



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
June 2007
Issue No. 24

Introduction

This Report from Australian reforming Catholics shows encouraging steps forwards in ARC's development as a group of Catholics committed to achieving change within our Church.

Bishop David Walker of the Broken Bay Diocese invited John Buggy to speak at last month's Diocesan Conference about disaffected Catholics (read the letters on page 2).

This month the *West Australian* newspaper asked John to write about Church in connection with the stem cell research debate.

John wrote the article and gave it the title *A Time for Leadership*.

I find the letters printed on pages 2 and 3 also important because two are from non-Catholic ministers of religion.

Indeed, the growing variety in contributions to *arcvoice* is stimulating.

It is good to realise again and again that many people in Australia and elsewhere share views on the way the Catholic Church threatens to evolve and how it should evolve.

I am impressed by the articles from Maree Lyndon and Linda Morris (p 4) and happy to share page 5 with Anne Digges with whom I have – apart from my age – lots in common, including the same disaffection with the Church.

Page 6 fulfils a decision made at the AGM of last 15 October.

The writers of the articles on page 7 show how far away some members of the Hierarchy are from reality. The title of the headline on the front of *arcvoice* 23 *Bishops need help in facing reality* was 'spot on'.

Marion Mather's letter on page 3 stresses this point again and so do the quotes and Dermot's Dorgan's song on page 10.

Maree Kennedy completes her essay *Being a Christian Woman*. (8-9)

Page 11 is shared by advertisements for important Conferences and the *Our Mother*, perhaps also directed towards the reality of life as we live it today.

Jim Taverne

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Volunteer Assistance Needed

ARC's membership is growing and we are in urgent need of a volunteer to assist with maintaining registrations and subscriptions. Computer skills (Excel) essential. Please contact:

Jim Taverne

4/1035 Pacific Highway, Pymble, NSW 2073

02 9449 2923

jagota@ozemail.com.au

Understanding Disaffected Catholics

Curia Leaders' Workshop - Diocese of Broken Bay - 10-11 May 2007

John Buggy (spokesperson for ARC Secretariat) was invited by Bishop David Walker to attend and speak to the Broken Bay Diocesan Curia's Leaders' Workshop. His presentation has been sent to those ARC members who have email facilities. A *PowerPoint* version is also available on request. If others would like to receive copies, please contact the editor on (02) 9449 7275 or knowlden1@bigpond.com

The following comments are just a sample of the many supportive messages which John has received. The writers have agreed to their publication.

Living over here (in Thailand), it is a great thing just even reading the email correspondence and following the discussion. I have shown the Broken Bay presentation to a few people over here and will keep it for reference. It sums up just how a few of us over here feel about church and the hierarchy. I was so excited with the response over here to your presentation, not just to Catholics but two Anglicans and a few (three) displaced church persons, and it resonated with them all. Please, for those who are far away, keep up the discussion. Regards to all, *Michael Holdcroft*

Thank you for your presentation to the BB Diocese recently and which I have just read on the ARC website. It has answered so many questions for me about ARC and who it embraces. How do I join and where do you meet? (LATER) Hi! I have just joined ARC and this is just to introduce myself. I was prompted to join after reading John Buggy's address to the Broken Bay Diocese Group. I have been aware of ARC for some time and John's talk was the catalyst I needed to join up. I look forward to reading more in the coming weeks. Peace to all, *Anne Chang*.

I have just read your presentation on *Cath News*. I found it very interesting. I think perhaps this is where the Pentecostals have a much better idea of fellowship than Catholics. (We live in a small country town which makes it very noticeable). We are Christian meditators, the others still have their Charismatic meeting and we all feel that prayer, or lack of, has a lot to do with it. Any thoughts? God bless, *Marg*

This morning, following a link from *CathNews*, I printed your paper you delivered at your conference. Thank you very much. I found it beautiful, encouraging and inspiring. You are a busy man so please do not trouble to reply. With best wishes, *Bill Domsley*

Thanks. A fine and encouraging paper – comparable in some ways to the Open Letter sent by former Moore College lecturer, the Revd Dr Keith Mascord, to the Standing Committee of our (Anglican) Diocese – which is being

assessed now quite thoroughly and which many hope and pray will have some good effect! Blessings, *John Bunyan*

I just read your article *Understanding Disaffected Catholics*. You obviously know much more about this than I do and we may not agree on all solutions at this moment, but I wholeheartedly agree with your statement that doing the same will produce the same results. I also agree that we must maximise the celebration of the sacraments and clarify all issues that disaffect Catholics eg divorce, contraception, the role of women. We should either change policies, or enforce them, but not leave people in confusion and guilt. I have been sending unsolicited emails about the plight of the church to a growing list of clergy and some lay people. It numbers 700 now. I will continue to share what I learn with the 700 priests and lay administrators plus selected lay people on this mailing list. Yours in Christ, *Barry Kearney*

