Fighting for the Faith

"Contend for the faith
which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Jude verse three.

At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, 11-10-1962,
Pope John XXXIIIrd said:
"The chief purpose of the Second Vatican Council
is to ensure that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine
should be more efficaciously guarded and taught."

Saint John XXIII, Abbott, *Documents,* pp 713.

Prehistory

This essay is an introduction to the pre-1985 history, of the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy (ACCC). I am Fr James Tierney (Fr Jim). I was born in 1935, a convert 1955, a priest 1964 and retired from parish work to do catechetics from 1995. I am probably the only person left alive that was involved in the pre-history or remembers anything about it. The pre-history of the ***Australasian Association of Catholic Clergy (AACC)*** lead to the preliminary constitution from which the first meeting was convened by Father John Walter, at the promptings of Father Brian McEwan. There were others who had contributed ideas to Fr Walter.

Thank You

A big thank you must go to Father Danai Penollar for arranging a 40th anniversary meeting of the Confraternity, which he did late last year within a few days of the foundation date which was the 9th of October, 1985. Later on, this date became significant as the optional memorial of St John Henry Cardinal Newman. Quite recently, Newman was declared the 37th doctor of the church, and the principal patron of education along with St Thomas Aquinas, which gives our foundation date even greater symbolic significance.

Summary

“I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons” Newman, *Meditations.*

In 1980, Father John O’Neill came to see me to propose we call a **meeting** to defend the priesthood. But I said, “We need to have a meeting to defend the Resurrection.” So, we drew up a list of priests who were orthodox and would fight for the faith. We called it the *Boanerges* List (we were the “sons of thunder”, James and John). About 1984, Brian Schaefer and Father (Bishop dec’d) Peter J. Elliott decided between themselves that we needed an **organization** to defend the priesthood. These two factors, which through me and my constitution committee, led to Father Brian McEwan requisitioning all my preliminary materials about a priest organization, which led to him, and Father Walter calling the initial meeting. Fr McEwen failed to return any of the documents and his executor destroyed them after his death. Father O’Neill and I chose Father John Lander of Brighton-Le-Sands and Father John Wilkson (CM) to invite the forty priests on our list

for the defence of the Resurrection. In effect, 22 priests turned up and it was the best clergy conference I have ever attended. Subsequently, there were two more meetings to hear the results of our committee which represented us to Cardinal Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney.

My Own Involvement - Catechetics

My own interests in all this were centred on orthodoxy in catechetics, the transmission of the message of Our Lord through the apostles to His church, the formative doctrine on which the whole structure of our faith is built: Creed, Sacraments, Covenant Commandments, Prayer.

In that regard, it was from 1970 onwards that I was defending, first of all, the Ten Commandments, and then more elaborately defending the Apostles' Creed and the formative effect on Christianity of Christian doctrine, from 1971 onwards.

Defending the faith? “The sole purpose of our instruction is that it should be love coming from a pure heart, good conscience **and a sincere faith”** (1 Tim1:5) So love depends on the doctrine of the faith.

In 1971, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), in Sydney, had “gone trendy” and abandoning the doctrine lecture, the first segment of the evening in the catechist training courses which were held in something like eight centres throughout Sydney for the formation of state school catechists who were often called *scripture teachers.* The teaching of the Apostles’ Creed was diminished, just to a mention.

This led me to write a demolition pamphlet against what the CCD was doing, especially in their publication called *Growth* for Year 7 at high school, which made the outrageous statement that, "If you think you can teach Christian doctrine to the teenagers of the 1970s, you are sadly mistaken." Well, the catechists in my own parish were teaching Christian doctrine in an extensive way in the state high school in our parish.

My pamphlet against the CCD's material was called *Teaching Religion?,* which became the first of my *Tracts for the Times*, named after Newman’s publications in 1833. And the parish priest for whom I was his assistant, showed it to Cardinal Gilroy, the Archbishop of Sydney, who was quite willing for it to be printed and distributed even without an *imprimatur*. It didn't count as a publication.

Deceit

The distribution of my pamphlet resulted in the priest who had been the C*ensor Deputatus*, for the *Nihil Obstat,* to approve (the publication *Growth)* was Monsignor John Leonard, a famous priest in Sydney, who had not been shown the introductory chapters of this publication in the teacher's book. They had been kept from him. And it was in these that the delinquencies were present, that the doctrine was replaced by **self-fulfilment,** the **ego philosophy**. So, it probably pleased Cardinal Gilroy that at least a remedy was being made by my protest.

But it was not sufficient to attack a falsehood. I had to provide an alternative which was true to the faith of the Church. And so, I wrote *a program* for *Apostles of Christ in high school* and provided outline lessons for Years 7 to 10.

This program was published in 1972 and was popular with some Catholic school teachers who were also suffering from the diminution of teaching doctrine. That was until they were stopped from using it under threat of losing their jobs. The *Apostles of Christ* was a spiral program that worked around the Creed, the Sacraments, and the Commandments, with Prayer impregnated into the Creed and Commandments section because there were only three school terms each year. And the spiral included having a gospel for each of the four years. So, Saint Luke for year seven. for year eight, it was Saint Matthew. And for year nine, it was Saint John. And year 10 was Saint Mark.

