people, a series of ridiculous libel

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## Another successful New York Guyana Mass

From Francis Quamina Parrier in New York  
Last Sunday October 2, what has become known as the 'New York Guyana Mass' was back in Brooklyn after being celebrated in 2009 and 2010 in Queens.

Every year for the past 22 years some former altar servers at Brickdam Cathedral with much assistance from other Catholics from Guyana have held a special Mass to which Guyanese in particular are invited to pray for the country and to raise funds for special projects in their homeland.

It is the policy of the Mass Committee to alternate the Mass two years in the Borough of Queens then two years in the Borough of Brooklyn. The Guyana Mass was the brainchild of Monsignor Paul Jervis, who was a former altar boy at Saint Pius X Parish in Georgetown.

As in previous years, many Guyanese and their American friends, attended the Mass. A few Guyanese Catholics who are based in Canada travelled hundreds of miles from across the border to attend. For them, it is an annual Pilgrimage - attending a special Mass at which prayers are offered for the country of their birth.

Over 350 people attended this year's celebration

It is also an occasion for them to make donations for specific projects back in Guyana.

This year the major portion of the donation will go to the Sacred Heart Church rebuilding fund. The Soup Kitchen at the Brickdam Presbytery will also benefit. So, too, the Retirement Fund for Diocesan priests living in Guyana. Some of the money will also go to the Father Ronald Pieters Educational Fund for some bright but needy students.

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### 29th WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME BISHOP'S ENGAGEMENTS

Sun 16th October: 08:00 hrs  
Mass at Holy Spirit.

09:30 hrs Meet Confirmation  
Candidates at Holy Spirit

Mon 17th October: 18:30 hrs  
attend opening of Congress of  
Evangelicals of the Caribbean

Thurs 20th October: 18:00 hrs  
Confirmation at Holy Spirit

Fri 21st October: Leave for  
Trinidad to attend Marriage  
Encounter Weekend

Mon 24th October: Return from  
Trinidad

+ Francis Alleyne, OSB

## Mass For Senior Citizens

All the Elderly, Sick and Shut-in members of our Pastoral Area Community are invited to a Mass which will be celebrated on Sunday, October 30th at 5:00 p.m. in the Cathedral. During the Mass, the Sacrament of the Sick will be administered. Parishioners are asked to make a special effort to bring their elderly and household relatives to this Mass.

## When all men think alike...

The administration has sent a very clear signal of how it intends to deal with the private media. The suspension of the broadcast licence of CNS TV6 has only been temporarily lifted. It will take effect from December 1, if the ruling party is re-elected. Whether the suspension will be of the same duration, shorter or longer remains to be seen.

Meanwhile the Presidential adviser on Governance has indicated that the Government intends to alert the United Nations on what she feels is the threat posed by certain media houses to the upcoming election.

The ruling party is also making it unmistakably clear who will be the power houses within it if it is re-elected. Today's columnist raises some interesting issues. Bharat Jagdeo's presidential powers will end on November 28, yet he confidently says that he has directed that the ban on CNS 6 will begin from December 1. One wonders how many more directives have been issued to take effect after he leaves office. Surely Mr Ramotar does not want to give the impression that if elected he will be a puppet president.

Surely especially just before an election, in order to be able to exercise their minds on public affairs people need to be provided with information which is true and comprehensive. Instead at present they are daily fed with sound outs from the ruling party masquerading as news.

NCN's 'news' broadcasts frequently begin with "President ....

has said" or "Minister of this or that has reiterated..." These reports are repeated in different forms at different times and they are presented in such a way as if it were expected that no other view would be held. The impression is gained that one is not expected to think, for as the saying goes, "where all men think alike, no one thinks at all"

For example we were recently told that the economy grew by

over five per cent in the first half of this year. Many asked how this was possible when it was well known that sugar, our main foreign currency earner was greatly under-performing, mining - probably the second most profitable export - was being made to wait months before beginning new operations.

**CATHOLIC STANDARD**

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Colin Smith  
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Georgetown

It is deplorable that issues - serious issues that vitally affect the nation, issues of human rights, the real state of the country - are not being discussed.

Little effort is made by the National Communications Network or the Chronicle seriously, honestly and openly to discuss and debate matters of vital importance to the nation. Most of the time on NCN and the Chronicle only the views of a few select persons of one party are allowed to be aired.

