



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
September 2007
Issue No. 25

Editorial

The exercise of authority in our Church is one of the main overarching issues taken up by ARC. It is not surprising that we have contributors writing on this topic quite frequently, as we do in this edition. During the past few months, in particular, it has been most encouraging to be presented with at least a couple of examples that show we are far from alone in bringing the inappropriate use of power to the forefront.

Firstly, the Secretariat of ARC had the privilege of meeting with Father Pat Connor, an ARC friend visiting from the USA and also a member of the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church. This growing group is drawing attention not only to the need for safeguards against abuse of authority but also to rights that should be enshrined for all Catholics by virtue of their membership through Baptism. We refer to their documentation in this issue.

Secondly, the launch of Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*: reclaiming the spirit of Jesus will hopefully lead many more committed Catholics to consider and press for much-needed reform. Such is the centralisation of power in the Church that the managing of issues rather than confronting them extends beyond the way in which sexual abuse has been unsatisfactorily addressed. Bishop Robinson refers to a range of doctrines and Church practices that should not be treated as if they are infallible by closing down even discussion about them. He sees the exercise of inappropriate power contributing to a situation where Catholics are becoming divided into two categories namely, the 'proclaimers of certainty' and 'the seekers of truth'. The latter become marginalised when centralised authority allows no room for informed debate on so many issues that are far from the certainty that the 'proclaimers' maintain.

It is particularly disconcerting to discover just what that marginalisation can mean. When bishops were asked their opinions on whether married men should be ordained to deal with the shortage of priests, those bishops who were in favour were individually pressured by Rome to change their

viewpoints. Such is the informal abuse of authority even in our own local Church that Bishop Robinson, in thanking those who assisted him in the preparation of his book, considered it prudent not to name them, stating that doing so would not be helpful to them.

Perhaps there are other bishops in Australia who would like to be as frank and honest as Bishop Robinson. As ARC members, I know that we would give our strong support to any initiatives taken by them to open up genuine dialogue in the interest of finding truth. My impression is that more Catholics are seeking this kind of leadership every day.

John Buggy

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Letters

I read with interest John Buggy's report on 'Understanding Disaffected Catholics'. The argument was very well thought out and appealed to me as a baptised-from-birth Catholic who has now reached the age of 81 after working for nearly fifty years in the Church as an educator.

While my wife and I remain practising Catholics (virtually daily Mass attendees) I often despair and get very frustrated over the Church's seeming lack of ability to read the modern world and in the lack of real leadership within the hierarchy.

My beliefs and practices probably fall into the conservative category but that does not lessen the pain as the Church and its leaders hide behind 'rules' and dogma which is rarely if ever submitted to real theological debate.

I am interested in learning more about your organisation and possibly joining it. I would be grateful if you could provide me with some material/information about ARC.
Frank Rogan VIC

I entirely agree with voices of protest about the World Youth Day. Pell is totally neglecting his duty of pastoral care (his priests have been asking for an increase in their stipend for three years to no avail) and he seems far more concerned to outdo the Hillsong lot than to spend his time, money and energies in a way that would reflect the true Christian spirit. I'm afraid I'm not going to support the WYD in any way.

I see that Protestant churches cannot properly be called 'church' according to Joseph Ratzinger who, possibly, is beginning to show his true colours. I think the institutional church is digging its own grave! It's hard not to despair.

In *arvoice* 24, I really enjoyed the song, *I want to be a Bishop for a Day* by Dermot Dorgan!
Imogen Kelly NSW

Just to say thanks again for sending the newsletter. I found the article about the acolyte particularly interesting as an example of women being told that they cannot do what they are already doing! and it is good that the parish priest is taking a view.
Angela Searles UK

World Youth Day

Fabiola's Table comments:

Is it just Fabiola's Table or are others feeling a bit like they are in an episode of *Dr. Who*? World Youth Day is building momentum and destined to be a stand out event, but at what cost. Fabiola's Table feels compelled to ask: Where is God to be found in the gross extravagance and political lobbying of World Youth Day 2008?

The Howard Government is lining Cardinal Pell's pockets with \$20 million cash for the event, a pity that the Cardinal hasn't had the same success lobbying for funding for Catholic schools. How can the Catholic Church continue to stand with integrity in solidarity with the poor and oppressed of our world when it spends millions on World Youth Day?

