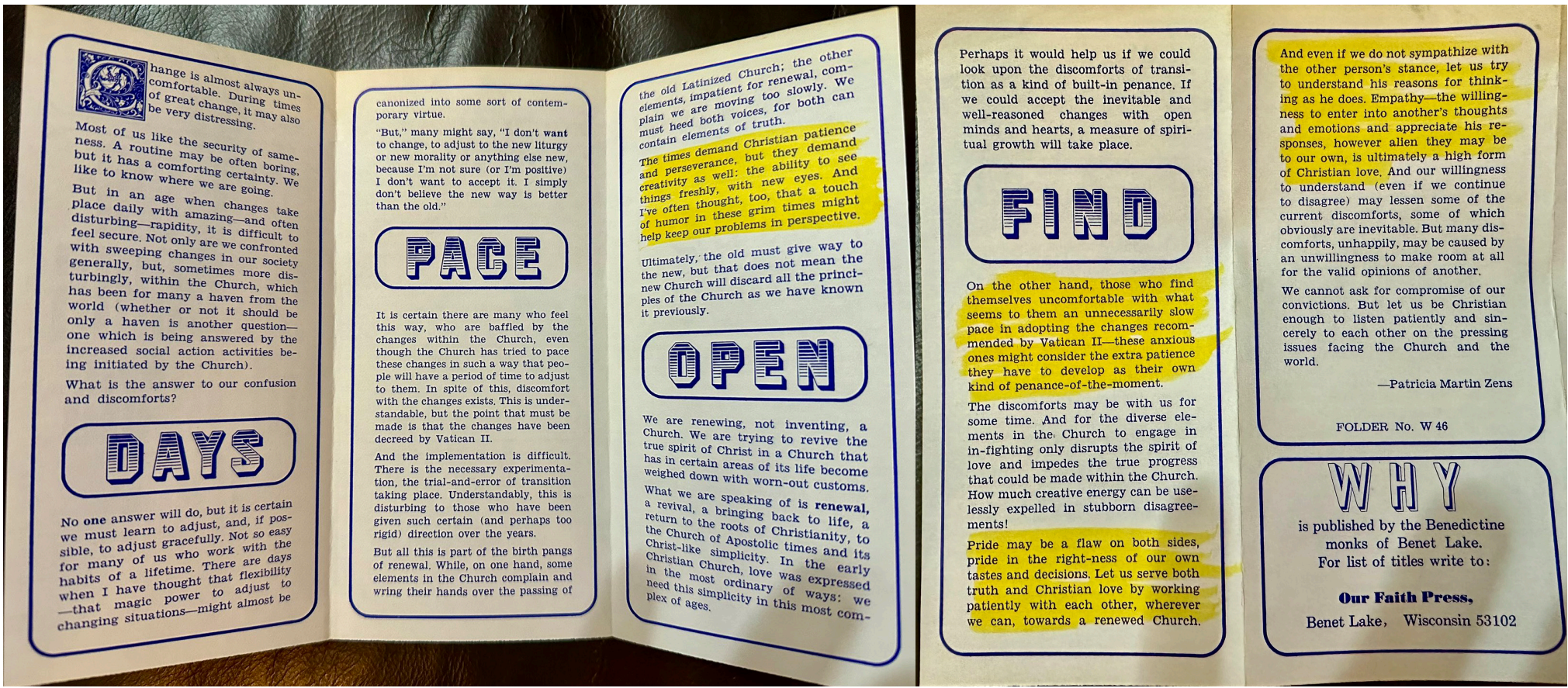


WHY
THE DISCOMFORTS OF TRANSITION

This pamphlet (“The discomforts of transition”) was kindly sent to us by **Mrs. G. W. I.** It appears to have been published circa 1968 by St. Benedict’s Abbey (Benet Lake, Wisconsin). The author is one “Patricia Martin Zens.”

It would be difficult to find a more arrogant, less “synodal” manifesto. It’s filled with references to **“a [Catholic] Church that has ... become weighed down with worn-out customs.”** Patricia explicitly states: “the old must give way to the new.” She points to “pride” (her word) as the cause of reluctance by those who preferred the Church’s traditions.



