



FaithWorld

Dutch bishops give Pope Francis a bleak picture of Catholic Church in decline

By Tom Heneghan

December 3, 2013

Tags:

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(A health centre unit is built inside a former Catholic church in Eindhoven that has been sold because of dramatic falls in levels of churchgoing in the Netherlands. Photo taken 20 March 2012/Tom Heneghan)

Dutch bishops visiting Rome this week have given Pope Francis a dramatic snapshot of the steep decline of Roman Catholicism in its European heartland.

Both Catholic and Protestant Christian ranks have shrunk dramatically across Europe in recent decades, and hundreds of churches have been sold off to be turned into apartments, shops, bars or warehouses.

In the Netherlands, churches have been closing at a rate of one or two a week. The bishops told the pope in Rome on Monday that about two-thirds of all Roman Catholic churches in the Netherlands would have to be shut or sold by 2025, and many parishes merged, because congregations and finances were "in a long-term shrinking process".

Their five-yearly report blamed a "drastic secularization" of society, although a critical group of Dutch lay Catholics said the scandal of sexual abuse of minors by priests, which has afflicted many Catholic dioceses around the world, had also driven many people away, as had the closures themselves.

The only bright spot for the Dutch church was the finding that the election of the popular Pope Francis in March appeared to have slowed the exodus this year.

Francis has made it his mission to restore the Church's relevance with a message of simplicity and charity, although his parallel plan to open up its hidebound institutions may take years to make itself felt.

AUTHOR PROFILE



Tom Heneghan

As Religion Editor based in Paris, I cover main religion developments, coordinate religion news coverage and run the FaithWorld blog. Since joining Reuters in 1977 in London, I've worked in Vienna, Geneva, Islamabad, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Bonn and Paris. My book *Unchained Eagle: Germany after the Wall* was published in 2000. In 2006, I received the European Religion Writer of the Year award and FaithWorld was awarded the RNA 2012 Best Online Section prize. Any opinions expressed here are the author's own.



(A painting is removed from a former Eindhoven Catholic church sold to the city and being turned into a library and cultural centre. Photo taken 20 March 2012/Tom Heneghan)

Cardinal Willem Eijk, head of the Dutch bishops' conference, said that the bishops' 90-minute meeting with the pope had examined the Dutch Church's decline and the effects of the scandals that first came to light in 2010. Tens of thousands of children were abused by priests over decades, according to an independent inquiry, and the Church has apologized and begun paying large sums in damages.

More than 23,000 Catholics quit the Dutch Church in 2010, the peak of an exodus in which an average 18,000 have left each year since 2006. This year, however, only about 7,500 had left by October.

Catholicism is still the Netherlands' largest faith, officially claiming 24 percent of the 16 million population. Next come the Protestant churches at 18 percent and Islam at 5 percent.

But Eijk told Vatican Radio that government estimates put the Catholic total at 16 percent, falling to 10 percent by 2020. And the bishops' report said a mere 5.6 percent of those declared as Catholics actually went to church regularly.

Ad de Groot, a lay Catholic leader in Eijk's archdiocese of Utrecht, said secularization and the sexual abuse crisis had prompted people to leave in the past. But now, the very plan to close churches is alienating the Catholics who are left, he said.

De Groot's group accuses the bishops of merging parishes without consulting those who are losing their local churches. "Many people are angry and disappointed," he said. His group told the Vatican last week that half of practicing Catholics would drift away in coming years as their churches closed.

via [Dutch bishops give pope bleak picture of Church in decline | Reuters](#).

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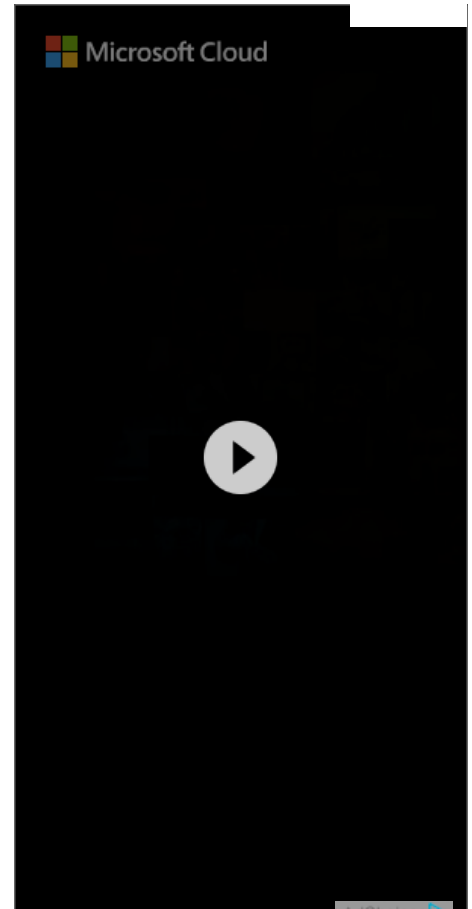
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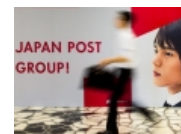