Currently I'm a parish worker in Brisbane. Have met some of your people at a conference in Melbourne a few years ago: Ordination of Catholic Women. I belong to them. I probably should join your mob, but don't have time for anything much at the moment. (not that I'm not interested). Will have a look at the website when I get a chance. Best wishes. You are providing an important service to a church in which dialogue is virtually negligible. *Vivien Williams*

A brilliant paper! Thank you John Buggy, it says it all and is so very well articulated! Cheers, *Jim Milligan*

I found your paper on disaffected Catholics helpful. Your account of the 'disaffected seekers' could be part of my autobiography. It is a good sign that you were welcome to give this paper at a Broken Bay Diocese function. Some of the bishops would read it with attention and care. Sadly a few who are prominent around here will dismiss it. Shalom, *Graham English* (Senior Lecturer, School of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University)

I have only been to the 2006 meeting and found it excellent and am prepared to travel from Perth to attend future meetings. *John Hillier*

Printed copies of John Buggy's two articles:

- *Understanding Disaffected Catholics*
- *A Time for Leadership – Reason and extremes within the stem cell research debate*

will be posted on request to:

Margaret Knowlden
Editor, *ARCvoice*
32 Awatea Road ST IVES CHASE, NSW 2074

Also available on our website: www.e-arc.org - select 'Notice Board'



A word of thanks for ARC from a Protestant minister. I have been involved in ecumenism for 50 years and now, in retirement, can reflect on the journey so far.

We have all taken tentative steps towards each other so that much of the old antipathy has gone, but we have not yet dealt with major, radical issues which lie between us. There is only one church of Jesus Christ and we have to make that a reality, not just a phrase or a dream. As a child of the Reformation tradition I know that just as Catholics will need to deal with issues like the full ministry of women, so we will have to face acceptance of the Bishop of Rome as the Presiding Bishop of the global church. In order that we may take such a leap, the Vatican will have to accept that the Bishop of Rome is not an emperor, nor the one giver of final truth, nor the judge of all believers. It is a tough call for all of us.

But ARC gives me hope that reform is possible, for you have been thinking through these issues in a constructive way, despite official discouragement. It is often true that reality is the strongest theological argument. So as we discern how close we are in our spiritual journey and how great is our need of each other, exclusiveness will no longer work for any of us. Then even cardinals will know that God calls us together in mutual acceptance and in common service in this broken world.

You help me to pray for a bold ecumenism.

Revd Dr Bernard Thorogood
2 Ashmore Avenue Pymble 2073

Thanks for the contact. We are essentially a loose email group predominately talking about Melbourne issues in the Catholic Church. There is very little 'activism' going on in the Melbourne church, most people seemed to have rolled over and given up. Fabiola's doesn't have a website, and as you will notice our emails are generally in response to issues that emerge on the local scene. ARC is one group that we would see as supporting our desire to be prophetic witnesses in a difficult time in our Church. Of course we suffer the usual discouragement when things like the demise of On-Line Catholics occur and often bemoan the apathy of Catholics, but then we rally and shoot off an email to those interested in what we have to say.

Church needs to look at the reality of life as we live it today

Having read some of the articles in the recent edition of ARC, I feel prompted to write about two situations that I am aware of, involving on the one hand friends of mine who are being married just after Easter this year, and on the other, a couple that I know.

Firstly, my friends are a lovely couple who met just two years ago, both in their fifties, both Catholic and both having been married before. Both of them have been alone for a number of years, both have spent years raising children as single parents, educating them in Catholic schools, and both are practising Catholics. Both came from relationships where their spouse left the relationship to be with someone else.

Late last year they decided that they wanted to marry. They really wanted to have a Catholic Church wedding but, although one had an annulment, the other didn't and they were told that a priest could not marry them. They have agreed to an arrangement where they are being married in a Catholic Church building although it will be by a civil celebrant.

In the other situation, the ex-husband of a friend of mine is getting married for the third time. He is in his sixties, is not a religious man and does not align himself with any faith or church. He is marrying a lady much younger than himself who has never been married before. She is a Catholic and they are having a full Catholic Church wedding.

It seems so strange to me that contrasting situations like this can occur. On the one hand the Church is turning its back on a couple who have lived their lives doing the best they can in their circumstances, who have continued to grow and develop in their faith life despite the difficulties they faced, and they are being turned away from Catholic marriage. On the other hand, a man who is being married for the third time to a younger bride, who has had no involvement in the Church whatsoever, is welcomed into Catholic matrimony.