The Ten Commandments

When I was finishing the draft of a Program for *Apostles of Christ* in High School, I was directed by the headquarters of the Archdiocese of Sydney to sit side by side with the Censor (which was quite illegal) while he tried to amend my document. He objected to the insistence on the Ten Commandments. I said, “The Ten Commandments are the natural moral law.” He said, “I prefer to see a New Testament formulation.” I said, “You’ve got it over the page through the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.” He said, “Well, the theologians don’t like the Ten Commandments.” I said, “But the parish priests do.” He replied, “That’s too bad for the parish priests”. I retorted, “ You don’t seem to understand that I am writing this program against your sort of theologians.” That flattened him and he gave up arguing on the topic and I got my *Nihil Obstat*. Later, he became my bishop.

In 1975, *Apostles of Christ* was followed up by four teacher's books, which were only duplicated, for which I was given a year's leave to write, (living at the seminary at Springwood as a monastic environment and suitable for concentrated work).

In the meantime, I had set up the **Cardinal Newman Catechist Centre** in 1974 in the old presbytery at Parramatta with the express permission of Cardinal Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney. This was outrageous to the CCD and the CEO. And that continued there until 1984 when we had to move out to make room for Parramatta becoming a diocese.

Under the auspices of Father Rod Bray, we moved to Merrylands. The Catechesis Centre was renamed, in the year 2001, to the Cardinal Newman Faith Resources Incorporated and is flourishing more than ever at Saint Marys, on the western line, under the managership of Mrs. Gai Smith.

The Resurrection

From 1973, I learnt that at St Patrick’s college Manly, the Sydney seminary, Dr David Coffey was ***demythologizing.*** What the Bible said was a story made up later and had to be interpreted in terms of what modern man thought of miracles, ‘because modern man believed in modern science and not miracles’. It was a story made up afterwards to defend Christianity saying that the Resurrection didn’t actually happen as a physical event, that the physical remains of Jesus might still be lying around Palestine.

In 1977, a young man from the seminary, after 3 months of Dr Coffey, left the seminary, left the church and left Christianity. In God’s providence he has recovered the faith and become a wonderful practicing Catholic. It was that incident that led me to appeal to

the Papal Pro-Nuncio, Archbishop Gino Paro. He had no idea of what was going on, and he wept during our 2 ¼ hour session. “What shall I do, Father?” He said. And I said, “I think there should be papal pleni potentiary go through the seminary.”

In the outcome, the Congregation for Catholic Education in the Roman Curia commissioned Bishop Jeremiah Newman of Limerick, Ireland, one of their former employees, who turned out to be a trendy, as their investigator. He whitewashed the whole business at St Patrick’s College, Manly. Meanwhile, Cardinal Freeman, who was in Rome at the time, was phoned up by his secretary to say his seminary was under investigation. He was furious. So, they sent the investigator down to Melbourne to open a new file on the seminary in Melbourne to placate him. Freeman was orthodox but intimidated by academics.

The Meetings

Now, it was while I was writing the *Catholic Family Catechism* in 1980 that Father John O'Neill had come up to see me at Hampton to propose we have a meeting to defend the priesthood and I was only too willing to be involved in defending the priesthood. But I said, "More importantly is, at the moment, that we defend the resurrection." I agreed entirely we needed to defend the priesthood but insisted more urgently we need to defend the Resurrection.

As a result with my meeting with Father O'Neill, we decided to call a meeting of priests on the Resurrection rather than on the priesthood at this stage. To organize it, we got two less controversial priests, namely Father John Lander and Father John Wilkinson of the Vincentians, who actually issued the invitations for a meeting at Brighton-le-Sands Presbytery. At the Brighton-le-Sands meeting, we invited 40 priests of which 22 came to the meeting. Fr Walter was invited but unable to attend that meeting. But he came to the two subsequent meetings that were held in the Bass Hill presbytery by Father John Dougherty, the brother of the future Bishop Patrick Dougherty.

The result of our resurrection meeting was to appoint a committee of four to take the matter further with Cardinal Freeman and with the Holy See. There's a whole history of how finally we got tan official statement refuting the falsehood, but so much damage was done in the meantime.

In the outcome, the case lingered on until 1988. In the meantime, Father O’Neill and I held our meeting of priests to fight for the Resurrection. Our committee of four held two further meetings at which Father John Walter was present.

Then, Father Brian Harrison was expelled from the Sydney seminary in 1981 for defending the Resurrection and for defending absolutes in morality. He got into a seminary in Rome for English speaking students who had been expelled for their orthodoxy from seminaries around the world. It was he that, through the papal master of ceremonies, got through to the Pope who got through to Cardinal Ratzinger with the outcome being a notice in the *Catholic Weekly* from Cardinal Clancy. It said, “The physical remains of Jesus after His death were raised in the Resurrection, hence the empty tomb.” This was all printed in a funereal black box in the context of Cardinal Clancy’s eulogy of what a great theologian Dr David Coffey was. The box had a quarter inch border around it as though it was announcing a death. It was the editor's irony, I think, of announcing the triumph of the Resurrection. See *Handouts n.* 179 (See www.cardinalnewman.com.au.)