Change is almost always uncomfortable. During times of great change, it may also be very distressing.

Most of us like the security of sameness. A routine may be often boring, but it has a comforting certainty. We like to know where we are going.

But in an age when changes take place daily with amazing—and often disturbing—rapidity, it is difficult to feel secure. Not only are we confronted with sweeping changes in our society generally, but, sometimes more disturbingly, within the Church, which has been for many a haven from the world (whether or not it should be only a haven is another question—one which is being answered by the increased social action activities being initiated by the Church).

What is the answer to our confusion and discomforts?

DAYS

No one answer will do, but it is certain we must learn to adjust, and, if possible, to adjust gracefully. Not so easy for many of us who work with the habits of a lifetime. There are days when I have thought that flexibility—that magic power to adjust to—changing situations—might almost be

canonized into some sort of contemporary virtue.

“But,” many might say, “I don’t want to change, to adjust to the new liturgy or new morality or anything else new, because I’m not sure (or I’m positive) I don’t want to accept it. I simply don’t believe the new way is better than the old.”

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It is certain there are many who feel this way, who are baffled by the changes within the Church, even though the Church has tried to pace these changes in such a way that people will have a period of time to adjust to them. In spite of this, discomfort with the changes exists. This is understandable, but the point that must be made is that the changes have been decreed by Vatican II.

And the implementation is difficult. There is the necessary experimentation, the trial-and-error of transition taking place. Understandably, this is disturbing to those who have been given such certain (and perhaps too rigid) direction over the years.

But all this is part of the birth pangs of renewal. While, on one hand, some elements in the Church complain and wring their hands over the passing of

the old Latinized Church; the other elements, impatient for renewal, complain we are moving too slowly. We must heed both voices, for both can contain elements of truth.

The times demand Christian patience and perseverance, but they demand creativity as well: the ability to see things freshly, with new eyes. And I’ve often thought, too, that a touch of humor in these grim times might help keep our problems in perspective.

OPEN

Ultimately, the old must give way to the new, but that does not mean the new Church will discard all the principles of the Church as we have known it previously.

We are renewing, not inventing, a Church. We are trying to revive the true spirit of Christ in a Church that has in certain areas of its life become weighed down with worn-out customs.

What we are speaking of is renewal, a revival, a bringing back to life, a return to the roots of Christianity, to the Church of Apostolic times and its Christ-like simplicity. In the early Christian Church, love was expressed in the most ordinary of ways: we need this simplicity in this most complex of ages.

Perhaps it would help us if we could look upon the discomforts of transition as a kind of built-in penance. If we could accept the inevitable and well-reasoned changes with open minds and hearts, a measure of spiritual growth will take place.

FIND

On the other hand, those who find themselves uncomfortable with what seems to them an unnecessarily slow pace in adopting the changes recommended by Vatican II—these anxious ones might consider the extra patience they have to develop as their own kind of penance-of-the-moment.

The discomforts may be with us for some time. And for the diverse elements in the Church to engage in in-fighting only disrupts the spirit of love and impedes the true progress that could be made within the Church. How much creative energy can be uselessly expelled in stubborn disagreements!

Pride may be a flaw on both sides, pride in the right-ness of our own tastes and decisions. Let us serve both truth and Christian love by working patiently with each other, wherever we can, towards a renewed Church.

And even if we do not sympathize with the other person’s stance, let us try to understand his reasons for thinking as he does. Empathy—the willingness to enter into another’s thoughts and emotions and appreciate his responses, however alien they may be to our own, is ultimately a high form of Christian love. And our willingness to understand (even if we continue to disagree) may lessen some of the current discomforts, some of which obviously are inevitable. But many discomforts, unhappily, may be caused by an unwillingness to make room at all for the valid opinions of another.

We cannot ask for compromise of our convictions. But let us be Christian enough to listen patiently and sincerely to each other on the pressing issues facing the Church and the world.

—Patricia Martin Zens

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WHY

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