Surely the Church needs to look at the reality of life as we live it today and understand that now, more than ever, direction needs given according to the individual situation. No longer is some blanket approach going to adequately serve the Church or the needs of our faith community, given the infinite shades of grey that we constantly encounter.

My friends, I am sure, will be blessed on their day by our loving God, wherever they hold their ceremony, and that their love will continue to inspire and enrich the lives of those around them, including my own.

Marion Mather
Bardon, Qld.

Unfortunately some of us are rather intimately connected to the institution and cannot risk exposure. Of course we realise anonymity has its drawbacks, but in order to say what we do it needs to be protected.

Fabiola's is more than happy for any of our email comments to be included in your newsletter and we are very happy to promote ARC. If people want to receive emails they can contact us and we will add them to our list.

It is great to know that there are people like you still around!

Resurrection Blessings to all at ARC.

Fabiola's Table
fabiolas@bigpond.net.au

Membership contributions for the year ending 30 June 2008 are now due

My Confession Story

Maree Lyndon

I recently visited the Old Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul in Goulburn, the scene of much of my religious experience in the 1940's and 1950's.

I stood in the sanctuary, a place I realised I had never stood in before, largely because of my gender, even to view the headstone of a cousin/bishop set in the marble floor. My gaze followed the lines of confessionals I visited weekly in those innocent and formative years. I was so glad to see they are no longer in use, with only a more contemporary room in the corner.

My eyes rested firstly on one near the back doorway where once I had stood worrying about having sufficient 'matter' to receive absolution. Then I looked at the one on the other side of the doorway where I had the great experience of being told to 'get out' because I hadn't committed a mortal sin in three days! My gaze then travelled down to the boxes near the Sacred Heart side altar and I remembered the first Thursday when the whole class was marched off to confess that we had stolen Sr. Catherine's cherries. By the time a third of us had started 'Bless me Father ...' Fr. Dowd said 'And how many cherries have you stolen?' Is there any wonder I was a very confused and scared confessor?

I recalled the high drama and theatrics of the sermons we were subjected to but I was able to express my gratitude that I survived it all to encounter a loving Creator who let me know it wasn't like that at all!

The Old Cathedral is undergoing a \$5m restoration and they plan to replace the altar rails. I got a blank response when I attempted to explain the symbolism of doing this!

There must be many other 'Confession' stories to remind *arcvoice* readers of 'the good old days' and how far we have travelled. Please keep them rolling in! (Editor)

Women at cross-purposes with church

Linda Morris

Religious Affairs writer

Sydney Morning Herald, 24/3/07

(reprinted with the author's permission)

For the first time tomorrow, mother of four Lynne Taylor will process down the aisle at St Declan's Catholic Church, her parish for 15 years, wearing an alb and carrying the tall cross for the celebration of Sunday Mass. Like any acolyte, she will assist the priest, John Crothers, to prepare the altar for the sacred gifts of bread and wine and help him in the distribution of Holy Communion. Also present will be her son Benjamin, playing the organ, Joshua and Ethan, serving as altar servers, and Noah, bearing the Communion vessels.

It will be a significant moment, as the Catholic Church holds that only its sons, not its daughters, can fulfil this role of lay ministry. Some Catholic parishes have tried to navigate around church tradition by changing the name of women's ministry from acolyte to senior server or making these positions temporary.

But the issue of women's roles in the church has been brought to a head by the Sydney Archdiocese's Liturgy Office, which is insisting the church's rules be strictly observed. All parishes have been asked to forward the names of new candidates to the ministry of acolytes – and women need not apply.

Father Crothers, Penshurst's parish priest, has offered to forward any application of a current acolyte, male or female, with his recommendation. It was a matter of principle and justice, he said. Nine of the parish's 26 acolytes are women. Most, including Mrs Taylor, will probably apply for the right to be formally instituted as acolytes.

'In life there are times when you simply have to stand up for what you know is right,' Father Crothers said in a notice to parishioners. 'I'm confident that the vast majority of Sydney Catholics believe that women should not be excluded from lay ministry in the church. If we held blindly to every church tradition, we would still be saying Mass in Latin and forbidding Catholics to attend weddings of their Anglican friends in an Anglican church.'

Mrs Taylor cannot understand why the church is reluctant to accept her offer of service when the role is not a step towards priestly ordination. 'The church is very discriminatory in its treatment of women. In this day and age there is no reason why this should be the case. I believe God created Eve to work closely with Adam, not to serve him.'

Father Timothy Deeter, the Liturgy Office director, said it had been 10 to 12 years since the last group of acolytes were formally instituted by the archdiocese. Women can be altar servers, but not acolytes.