We call on the authorities to open up the state owned media to free and honest debate, to allow opposing views to be aired and not for the grossly insulting five minutes per week and probably at 3.00am.

This is the only way in which people can weigh issues and think and choose for themselves.

## National Unity

The changes in our lives, community and country are of greater interest in times of evaluating today's scenario and looking towards the future.

Some journalistic visionaries sketch portraits of life in the 21st century and speculate about changes in science and technology and its impact on education, communication, medicine, travel industry etc.

There is no denying that changes are taking place in many spheres of human endeavour. Our societies are becoming more urbanized, skill requirements specialized and our world is deemed a global village. With cross fertilization through travel and the media influences, changes are inevitable.

Yet in the dynamic process of change it may not necessarily be concluded that attitudes of human beings towards each other reflect advancement and progress.

The human personality is responsive to technological changes but too often ignores nurturing and shaping a culture, pattern or style which men and women ought to process and display. The competitive environment which fuels individual enterprise and activity and propels persons unto higher levels of achievement, also undermines the concept of 'dwelling together in unity.'

The question thus surfaces as to our attitude to others and the effect of such behaviour in our community, our work places and more importantly our country.

It takes no scientific study to recognise the divisive forces which plague countries with the many traumatic effects on our fellow human beings. Men, women and children are the victims of violence and oppression as primitive instincts dominate. The law of the jungle plays no subservient role in these times of man's advancement in the fields of science and technology.

In search for scientific data and possibly other forms of life in space, explorations continue. However, the search for purposeful unity in our immediate environment appears to be a distant dream.

The slogans: "In unity there is strength"; "United we stand divided we fall." are often times re-echoed. But such unity is certainly not the norm.

Our own country - the Co-operative Republic of Guyana has as its National Slogan - "One People" "One Nation" "One Destiny"

The formulators of that slogan clearly understood the desirability or more appropriately the necessity for purposeful unity. They may have recognised the many pitfalls associated with disunity.

Whatever our designation, occupation, religious convictions,

## Viewpoint By Vibert Parvatan

political affiliation, if any, we certainly share many common goals. We do so as people of a country and in the wider context as inhabitants of this earth.

Those goals would include: - The pursuit of happiness; - Improving the quality of life; - Ensuring peace and harmony; - Promoting the development of our country and enhancing its image; and - Protecting the environment.

Who will deny that such are the yearnings of every citizen. To meaningfully strive for the realisation of such goals for ourselves, our families, friends, neighbours and all Guyanese, must demand certain attitudes.

In that pursuit, it seems obvious that we have to be united in building bridges of understanding. We have a responsibility to ourselves and society, to promote tolerance, reduce conflict, rather than accentuate divisions and sow seeds of discord. It is somewhat distressing and amazing to observe the difficulty some persons have in recognizing the brotherhood of humanity and the fatherhood of God.

If we are energized to fight, if the mood is to be confrontational, let the target, let the enemies be crime, hunger, poverty, exploitation, evil, environmental degradation and ignorance.

It is my view that everyone has a part to play in promoting unity, love and togetherness. You have such a part, I have a part, we have a part. Our participation must be positive.

Look around at the opportunities for so doing. The ability to harmonise with others whether in our homes, schools, work places and country is no less an important lesson than the study of science. The many destructive forces which lead to conflict and wars and result in killings and millions of refugees drifting around, have its foundation in failing to live together in unity.

Thus, the enhancement of community participation is essential, in order to prevent worry and fear from prevailing and to lessen human tragedy.... We believe that any transformation of the world begins with the transformation of the self. For eventually, it is love, goodwill and co-operation which will overcome the negative forces threatening us and bring about the dawn of a new age."

At this stage of our National Affairs the focus has to be - your participation, my participation, our participation in promoting NATIONAL UNITY.

# Not even-handed with memorials

Dear Editor,

Recently the world marked the 10th anniversary of 9/11 - that terrible attack on the World Trade Centre in Manhattan. The Trinidad Express said at least 14 persons born in Trinidad (and Tobago?) perished. A tragedy indeed! As well as a tragedy for the almost 3000 Americans who perished, many of them immigrants to the US.

