

# Heat of election fever likely to burn out Liberals

A visitor from Mars could be excused if, casting an eye over the Canadian landscape (including the parts hidden under April snow), he or she deduced that the country is locked in the grip of an election fever. A fever caused by a mysterious virus called Gomery.

Our Martian would be right, of course. The campaign is on, and the Gomery inquiry into the sponsorship scandal is responsible.

All four federal party leaders went on national television Thursday night, then followed up with a profusion of media interviews.

Prime Minister Paul Martin gave no fewer than 14 interviews, back to back, on Friday. Three of the leaders (all but the Bloc's Gilles Duceppe) stumped southern Ontario over the weekend.

And with the Commons in recess all this week, the pace of campaigning is bound to intensify.

The question is no longer whether there will be an election before summer, but how early in June it will come.

House of Commons procedures are



**GEOFFREY STEVENS**

arcane; an advanced degree in necromancy is recommended for those who would fathom them. But to keep it simple, May is going to be a minefield for the Liberals with the opposition parties having at least three opportunities to bring down the minority government.

The first, it appears, will be on the budget. Unless Martin caves in to NDP leader Jack Layton's demand that the government cancel \$4.6 billion in future reductions in the corporate tax rate, the government could fall as early as May 3—which could produce an election on June 13.

(There is more smoke than substance to Layton's demands. The NDP, on its own, does not have quite enough

members, just 19, to save the government, which has 132, in the 308-seat House. What's more, cancellation of the tax cuts—designed to keep Canada competitive with the United States—would have no immediate impact; they are not scheduled to begin until 2008. Cancellation would simply give the NDP a trophy to wave in the election.)

The Liberals may well survive the budget test—the odds are they will—but they won't make it through the month.

The Conservatives have already tabled a motion calling on the Liberals to resign. When that motion comes to a vote, it will be supported by all 99 Conservatives and 54 Bloc MPs—and probably the NDP, too. They'd be crazy not to. The Queen's impending visit to Saskatchewan and Alberta complicates the timing a bit, but the election could take place on June 27.

An Ipsos-Reid poll published on the weekend will fuel the lust of the two principal opposition parties.

It gave the Conservatives a five-point lead nationally, 35 per cent to the Liberals' 30 per cent. More tellingly

(for the Bloc), it gave the separatist party a huge 51-20 lead over the Liberals in Quebec.

In Ontario, Ipsos-Reid put the Conservatives at 40 per cent—the highest they've been federally in the province in 20 years.

The Liberals (at 36 per cent in Ontario) are close enough to catch up, but the tide is against them. With 40 per cent, the Conservatives could sweep most of the seats outside Toronto (including all of the ridings in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and Guelph)—enough to take as many as 70 of Ontario's 106 seats.

The Conservatives have been busy doing their own polling in this crucial region, and the questions they have been asking, and the way they ask them, indicates they are more interested in campaign ammunition than in voters' true concerns.

A friend in Guelph received a call for a survey that was so obviously commissioned by the Conservatives that he nearly laughed out loud.

The poll began with a long statement to the effect that the Gomery inquiry had revealed that the Liberals

are corrupt, unfit to govern, and should be thrown out of office.

Respondents were then asked whether they would support Stephen Harper and the Conservatives in the next election.

Seven questions followed. Are taxes too high? Should immigration laws be reformed to prevent criminals from entering the country? There was a question on same-sex marriage and one on whether Canada should work closely with the United States on North American defence.

It's the sort of loaded survey that gives polling a bad name. It can also mislead the people who sponsored it into making serious strategic errors—just like the errors Harper made in the election a year ago.

Our visitor from Mars might find this amusing.

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## THE NEW POPE

# Dissent has a place in Catholic church

BY CHARLES E. CURRAN

I grew up as a typical pre-Vatican II Catholic. I entered the seminary at 13 and became a priest 11 years later; never questioning church teachings. But as a moral theologian in the 1960s, I began to see things differently, ultimately concluding that Catholics, although they must hold on to the core doctrines of faith, can and at times should dissent from the more peripheral teachings of the church.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the Catholic church feel differently. In summer 1986, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the powerful enforcer of doctrinal orthodoxy around the world, concluded a seven-year investigation of my writings.

Pope John Paul II approved the finding that "one who dissents from the magisterium as you do is not suitable nor eligible to teach Catholic theology."

**"History shows that the Catholic church has changed its moral teachings over the years on a number of issues (without admitting its previous position had been wrong)."**

Ratzinger—now Pope Benedict XVI—told the Catholic University of America to revoke my licence to teach theology because of my "repeated refusal to accept what the church teaches."

I was fired. It was the first time an American Catholic theologian had been censured in this way. At issue was my dissent from church teachings on "the indissolubility of consummated sacramental marriage, abortion, euthanasia, masturbation, artificial contraception, premarital intercourse and homosexual acts," according to their final document to me. It's true that I questioned the idea that such acts are always immoral and never acceptable (although I thought my dissent on these issues was quite nuanced).

Unfortunately, the Vatican was already moving toward greater discipline and orthodoxy—was having none of it. Seven years earlier, it had punished the Swiss theologian Hans Kung because of his teachings on infallibility in the church.

Later, Ratzinger "silenced" Brazilian Franciscan Leonardo Boff, an advocate of liberation theology, for a year. Just recently, Ratzinger said U.S. Jesuit Roger Haight could not teach Catholic theology until he changed his understanding of the role of Jesus Christ.

Since 1986, no Catholic institution has offered to hire me. Although I remain a baptized Catholic and a Catholic priest—the pope and cardinal did not move to have me defrocked—my case sent an unmistakable and unequivocal message to Catholics around the world that deviation would no longer be tolerated.