'To say this is injustice to women is to involve the old canard that everyone should be able to do everything. We see the ministry of the altar being close to the ministry of priesthood; and so there is hesitation, so as to not give hope to people who might be advocating the ordination of women. On the other hand, I don't think there should be any concerns of the ministry of the church being top-heavy with men. There are women functioning in many ministries in the church today, including readers, ministers of communion, altar servers and other ministries. There are liturgies where the priest could be the only male at the altar. The bottom line is it is the job of Cardinal Pell to be faithful to the liturgy of the universal church and to uphold these liturgical laws.' □

International Observations

Jim Taverne

In its Pentecost letter *Wir sind Kirche* asks: the Eucharist for some only? The Eucharist as source and apex of the Church life and message was to receive a new impulse at the Synod of bishops Sacramentum Caritas in late 2005. This did not happen. Many bishops had proposed the ordination of *viriprobat* to help reduce the growing problem of shortage of priests. This proposal was ignored in the Pope's statement. All the people of God have the right to share in the Eucharist and other sacraments (canon 213). It seems that the return to the translation of 'pro multis' by 'for many' instead of 'for all' confirms the sad reality.

My comment: Were the words of Jesus 'Do this in memory of me!' spoken to Catholic priests only, or to many people or to all? If there are not enough priests we must ourselves 'do this in memory of Jesus'.

The Eijk norm

The selection process for teachers for the new Faculty of Catholic Theology in Utrecht has caused astonishment and indignation among theologians in The Netherlands. The new system is called the *Eijk norm* after the Vice Chancellor bishop Wim Eijk. The freedom of the theology is being killed off by the return of the Inquisition. It is all part of the action by Rome to appoint. Bishops and priests who chase the people out of the church. because they don't listen to their parishioners but only to Rome. (Prof. Bert Musschenga in Volzin 9 March '07)

Question: Does the last sentence ring a bell for Australian Catholics?

Quote in National Catholic Reporter 30 March '07:

The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life ... It injects into life a false certitude. Fundamentalism invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide'. (The Pontifical Bible Commission: *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 1993).

Comment: Some years ago an Archbishop told me that the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) contained all that Catholics need for their correct faith.

Stay Connected electronically

Tissa Balasuriya OMI, the keynote speaker at our first Conference in October 2002, declared that the existence of email and websites had made his ministry more efficient and effective. It is good that good and bad news can be 'broadcast' via the Internet all over the world instantaneously. Communicating electronically is also an essential element of ARC's activity.

Please make sure that we know your present address and telephone number and also your email address. For more contacts, consider participation in our online discussion group

I want to be a part of a church that •••

Anne Digges

- that has women priests.
- that sincerely values in word and deed the contribution of the salt-of-the-earth women who give their hearts, souls, blood, sweat and tears to do its work, without whom the church would simply fold. Do you honestly think it is the men who are running the show?
- that values dissent and actively encourages thinkers.
- I want to be part of a church where I am treated as an equal, not just a priest's handbag when working in conjunction with priests. I ain't nobody's handbag, gentlemen!
- I want to be part of a church where the likes of Fred Nile are actively discouraged and every bitter, twisted, outdated, redundant mindset that he represents.
- that is brave and prepared to take unpopular stands of conscience, aka The Greens. I need to meet some Lefty Green Catholics who do not read *The Catholic Weekly*.
- that does not harass women and say the rosary outside Abortion Clinics.
- that is not so defensive about criticism that it calls its critics heretics and every other name under the sun. I want the church to grow up in other words.
- which makes me feel welcome and does not treat me like a raving lunatic.
- which does not feel the need to constantly evangelise. If indeed we have something that is worth sharing, the people will find us – not the other way around. My analogy is that of a salesperson trying to sell me something in a shop. The more you harass me the more I walk straight out of the shop and the more I wonder what is wrong with the product. Leave me to my own devices and I might have a look around and eventually buy something in my own sweet time. You may have picked up that I am not big into evangelisation.
- where unpopular views are listened to by parish priests, not just 'yes father, no father, whatever you say father, three bags full father, bless you father for I have sinned. I am, after all, just a lay pleb and not a real serious full-on catholic like you are father and couldn't possibly know what I am talking about, sorry father, silly me forgive me'. Bow scrape, bow scrape.
- which I love more days than I hate it.

ANNE DIGGES is a Catholic woman who lives in Sydney and works as a nurse

A common prayer for Australian Reforming Catholics

It was decided at the AGM of October 2006 that ARC should have a common prayer.