It was interesting how Churches remembered this anniversary but very, very few remember the anniversaries of the atrocities in Rwanda and Burundi, the disaster in Chernobyl and Bhopal - the latter for which the American parent company is still to be held accountable - or the war in Iraq.

From the point of view of American pride and military strategy the harsh retaliation was expected. But were 3000 American lives really worth the beginning of a carnage that saw the death of, by several estimates, 500,000 to one million Iraqis and a few thousand more Americans? We have seen YouTube videos of American victims, memorials, martyrs and the ash covered ruins in Manhattan.

Have we bothered to wonder about the ruins in Iraq? The thousands of the maimed, blind, the orphaned? No food. No water. No electricity. No YouTube videos for them. No memorial. No burial. The words of Jesus come to mind: "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?" Are Americans more favoured than Iraqis in God's eyes?

In January 2002, President George Bush named Iraq and North Korea as the axis of evil in the world. Is it the only one? What about the more subtle and structured axis of evil perpetrated by the rich countries of the north on the poor countries of the south - notwithstanding many of these southern leaders have been nothing short of robbers and renegades? Are not monopolistic alliances of trade and wealth to the exclusion of the poor another axis of evil? Blessed John Paul II was a public, vigorous, religious voice against the invasion of Iraq. Did we remember his caution on this 10th anniversary of 9/11?

There is no doubt America has been a land of promise and opportunity for many. Many Caribbean peoples have been there since World War II and have done well for themselves, better than born-bred Americans. Half of Guyana is probably there. We affirm that all forms of religious fundamentalism, whether overt or subtle, are destructive to human flourishing and harmony. But we must be careful of being religious bigots ourselves. Phillip Jenkins of Penn State University has told us that the average Christian today is no longer white, middle-class and from the north. He/she is black, poor and from the south. Let us remember their plight and violations of human rights. Let us remember others like them who are not Christian; Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist. And may our thinking, speaking, googling and preaching be more even-handed and considerate.

Fr Martin Sirju, Siparia, T&T (Catholic News)

# for Christianity

Dear Editor,

I agree totally with the description of the Vatican newspaper that it is "historically senseless hypocrisy" to drop dating abbreviations BC and AD on the grounds that they might offend non-Christians. It is a sign of what the world is coming to that the BBC is replacing BC = Before Christ with BCE = Before Common Era, and AD = (latin for) In the Year of the Lord with CE = Common Era.

Since the late 1960s the term 'British subject' no longer had any legal meaning for Commonwealth citizens. So when is the BBC going to drop the 'British' out of their name so as not to possibly offend non-Britishers who might be listening to their broadcasts?

This increasing disregard for Christianity is taking place step by slow step. The Devil is not going to take over all at once. He is too clever for that. He knows that once a practice has been introduced and becomes fashionable in the world, the children of Christians will pick it up and adopt it by peer pressure and the inability or negligence of their parents to inform them.

It is also the Vatican's fault. People still fledglings in faith are allowed to be confirmed and take adult status in the Church before they are adults in the sight of the law, and long before they genuinely decide to use their faith. This cheapens Christianity in the sight of the world and makes God's work harder to accomplish.

And of course there is the primary dependence of the Church on money, which is evident to the heathen to whom we are supposed to be "salt of the earth and light of the world". They are comfortable in their way of life because they see us living it instead of Christ's, despite what we say.

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# B'dam choir member shaken up by CANU raid

Brickdam Cathedral choir member Rafael Gonsalves says he and his family have been left somewhat traumatized at the hands of officers of the Customs Anti-narcotics Unit (CANU) in what has surely been a case of mistaken identity.

Mr Gonsalves said his wife was alone at their George Street home when men with the words CANU printed on their shirts walking past her house in the passageway that also leads to other houses at the back of hers. She thought that some incident had taken place in one of these houses behind hers but soon discovered that about twelve officers who had arrived in three vehicles were in fact surrounding her own two-flat house. When she opened the door to enquire about what was going on three officers, one carrying a crow-bar, pushed past her and began a thorough search of the entire upper flat where the family lived, emptying drawers and other containers on the floor and even overturning a barrel filled with Christmas decorations. They said they were working on information and that they should not be asked any questions.

