



# Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

## **The Real Legacy of Vatican II: and the *Renewal* that Became a *Requiem***

### **The Death of Two Monasteries in Andover, MA**

**The magnificent Franciscan Seraphic Seminary and Monastery, and the Poor Clare Monastery, faced each other across a quiet street in Andover, Massachusetts for more than 60 fruitful years.**

The Franciscan Seminary was built around 1940, and the Poor Clare Monastery in 1959 — the same year that Pope John XXIII (on January 25, 1959) called for a general council of the Church; specifically, an “Aggiornamento” or “updating” of the Church in an effort to align it more closely with the “contemporary” cultural

and social milieu of the 1960s. A more toxic decade could not possibly have been chosen.

The following brief pictorial history of two erstwhile thriving institutions once *filled* with vocations is a silent testimony that needs little comment.

The enormous Seraphic Seminary is now a “*Retreat and Conference Center*” for a variety of programs, virtually all of which are inter-denominational or altogether non-religious. A handful of people, almost all lay, staff the largely empty building. Not one Franciscan habit is seen by a visitor.

Across the street, the expansive and once lovely Poor Clare Monastery built in 1959 is in a state of complete abandonment and ruin. It is unoccupied. Not one Nun. A private investor has acquired the property for a commercial enterprise (which, as we see above, culminated in its being razed to the ground.)

It is a deeply disturbing pictorial, for on the plaque on the statue in the picture above, one sees a list of the names of benefactors (most of modest means) who had ultimately made a very poor investment in the very best of faith. We cannot avoid seeing a reflection of our own faltering faith and the catastrophic failure to authentically implement it in a world that the Conciliar Church embraced to such an extent that in many ways the two became virtually indistinguishable. The long conflict that historically characterized the tension between the spiritual demands of God and His Church and the competing demands of secular society became so attenuated following Vatican II that the distinction was largely meaningless in the way that men lived their lives. The sacred became an impediment to rapprochement with the world and was soon the most notable casualty in the conflict.

In less than two generations what was long held to be lofty, noble, and set apart for God (which is the very meaning of holiness) became ultimately mundane and tiresomely redundant. “The ‘*good life*’” as the Church had understood it, and “‘*the good life*’” as the world understood it — long mutually adversarial — had become comfortably reconciled — but only through the largess of the newly emergent “Church of the New Advent” which paid tribute to Caesar by refusing tribute to God.

Sacred places like the Seraphic Seminary and the Poor Clare Monastery once abounded. These sacred places were built, and thrived, on “the Faith of our fathers” but soon fell into ruin and emptiness through the futile attempt to articulate that faith on the terms of the world, in the mistaken belief that if we become like the world, the world will become like us. It calls us to question many things, troubling things, from a vision of “renewal” to the reality of vacancy; of the tremendous hemorrhage of vocations, and renounced vows following a terrible miscalculation, an astonishing misunderstanding in the breathless pursuit of contemporaneity, of accommodating the Church to the world, and finding, in the end, that not only have the seminaries and monasteries been emptied, but the pews as well.

The pictures speak for themselves.

We can only stand back in astonishment and ask — *Who will rebuild the Church that St. Francis rebuilt ... and which we have let fall once again into ruin?*

If we do not, be assured that no one will.

Geoffrey K. Mondello  
Editor  
Boston Catholic Journal

Comments? Write us: [editor@boston-catholic-journal.com](mailto:editor@boston-catholic-journal.com)



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