The secretariat and others have worked on this suggestion and we now presents a choice out of four prayers, of which the Prayer of the Australian Reforming Catholics was conceived by the secretariat itself. If you wish, please convey your choice to the editor of *ARCvoice*: knowlden1@bigpond.com

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Adapted for ARC Oct 2006

Dear Jesus

Make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

St Francis of Assisi 1181-1226

ARC Campfire2004 Prayer

Jesus, our Friend!
You are with us in
all our conversations.
Help us to realise
that we are church
and that any reform
starts with ourselves.
Enable us to pass on
to our contemporaries
insights gained from your Spirit.
Amen



Prayer of the Australian Reforming Catholics

Jesus, our friend, through whom we see something of the mystery of God, help us in our efforts to reform structures, teachings and practices in the Church that developed over time from your simple command that we love one another.

Help us to discern and express what is in keeping with your Spirit and to inspire others to join us in the task of making the Church a visible sign of what your love means.

Enable us to make known biased teachings and practices that hurt and confuse those who seek you with willing hearts

Give us the courage to speak and act in seeking necessary reform in the Church.

Empower us to work with the same love, compassion and truthfulness that showed in everything that you said and did.

May we be instruments in bringing it about that more and more people feel happy to say 'Our Church' when they speak of the community or path that leads them to you.

Healing God,
In your presence we are still.
Deep in the shade of your love we have rested
as travellers under a leafy eucalypt tree.
Sustain us now
with your grace.
Because of your promise
to go with us
we are still on the journey.

(by Norman Habel)

from *Still on the Journey*, an ecumenical Lenten reflection programme prepared by the South Australian Council of Churches for 2000

Cardinal George Pell's recent guidelines on funeral eulogies miss the point in human terms of what a funeral is about. For two families, not only grieving the loss of a beloved member but also coping with the reality of suicide, the eulogies provided an opportunity to celebrate a life and help in the grieving process

'Put God back into the Funeral Mass'

Margaret Gallagher

Recent guidelines issued by Cardinal Pell (*SMH* 24.2.07) advise that words of remembrance should only be delivered after the Prayer of Communion and be brief (no more than 3-5 minutes), be limited to one person, be prepared in advance and ideally be reviewed by the parish priest.

I am in a position to speak about this subject as my son died tragically 5½ years ago and, without the various eulogies at the Mass including one from myself and his sisters, we would not have been able to cope as well as we did, and to be able to get on with our lives. To hear from the other people who gave eulogies was so important to us and to all the others present as it gave a total picture of my son's courageous life and the inspiration he was to all of those who had known him. How dare Archbishop Pell limit to a few minutes what can be said about the person who has died? Is that to be the sum total of their lives? I thought the Funeral Mass was about celebrating the life of the person who has died. How can that happen when there are no eulogies or only a token one allowed. There were over 800 people at my son's funeral, including many young people and people of all faiths. God was so much part of the whole funeral Mass. Many people told me after the funeral Mass how inspired they were by the way the Mass was conducted and the way the eulogies were presented that they felt much closer to God. I also know that some people who attended that day returned to the practice of their faith because of their experience at my son's funeral. I totally believe that Jesus would want bereaved families to be provided with the comfort and support that eulogies can bring.

I am writing this letter because I don't want any bereaved people to be denied the opportunity we were given to celebrate the life of my son. It helped so much in the whole grieving process and our ability as a family to continue with meaningful lives. □

Funerals Should Inspire, Not Flatten

Noel Braun

Everyday I think of my cherished Maris. And on many other days I think of the beautiful funeral service celebrated by Father Peter McGrath. It was an inspiring tribute to Maris' life and gave us, the family in shock, the opportunity to tell her story and express our appreciation of her wonderful contribution. I spoke of her daily struggle with the terrible disease – depression. My daughter Angela spoke of her role as mother. The other three children, Jacinta, Stephen and Tim added their prayers. Maris' best friend, Janne, added her tribute. Brother Damian delivered the homily.

We, the family, gained an immeasurable amount of support from the many people present as well as the opportunity to plan the prayers, readings, songs and deciding who should speak, to make for us a meaningful and real tribute. I needed to speak, for example, to explain why Maris died as few people knew of her struggle and her suicide was completely unexpected. It was a most fitting farewell, a very sad occasion, but full of passion, inspiring us for the long, long journey of coming to terms and coping with life without her.

All of this would have been so different if Maris had died today and we lived in the archdiocese of Sydney. Like Margaret Gallagher, who wrote an article in last month's *Terrey Graph*, I read the news item in which Cardinal Pell's new guidelines regarding funeral services were announced, such as allowing only one person to speak after the Prayer of Communion for no more than three minutes. Maris' eulogy would have been vetted, the funeral could have been a cold impersonal passionless routine, full of clichés and dull prayers ("it is a holy and wholesome thought...") etc., without recognising the person that Maris is or the pain that we, the bereaved, were experiencing. We, the family, could have been left flat and dissatisfied – an inadequate start to the difficult path of grieving.