After apparently not finding what they were looking for

in the upper flat the hunt was extended to the unoccupied lower flat but with the same result.

Mr Gonsalves told the Catholic Standard that he was singing in the choir on Friday afternoon at the Mass to mark the end of the clergy conference when his 14-year old son came into the church to tell him that there were customs officers searching their house. He said he arrived home and found that his entire home had been turned upside down. The officers he met asked him to identify himself. They then also thoroughly searched his car including the trunk and interior panels. Two young men who assist Mr Gonsalves in his workshop at the back of his premises were also questioned and their bags searched.

Upon coming up empty-handed again the members of the CANU unit entered their vehicles and left the Gonsalves home in total disarray.

Mr Gonsalves said he was relieved when the incident which lasted about 40 minutes finally came to an end without any arrests or injuries. He is most puzzled however about who passed on what information that triggered the very disconcerting episode.

## Successful New York Guyana Mass...

*From front page*

Another policy of the Guyana Mass Committee is to invite a Guyana-based Guyanese priest to be the chief celebrant at the Mass. However, that rule was bent on one or two occasions, such as when Trinidad-born Bishop Francis Allen was invited to be the chief celebrant a few years ago.

That rule was again bent when India-born, now Canada-based Fr Michael Coutts, SJ, was invited to be the chief celebrant. Many of us already know that Fr Coutts is one of those 'foreigners' who we readily accept as GUYANESE. He has spent over 15 years of his priestly ministry serving in various Guyanese parishes such as the Corentyne, the North West District, West Bank Demerara, the Rupununi and of course, at the Brickdam parish in Georgetown. You couldn't do much better than that as a non-Guyanese. The New York Guyana Mass committee, this year, bestowed an Honour to Fr Michael Coots, SJ, for his work in Guyana and among the Guyanese in Canada.

As in previous years, many Guyanese and their American friends, attended the Mass. A few Guyanese Catholics who are based in Canada travelled hundreds of miles from across the border to attend. For them, it is an

annual Pilgrimage; attending a special Mass at which prayers are offered for the country of their birth. It is also an occasion for them to make donations for specific projects back in Guyana. This year the major portion of the donation will go to the Sacred Heart Church rebuilding fund. The Soup Kitchen at the Brickdam Presbytery will also benefit. So, too, the Retirement Fund for Diocesan priests living in Guyana. Some of the money will also go to the Fr. Ronald Pieters Educational Fund for some bright but needy students. A letter of gratitude for all the financial assistance sent to Guyana last year from the Guyana New York Mass Committee, sent from Vicar General Fr John Persaud, was read to the congregation.

During the Mass, prayers were said for the repose of the souls of Sister Rose Magdalene, Fr Linus Wall and Sister Bernadette Fernandes who passed on since the last Guyana Mass.

At the end of the Mass there was a reception at which many "mingled together, voices joyful and gay", as they enjoyed the variety of Guyanese food and drinks, and reminisced about life and living back in their "Beautiful Guyana".

Of course, the up-coming general elections was very much part of the conversations



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2. They are attracted to the soul stirring religious music and interactive worship. The Catholic Church has a monotonous and passive liturgy.

3. Poverty also causes some people to leave. The perks given by others draw them.

4. Bible is not used in the Catholic Church sufficiently, so the Catholics have a shallow knowledge of Faith.

5. The Catholic Church is not welcoming and people find more Solidarity among the faithful in other denominations. To better minister to the faithful the priests suggested the formation of hospitality ministry who will visit the sick and carry out house visiting.

Greater participation in the liturgy is also encouraged in the parishes along with the introduction of bible studies and the creating of activities that would deepen knowledge of Christian Faith were also recommended.

The clergy conference started on October 4 with the retreat guided by Sr Mary Ann Clifford RSM. The retreat helped us to experience the Gospel verses, "The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while'. Mark 3:30-31. The day of recollection and sharing helped us to review the ministries carried out through the width and breadth of our diocese.

The third day was dedicated to "Awareness and Action on Domestic Violence". Mr. Vidyaratha Kisson along with Mr Gino Persaud were the resource persons of the day. The input session started with questions and queries on Domestic Violence. Various forms of abuse highlighted in detail are psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, intimidation and financial abuse. The details on the web of abuse propelled

the floor into lively interaction giving the priests a better awareness of this reality and offering guidelines to be first responders to victims. While summing up the day, Bishop Francis Alleyne OSB said, "The Bible and the Catholic faith never encourage any form of subjugation or violence. Men and Women are created in the likeness and image of God and so there is no room for subjugation". The Bishop was asked to make an official statement on this crucial subject.