Official Catholic teaching always has given the impression that the pope and bishops will not and cannot change moral teachings because these teachings are based on God's law. Certainly Pope Benedict XVI will insist upon the same approach.

But it doesn't have to be that way. History shows that the Catholic church has changed its moral teachings over the years on a number of issues (without admitting its previous position had been wrong).

A very sorry page in Catholic history, for example, is the fact that for over 1,800 years the popes and the church did not condemn slavery. And until the 17th century, popes, in the strongest terms, condemned loans with interest as violating God's law.

History is not the only argument for change in Catholic



Joseph Ratzinger was honoured in his hometown of Marktl, Germany, in 1997 when he was a cardinal. The new pope has been a longtime guardian of doctrinal orthodoxy.

moral teachings. Catholics generally recognize that many (if not all) of Catholic moral teachings on specific issues belong to the category of "non-infallible" teachings.

Despite the "creeping infallibilism" that seeks to put more and more teachings beyond question, the fact is that many moral issues are open for reinterpretation and rethinking.

Dramatic changes have occurred in some aspects of papal social teachings in the last two centuries.

Pope Gregory XVI in an 1832 encyclical condemned freedom of conscience in society as an "absurd and erroneous teaching or rather madness."

Pope Leo XIII in the 19th century condemned "the modern liberties" and opposed the equality and participation of citizens in civic and political life. The people, he wrote, are "the untutored multitude" that must "be controlled by the authority of law." Vatican II, however, accepted religious liberty for all human beings.

In dealing with civic, political and economic life, contemporary papal social teachings give great importance to history and to the notion that social ideas can change with the times.

In these areas, church teachings now emphasize the freedom, equality and participation of the person, as well as a "relationality" model that sees people in multiple relationships with God, neighbours near and far, the Earth, and self.

But in papal sexual ethics, an older methodology still prevails. Unchanging human nature and the eternal law of God, not historical development or the person understood in light of relationships, constitute the primary considerations. The many people both inside and outside the Catholic church who experience some dissonance between papal sexual and social teachings are right. There is a different methodology at work in these two areas.

Some changes would logically occur in sexual teachings if they employed the same methodology as used in papal social teachings. Likewise, papal sexual teachings, like social teachings, would not be able to claim absolute certainty on complex and specific issues.

History reminds us that change in Catholic moral teachings always comes from the grass roots. Interviews with ordinary Catholics mourning the death of Pope John Paul II indicated that even those who admired and loved him strongly disagreed with some of his specific moral teachings.

Even the staunch defenders of the papal condemnation of artificial contraception for spouses recognize that the vast majority of Catholics do not follow the pope.

• *Los Angeles Times*  
• *Charles E. Curran is a professor of human values at Southern Methodist University and the author, most recently, of The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II.*

# Navigating streets distinguishes residents from visitors

When I moved to Waterloo Region in 1991, the first thing that struck me as odd was the city's grid network—or lack thereof.

Coming from a city where north was north and south was south, it was disconcerting to find that north was now west in Kitchener. Confusing still was that west became south and then became north if you followed King Street.

It became clear to me that successfully navigating the area's distinctive street network would mark a rite of passage that would allow me to say that I was a true resident of the area.

## OUR SECRET JOY

Fourteen years later, I take some heart that longtime residents have trouble navigating the streets themselves, and have an even greater trouble giving directions to friends and strangers. But that's our secret joy.

You catch a glimmer of that delight in our eye when someone from out of



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town (especially from Toronto) comes up to you and asks how to get anywhere from here. What do you mean there's a King Street East, West, North and South? That Weber Street crosses King Street twice? That they should follow Victoria Street North—straight into the rising sun?

We should not underestimate the resource this distinctive feature of our region provides. Yes, Guelph has its downtown of strange angles and a turn in Highway 7 that sends you careening

into a park, but the bulk of that city is a simple grid laid over spaghetti streets that is typical of Ontario suburbs.

Our streets are so complicated that we might actually have the opportunity of becoming a tourist trap in the literal sense of the word.

I say we take it. Tell a Torontonion to leave the city via Homer Watson Boulevard, and imagine their surprise when they come back to the city along Fountain Drive. The map books alone should net us a fortune.

The key to prospering as a city is to find our distinctive advantages and emphasize them, and our street network should be no different. How about we start changing the names of our streets enroute, like we do with Fairway Road, Courtland Avenue, Jubilee Drive and Park Street?

When a Toronto driver asks, "I want to go from Fairview Park mall to Waterloo Town Square. Where do I turn?"

"You don't," we reply, and grin maniacally.

We already transform Weber Street into King Street after Weber Street crosses King twice. We already transform Columbia into Lexington. Maybe certain stretches of King Street should be randomly renamed after previous mayors. Or, better yet, maybe we could rename all of our streets Bob.

## NOW ADD ROUNDABOUTS

And just when our visitors become accustomed to our bizarre street network, we can hit them with our secret weapon: roundabouts.

The regional website has done a good job explaining what roundabouts are and how they work, and they are intuitive enough that almost everybody can navigate them safely, but we've jumped on the roundabout bandwagon more than any other city in this province.

We might handle them as second na-

ture, but imagine terror in the out-of-towner's eyes when he or she comes upon one of our roundabouts for the first time. That's worth setting up a camera at these intersections.

For fun, we can direct people through these roundabouts whenever they ask for directions. And we get bonus points if we suggest that they use them to make a U-turn on their way to wherever they're trying to go.

But seriously, our distinctive road network is a unique feature of our city, one that has a lot to do with the history of our founding. And yes, we should celebrate it. That doesn't mean we can't gripe about it.

In my experience, that's also a distinctive characteristic of this community; and a further sign that this region is now my home.

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