Although Cardinal Pell's guidelines may satisfy the requirements of a religious service, I believe it misses the point in human terms of what a funeral is about. Since the beginning of time, humans have acknowledged the passing of the dead in ceremonies that had meaning for the age and culture. Telling the story is so important and being allowed to do so at the funeral brings extra blessings, as if God too acknowledges that bereaved families need the support and comfort of eulogies (telling the story).

I am usually a mild-mannered person and not given to confrontation. However, Cardinal Pell's decision disturbed me, like Margaret, that bereaved families will be denied the opportunity we had to celebrate Maris' life in such a personal and inspiring way. The church rules have got it wrong before, such as refusing burial of a suicide in "sacred ground". (How lacking in compassion!) How would we have coped with that rejection? I believe it's wrong this time. □

Being a Christian Woman.....

Maree Kennedy

PART 2 (continued from *ARCvoice* 23)

My questions about this 'out there male person God' continue to expand...

What made God male? How could I as a woman relate to the maleness of most of the bible stories? Could God also have feminine qualities? Did I always have to call God Father? What was it about my femaleness that made me unworthy to receive all seven sacraments? Why was I as a female, unable to take up a leadership role in what I am told is 'my church'? Where were women's voices in the decision making of 'my church'? Why are celibate men telling me what I can and can't do with my sexuality and reproductive bits?

These questions forced me to question both the image of God and the understanding of church that I had been taught.

There began to be some things that really made my Christian female blood boil. As I could not believe that women are any less human or holy than men, I could no longer accept that a woman is unfit for any vocation or position of leadership in the Catholic Church.

I began to see that sexuality, including all sexual orientations, is morally neutral and can be lived out either positively or negatively. I could no longer believe that any of us has the right to refuse Eucharist to another.

Now, I cannot believe that those whose marriages have died are not worthy to receive Eucharist unless they have the marriage annulled or live a celibate life.

There are many other issues that I really struggle with and it is often very painful.

Readjusting my beliefs was really like having the rug pulled from under me. One question inevitably led to another.... Once I started to question and think for myself the floodgates opened. Once I saw I couldn't unsee.

I thought that if I studied theology and read the right books and documents I would find the answers to my questions. I enrolled in a Master of Arts in Theology degree, and while I am learning heaps, I just have more questions. Through my reading and speaking with other searching people, I began to question even more...

With our current knowledge of science and evolution, did the first people really intentionally turn away from God or did they just do what they had to do to survive? Were the first people really capable of making an informed choice

about turning away from God as it says in the Catechism? Weren't death and destruction part of life long before humans emerged? Are we humans really flawed or just evolving and incomplete?

Did God set creation in motion then stand back and watch according to a divine plan? What good then is prayer if it is all planned? Does God intervene now or not?

If the one true church that I had been taught about was wrong about Galileo and they took 400 years to admit it, could they also be wrong about other big things too? I'm thinking it's very possible!

I have been led by my own life experiences and my searching spirit to change my image of God and my understanding of church. I no longer see God as a male person up there who watches me, judges me and directs my paths. I no longer see God as a man in heaven and it really infuriates me that my church hierarchy continues to insist on only masculine words to refer to God. God is so much more than a personified male in a place called heaven.

I believe that we do not have the words or explanations ever to describe God fully, but we must be more inclusive rather than exclusive. I believe God is present in all of creation. I see the presence of God in those who comfort the sick, and in the sick, in those who lend a hand to the needy and in the poor, in those who have patience with a child, and in the screaming child, in those who show compassion to those who are different, and in those who are different, in those who give a voice to those who have no voice, and in those who work for the environment and for peace. I don't think you have to wear a jersey of a particular religious tradition or be a specific gender to be an expression of God. I don't think that any one religious tradition holds all the truth about God. I think God comes to expression in a multitude of ways, in a multitude of cultures both inside and outside religious traditions.

I now see the bible stories as sacred human books of profound wisdom which outline human perceptions of people's experiences of God in a particular time and place in history. I see stories that were shaped by the human people of that time, with their human weaknesses and strengths, prejudices, convictions and current knowledge of the world.

I am now discovering new and life-giving ways of being church, and now believe that the one size fits all model of church will never suffice.