On the fourth day, from Guyana National Faith and HIV coalition, Ms Shabakie Fernandes addressed the clergy on 'Multi-faith, multicultural and collaborative approaches to coordinating issues related to faith and the drivers of HIV issues within our communities'. Since HIV is fatal and stigmatizing, the emphasis was placed on integrated preventative measures for HIV/AIDS and the stigmas attached.

After the input sessions, the participants entered into business session. The bishop updated the priests with the current status of the diocese. The issue of permanent deacons in the diocese was discussed. The diaconate vocation, being part of God's special call, should be encouraged along side and distinct from the ministry carried out by the extraordinary ministers in the diocese.

The clergy conference 2011 came to an end with a concelebrated Mass presided over by Bishop Francis Alleyne OSB along with 24 priests of the diocese in the Cathedral of Immaculate conception, Brickdam.

The Eucharistic fellowship was followed by a sumptuous dinner organized in the Bishop's house by the Marriage Encounter couples.

Thanks for all who prayed and contributed in different ways to the success of the conference.

## Paramountcy Plus..... From front page .

cases were launched one after another against the paper which the courts applying the doctrine of "Paramountcy" dutifully endorsed. The substantial fines were paid by public contributions, largely from the poor, and paper struggled on. Never, however, even when the paper was reduced to a cyclostyled one page 8000 copy run the day before the infamous Referendum to end all referendums held to give President Burnham absolute power to rewrite the constitution in his image, did President Burnham attempt to physically close down or directly suspend the operations of the limited free media in Guyana. (that Burnham paramount constitution incidentally remains largely intact today)

Trinidad and Tobago is currently under a 3 month state of Emergency and night curfew in which many fundamental rights are severely limited. The government however, has never contemplated controlling or suspending the operation of the independent media even those which carry severe criticisms of the operations of the state of emergency.

Guyana's ruling PPP-C, uniquely among the world's "democratic" countries, with parliamentary support of the opposition PNC, has given to its Executive President the power to suspend the operations of media houses, powers which President Burnham in all his paramount glory, never was able to achieve. The Executive President has now exercised this new paramount power on 3 occasions, rendering unnecessary, even superfluous the recourse to the courts which President Burnham was forced to opt for.

In what has been hailed as a gesture of generosity and magnanimity, the more recent 4 month suspension of operations of a TV station has been postponed until 1 December 3 days after the holding of National Elections. This postponement of the edict, however, raises several

interesting points. Does this paramount executive power extend beyond the period in office of the incumbent President? Is the next President bound by this decision, or by any other orders which the incumbent may make, public or non public? While the further question would never enter into the imagination of the ruling party, it still needs to be asked. Would the suspension of the TV station go ahead as ordered even if the next President were not to come from the ruling party? Would it be enforced on schedule even, as is so common in Guyana elections, the final results are not proclaimed by 1 December, 3 days after the Presidential Elections? Is it proper to extend Presidential Paramountcy so far into the future? Why not let the Courts of Guyana, which have recovered somewhat from the doctrine of paramountcy, deal with the particular contentious media issue as they are mandated to do in Guyana and the rest of the democratic world?

The Vienna Based International Press Institute has in a statement carried by Thursdays regional newspapers answered all these questions by reiterating its call for the President to lift the ban completely, and raised serious concerns over the government's recent attacks on Guyana media with its exaggerated comparisons to the role of the media in the Rwanda genocide.

Despite what was promising to be the most uneventful elections in Guyana in its history of adult suffrage, the Guyana government seems to be ensuring that the eyes of the international community, and particularly groups concerned for human rights and freedom of expression, will be focused on Guyana over the period leading up to the elections. Let us hope that this strategy results, whether intentionally or not, in benefits for the Guyanese people, greater peace and freedom and small steps towards the undermined of the racial politics that have plagued the country and its potential for the last 3 generations. Guyana badly needs at least Paramountcy Minus, not Paramountcy Plus.