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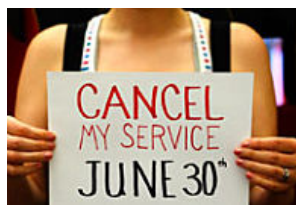
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Dec 4, 2013 9:20 am UTC

The Dutch Bishops were in the vanguard in the destruction of the Roman Catholic Faith following the Second Vatican Council ! introducing novelties and heretical statements and teaching, and here we see the result of this clerical treachery !

Posted by albertjazz | [Report as abusive](#)
The fruits of Vatican 2 and the Novus Ordo

Dec 4, 2013 1:00 pm UTC

Posted by Bret_A | [Report as abusive](#)

Dec 4, 2013 5:07 pm UTC

People need a reason to go to Mass on Sunday. When the Church is presented as a social welfare organization they why would anybody bother to attend Mass? There are myriad opportunities for social engagement and charity work that don't require committing to a Sunday morning meeting.

The primary mission of the Church is supernatural. It is the pathway to God and the means by which humans can attain eternal life instead of eternal damnation. Back when the churches were full on Sunday, people understood that.

Posted by ws3s | [Report as abusive](#)

Dec 5, 2013 11:21 pm UTC

Of course the faith is being lost in this country after the publication of the liberal "dutch catachism."
Liberlism always destroys faith.....

By Reuters Staff



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By Philip Pulella

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Posted by maggiesullivan | [Report as abusive](#)

Dec 5, 2013
5:07 pm UTC

ws3s needs to specify that CATHOLIC people should attend mass. Whatever his/her persuasion I would add that, catholic or protestant, Christ's raison d'etre was to be the pathway and spread the message. Every church claims that IT is THE path. I beg to differ. You can mince words re: means, but eternal life is promised if you but believe in Him.

@maggiesullivan: Liberalism DOES NOT always destroy faith or anything else. You should research the classical (read 'full') meaning of words before you open your mouth. Punter.

Posted by Mac20nine | [Report as abusive](#)

Dec 9, 2013
6:25 am UTC

I am heartened to see church facilities, previously doomed to superstitious ritual, finally being put to some practical use. Now if only organized religion could be induced to lay-off a commensurate number of clergy.

Posted by kbill | [Report as abusive](#)

Jun 14, 2014
1:04 am UTC

the saddest part is the worlds ignorance.it believes the church to be antigay,corrupt,child abusing, and woman haters.it belives the vatican actually makes money. the implications this will have on the poor, and society as a whole. were screwed, yet you believe we will be better off. tell you what.the catholic church will leave for 1000,no 100 year science will die morality will die everything you value, including your spouse, family and snack will die.pretzels? catholic monks made it,looks like kids hands in prayer.champagne?alcohol as we know it?catholic. that is what you owe us.fine we will leave.but we are taking alcohol, family,morality and the scientific method with us.we take the renaissance and "dark ages" with us. the crusades, so you'll all be muslim. we will take the inquisitions.so you will be invaded,due to spys. we will take saintdominic,the first and last for hundreds of years,advocate of the native americans we take our traditions.we take classical musicians,Beethoven. you keep Hitler, we hated him, he was neopagan/nazi mystic but lose the thousands of jews we saved,you claim we abandoned. if your christian,but not catholic,you lose your faith if your atheist,you lose the only rational voice in history,and when you screw the world, we wont be there to turn the other cheek. we leave your type of punishment to the muslims. Those guys are cool, but nuts. if your muslim,you lose your faith as well if your jewish(you guys are our bros) you lose the only one who, however inconsistently, has ever been on your side other than god. so fine earth break my heart.let every catholic church close. i give you 1 week,but 100 years sounds fine. so enjoy your false, absolutely false, "truths" the societys WE founded are flourishing,everyone founded by atheism? all dictatorships with little to no economic activity. Bye,were done with it,forget the good Samaritan and golden rule.after,3000 years of constant abuse, the catholic church IS outttt!

Jul 17, 2014
2:15 pm UTC

Posted by aquilathestone | [Report as abusive](#)

Of course, the hierarchs will make the excuse that the desacralization of the liturgy has had nothing to do with the decline in mass attendance.

Posted by profling | [Report as abusive](#)

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9/22/2015

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