I still attend Mass most Sundays but have had to shop around the parishes to find communities and priests which are inclusive and welcoming of all. I find the restrictions placed on the traditional Catholic liturgy very difficult as I believe there are unlimited ways for God to come to expression in each of us if only we allowed to Spirit to move. I have a hard time now praying the Catholic Creed at Mass. For my own integrity I have to say my own Creed. I just cannot rattle off words that no longer express my understandings. In fact to be honest I find it very difficult to pray any of the parts of the Mass with any integrity so usually I don't. I believe the structures within my Catholic tradition need to change dramatically, so that all people have a voice, including women.

I think we as church need to put on our shoes and run to catch up with what God is already doing in the world, and that those of us who are part of a religious tradition should stop trying to fill empty seats in churches but rather encourage and affirm all people to develop the natural spirituality and yearning that is within them.

My image of God and understanding of church have changed so much that the current structures and liturgy usually no longer express or even nurture my spirit. So I step out into the world and find God there. I find God in the everyday struggles of my day, in social justice groups, in Spirituality in the Pub, in WATAC, in interchurch gatherings such as this one, and in dealing with young people who have an amazing sense of justice and intellect to question and challenge the unjust. I see this as church.

To me, being 'church' is walking this journey together and being really present to the other person as well as being true to myself. To me, church is not about conforming to certain 'truths' or rules, it isn't deciding who can or can't belong, it isn't excluding others, it isn't rattling off prayers that are not meaningful to me or listening silently to church leaders whose statements are sometimes so removed from reality that I want to puke and it isn't placing my bottom on a seat in a church when the experience is more soul-destroying than life-giving.

No matter how hard I try, I cannot return to my original image of God. In fact, I don't want to.

People tell me to 'chill out' and stop thinking and analyzing so much! I wish I could 'chill out' sometimes, but most of the time I am spiritually thirsty. I need to find who God is for me

I guess my problem is not my faith, although I have been told that it is. I sometimes just can't go to Mass because it makes me so angry. I cannot sit there silently while the church

leader raves on about the evils of the material world and secular society and I look down to see a huge shining gold cross hanging around his neck and think about church real estate.

I still believe in God, but not the God of my past. I see God working through those who allow God to work through them in their everyday encounters with those around them, especially in my family, school community and precious friends. I see God both within and outside the hierarchical church. I see God in the creation of the universe and all life and death. I see God in the limitless expanse of creation which is still evolving. I see God in each of you.

One of the biggest issues I struggle with is the passing on of a spiritual tradition to our two sons aged 17 and 15. I want them to have a new understanding of church, one that is the people of God who gather to search for and support the God that is already present in each person. I want others to help my husband and me to guide them to nurture their spiritual longing so they know and feel the presence of God. I don't want the concept of church to be irrelevant to my sons and other young and old people. I want the church to be for them and others, a community of people who will listen and allow them to speak and grow. A community of people who are more concerned with inclusion than exclusion. A community of people who will show them God through their actions rather than just words. I want a church for them which is open and willing to meet them where they are, and encourage them to grow. I want this church to be fully immersed in the world not separate from it. I don't want them to be told that they are not 'practicing their faith' just because they may not attend church every week. I want my kids them to have the passion that I have for searching for God, but not feel or be told that they are 'losing the faith' just because they question and discern.

So I have a choice. I can harp on about all that is wrong with the church and throw it all in or I can continue to grow spiritually by finding new and life-giving ways to live out my Christian tradition. I can show my sons that the search for spiritual growth is often painful but worth the struggle. I can encourage them to find their own ways of spiritual growth with my support.

So, I am choosing to try to be church in new ways whilst remaining faithful to Jesus' message and my own integrity. Sometimes I miss the safety and security of my childhood beliefs. Sometimes I get so angry and frustrated that I could scream, throw up my arms and shout why bother. But I'm glad Jesus didn't. He hung in there, walked, talked, loved and journeyed with others and so will I. □

Being a Christian woman is who I am.



A Leadership Crisis in the contemporary Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in the beginning of the new millennium and at the end of the long papacy of John Paul II suffers from a strong authoritarianism and centralisation that seem to go against the Vatican II understanding. This authoritarian centralisation of the church in the Vatican shows itself in many ways in the life of the church today. To be appointed a bishop in the church, a candidate must never have uttered even a word against an existing papal teaching such as the fact that women cannot be ordained in the church or even the condemnation of artificial contraception for spouses. **Only very safe men are chosen as bishops.** Centralisation shows itself in many other different ways such as in the demand of the Vatican to decide the smallest matters of liturgical language and customs for individual language groups and countries.

Charles E. Curran

'A Theology and spirituality for church reformers'

Extract from Angela Hanley (Editor), David Smith (Editor)

Quench not the Spirit Theology And Prophecy
for the Church in the Modern World

They are deliberately appointing people who are not offering any leadership, much less intellectual vision, but **appointing people who only do what they're told** and get people to read the Catechism.