But the damage was done and the damaged products from the seminary who survived until ordination were never recalled by a bishop to correct their thinking.

Catholic Family Catechism

My first publication against the CCD, *Tracts for the Times* Number 1, was followed up by the *Apostles of Christ*, which was Tract 2, and reached a high point with the *Catholic Family Catechism* in 1981.

The *Catholic Family Catechism* was published in 1981, again after a year's leave from parish work. And with intense opposition from the people running catechetics in the Catholic education system of the Catholic schools and the Christian doctrine (CCD) in the government schools. And the *Catholic Family Catechism* then was sent off to Rome, who wanted several improvements put in. They were quite extensive. They took it very seriously and, while the local censor for publication initially had only found four things he wanted changed, Rome said there were 10 things that were compulsory alterations and another 30 of suggested ones.

Having fulfilled the obligations of Rome, we reprinted another 40,000 copies. The new printed edition attracted a wonderful testimony from the Cardinal-Prefect, Silvio Oddi, the cardinal-prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy who handled catechisms and the commendation went that, "We do hope that your catechism will be widely used in all the English-speaking countries as a basis for helping the domestic church." It was a wonderful defense document against the people who did not like catechisms, doctrinal formulas, or memorization.

It was reprinted in Malaysia in several editions in 1984 in English, translated in Oriya in India for two dioceses (Berhampur and Balasore) and then again translated for Trobriand Island (East of PNG) and three copies were supplied to the Archbishop of Honiara in Solomon Islands. The CFC suffered much from attacks and unfair tactics of publishing an attack which never really quoted anything accurately in the theological magazine, *Australasian Catholic Record*. They then refused to publish my answer to it.

With help from Professor Patrick O'Farrell, the great Australian Catholic historian who was on the board of this publication, who threatened to resign from the board unless they published my answer. So that had made more enemies, of course.

An Organisation

It was about 1984, (all my material given to Fr McEwen was destroyed) that I took up the suggestion from Brian Schaffer and Father Elliot that we should have an organization to defend and promote the priesthood in its true role as bringing God to the people and bringing people to God. And so it was that I got together myself, a small committee, to plan a constitution and the office bearers for such an organization. We were proposing to have an Australasian Association of Catholic Clergy. The Australasian part was to join us with New Zealand. And the association part of the name, (not as good as confraternity) was in the 1983 Code of Canon Law canon 274 and gave the right of diocesan priests to have associations.

That proved very important in the future against future attacks on us that we should not exist at all, the Association of Catholic Clergy, but rather we should join the National Council of Priests, to which we were opposed on doctrinal issues. So, the draft constitution involved Father Louis Breslan from Guildford, and Father Rod Bray, the parish priest of Merrylands, and Father Les Bagot of Rozelle, and I think Father O'Neill was certainly invited. He can't remember whether or not he was there. He's one of the few people still alive that were involved in all these things and is now, after 43 faithful years of parish priest service at Doonside, living in retirement at Baulkham Hills. His memory, however, is not as good as mine.

When I was in Rome in February, 1985 with Cardinal Silvio Oddi, on the matters of my catechism, he said we should not have an Australasian Association, because Rome did not like priests' associations spanning several bishops' conferences. And so, it just simply became the ***Australian Association of Catholic Clergy***. Cardinal Oddi was quite satisfied with the proposed constitution of the yet nonexistent body.

We were well rewarded for beginning with the name association when another nuncio, Archbishop Brambilla, objected to our existence and told us we should join the National Council of Priests, and we pointed out we had the right to exist by canon law. And then, through a contact with Cardinal Cassidy, who was then the Deputy Secretariat Secretary of State in Rome, we told Archbishop Brambilla to reverse his condemnation. Even then, he said he did not agree with Rome which was rather an undiplomatic statement. Anyway, it was quite right and proper that the name be changed then later to Confraternity, which is a much more spiritual sort of name, suited to the situation of joining up in brotherly fraternity with the Confraternities in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Father John Walter

And that's how the ACCC's original name was association when it was set up at Riverwood in 1985, October, with Father Walter as the chief organizer, and the future editor of *The Priest*, the publication for which he was such a successful editor and nursed it through the early decades. Father John Walter actually hosted the first meeting on his premises of Riverwood parish. From that meeting flowed the successful institution of the ***Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy*** (ACCC) which has blossomed since.

> Father Walter's wonderful account in the last issue of *The Priest* of the original meeting and what followed on from that and all that has happened is a great blessing. And what's more, he alerts to the fact that the preceding meeting, not directly connected with the Confraternity, was to defend the Resurrection.
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> The Congregation of the Clergy later told him that the publication, which we called *The Priest,* was the best publication on the priesthood in the English-speaking world that had been sent to them from various other countries.