

## 1968 and beyond in the church

In that year, Pope Paul VI famously reaffirmed Catholic teaching on birth control in *Humanae Vitae*, but then declined to discipline the many bishops and priests who rejected that teaching. The result was an uneasy truce: the teaching was formally upheld, but obedience to it was not demanded.

The same dynamic played out in 2005, when the Vatican decided that men with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” should be barred from the priesthood.

Countless bishops ignore this guidance; some even tolerate discreet romances. They only require that the priests not openly challenge Church teaching.

Both traditional and liberal Catholics are unhappy with this settlement. Under it, holiness and truth are sacrificed for a superficial peace. This arrangement is fair neither to the people who want to live by Church teaching, nor to those who would rather do without it.

We will not be able to begin real reform until we admit that the triumphalist narratives pushed by Catholic frontmen are false. Depending on whom you ask, the Catholic Church is in the midst of either a new springtime of evangelisation, initiated by St John Paul II, or a fresh paradigm of pastoral accompaniment, brought about by Pope Francis. Some commentators will explain that we are in the midst of both, and they wonderfully complement each other.

But for people in the pews, things don't look so great. In 1955, nearly 75 per cent of American Catholics went weekly to Mass. Today, only 39 percent do. Outside of a few Latin Mass and “reform of the reform” enclaves, Mass-going Catholics suffer wrecked sanctuaries, botched liturgies and moral confusion. The springtime is hard to find.

In recent months, I have attended a Mass at which Christ was assigned gender-neutral pronouns, and one at which the homilist proposed that he may have had biological brothers and sisters. (So much for Mary's perpetual virginity.) At another, I was invited to join a ministry that openly rejects Christian teaching on sex.

Such is the new era of evangelisation, the wondrous paradigm of pastoral accompaniment preserved by the fragile truce of 1968. Speaking as a member of what is called the JPII generation, I no longer think it is worth preserving. Upholding Catholic teaching on paper but not in reality has led to widespread corruption and contempt for authority. Preserving the peace has required a culture of lies. One way or another, we must sweep it away.

Matthew Schmitz is senior editor at First Things and a Robert Novak journalism fellow