John Dear SJ

In interview with Stephen Crittenden

ABC's Religion Report

The ordinations between 1955 and 1975 were the largest in modern history; the intelligence, calibre and education of these men were the best we had known; most of this group strongly embraced the vision of Vatican II and were of the right mind to spearhead the re-evangelisation of the modern world. Thus there was a very large pool of highly competent potential leaders strongly committed to the Vatican II vision. **John Paul II passed over this group in favour of acquiescent men** – middle managers rather than leaders. This is no secret. See Cardinal Daneels' comments along these lines in John L. Allen's, *The Rise of Benedict XVI*, pp. 211-213. So the church missed a golden opportunity.

Eric Hodgens

Parish priest

Archdiocese of Melbourne



Bishop for a day

Dermot Dorgan

I want to be a bishop for a day
I want the pope to fix it right away
I've got a big agenda
And a document called "*Splendor Veritatis*", to impose without delay.
I'd like to wear a mitre on my head,
I'd prove the inquisition isn't dead.
I'm the bearer of salvation
And of excommunication,
And the guardian of the matrimonial bed.

The Catholics of modern times are going to the pack
They think the church belongs to them
and now they want it back.
Let them have their parish councils
if they think that makes them free,
But a bishop's creed's the title deeds and they belong to me.

I want to be a bishop for a week,
I want to see them nodding when I speak.
For nothing could be sweeter
Than to steer the barque of Peter
Despite the fact it's drifting up the creek.
I want to hold a crozier in my hand
And feel its jewelled handle while I stand
To condemn with great perception
Artificial contraception
And impose the Billings method by command.

**Some people say that bishops should be chosen by election –
A democratic choice to be avoided like infection.
The laity are simple folk and simply couldn't cope
And the only vote I need's the one I'm getting from the Pope.**

I'd like to be a bishop for a year
I'd make the role of women very clear.
The feminist brigade,
I'd take steps to see they're made
To go to Bosnia, Sarawak or Kashmir.
A final word of warning must be said:
In this church there are the leaders and the led
Know your place – you won't regret it,
I'm the boss and don't forget it
You're the legs and you're the arms, but I'm the head,
Know your place – you won't regret it
I'm the bishop – don't forget it
You're the legs and arms and feet –
Pardon me if I repeat –
I belong to the elite
'Cos I'm the head!

Dermot Dorgan

From: *The Cockroach and the Vatican*

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**“WOMEN MAKING
 THE
 VISION HAPPEN”**

Joan Chittister OSB



Founder and Executive Director of Benetvision, Resource Centre for Contemporary Spirituality, Erie, Pennsylvania. Joan Chittister is a Benedictine Sister who is a best-selling author of numerous books; she is widely recognised as an international lecturer who has taught on all

educational levels. Joan is an active member of the International Committee for Peace Council.

Ann Gilroy SJS

Director of undergraduate Studies
 Catholic Institute of Theology
 Auckland, New Zealand.



Ann is a lecturer in the School of Theology and her areas of special interest are spirituality and feminist perspectives in Theology. Ann obtained her MA (theo.) at Boston College and PhD at Cambridge. A Josephite Sister for many years, Ann has previously taught in rural and urban schools. She has contributed to five major publications including "This is My Body Given for You", "Around Cups of Tea and Coffee: Pakaha Women's Spirituality."

Our Mother who is within us
 we celebrate your many names.
 Your wisdom come.
 Your will be done,
 unfolding from the depths within us.
 Each day you give us all that we need.
 You remind us of our limits
 and we let go.
 You support us in our power
 and we act with courage.
 For you are the dwelling place within us
 the empowerment around us
 and the celebration among us
 now and for ever.
 Amen

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Please send material to:

The Editor

ARCvoice

32 Awatea Road

ST IVES CHASE NSW 2075

OR (preferably) email:

knowlden1@bigpond.com

Tel: 02 9449 7275 Fax 02 9449 5017

ARC Secretariat

Barbara Brannan 02 9451 7130 barabran@hotmail.com

Rob Brian 02 9371 8519 rbrian@vtown.com.au

Ted Lambert tel: 08 8392 4626 lambertl@chariot.net.au

John Buggy Spokesperson 02 9451 8393 jbuggy@ozemail.com.au

Alan Clague 07 3374 1889 clague@aapt.net.au

Margaret Knowlden Editor 02 9449 7275 knowldenl@bigpond.com

Therese & Gerard O'Neill 02 9554 3709 getone@bigpond.com

Jim Taverne 02 9449 2923 jagota@ozemail.com.au

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- ◆ What does **ARC** do?
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