Recently we saw the arrival of the World Youth Day cross. As *The Financial Review* (9/7) pointed out, politicians Howard and Iemma were quick to take advantage of an election year photo opportunity with the cross. Now, now Cardinal Pell what is it that you have been saying recently about the relationship between the church and politics?

But then again maybe Fabiola's Table is too harsh on the Cardinal. Indeed, most of us can be accused of complicity when as parishes, schools and religious congregations we offer our youth as a sign of our support for WYD and all it represents; while whispering our opposition in private. We shout our disgust at the umpire at the footy louder than our concerns about WYD. Well worth pondering.

Alas, this is only the tip of the iceberg about to be melted by all that World Youth Day air travel. Surely you guessed the next item: the approval given by the Pope to celebrate the Tridentine Mass. This apparently has some liturgists swooning in the pews as the priests chant in Latin facing the altar. It's a pity none of the rest of us have a clue what is being said and won't be waiting around to hear the translation. And if we are to believe *The Australian* (9/7, p13) there is a growing penchant in the Vatican for the outdated trappings of clericalism – 'ermine trimmed robes and dainty satin shoes.' Gosh what planet are we on?

This is the same Church that is driving WYD – Are we still happy to remain silent and offer our children's minds and hearts to the WYD extravaganza? Where is the Tardis? Please take us back to reality, Dr. Who!

Fabiola's Table is the Melbourne voice of women and men who skirt the margins of our Church. The patron is St Fabiola, a remarkable woman of the early Church.

fabiolas@bigpond.net.au

ARC Secretariat member, Jim Taverne, comments:

My name for 'World Youth Day' is 'The Papal Woodstock': it costs a fortune to advertise, organise and celebrate, leaving the host city with heavy debts (and perhaps a small rise in the birth rate)!

NOTE:

Row over youth day safe-sex message

The Catholic Church says it will not co-operate with any safe-sex campaign to educate 500,000 young pilgrims expected to flock to Sydney for Australia's biggest religious event.

(*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30/7/07)

Can Men be Ordained?

Rosemary Radford Ruether

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A synod of bishops from the four corners of the earth and a full panoply of mother superiors recently converged on the Holy City of Rome to consider the vexed question of the ordination of men. The Holy See had received many tearful appeals from the cruder sex claiming to have a call to the priesthood directly from God herself. But Her Holiness had firmly replied to these appeals that the call must have been a wrong number.

Our Holy Mother in heaven would never call to the ministry those so obviously disqualified by reason of gender. But the men had refused to take no for an answer. Throwing down their picks and shovels, they had declared that they would do no more maintenance work for the church until there was equality of rites.

They sent petitions to the Holy See, filled with arguments for the ordination of men, both theological and practical. Although, of course, they could cite no example from Jesus, the incarnation of Holy Wisdom, because he most evidently had ordained no men to the priesthood (or women either). It was said that confining the ordained ministry to widowed women over 65 was causing a crisis throughout the world. More and more older women felt the juices still flowing after 65 and were not willing to embrace blessed widowhood. Some preferred to run for prime minister or chairwoman of the board rather than to turn to the sacred service.

Finally, Her Holiness decided to gather the holy mothers of the church together, with a number of the best qualified peritae who had the male gender – from a safe distance, of course. They hoped to come up with a definite answer, once and for all, to the vexed question of the ordination of men. After long and careful study, in which the holy mothers had enjoyed a good many laughs on the subject of men and their foibles, a final decree was drawn up defining the reasons that men could not be ordained. The decree was proclaimed by Her Holiness *urbi et orbi*, and the holy departed for their respective seats of wisdom, feeling very pleased with themselves. The decree *Ad Hominem* stated to their satisfaction and, it is hoped for all time, the weighty reasons for their gut prejudices.

The first part of the decree deduced a good many reasons from men's biological and psychological natures that disqualified them from the priesthood. It was said, first of all, that men were too violent and emotional to be priests. Anyone who has watched groups of men at football matches, ice hockey, soccer or cricket games, not to mention political conventions, has seen their volatile tendencies and penchant for solving conflicts with fisticuffs. To ordain such creatures would be to risk disgraceful brawls at the altar. The male

proneness to violence surely disqualifies them from representing the One who incarnates graciousness and peace. The cruder and heavier physical frame of the male clearly marks him for the physical tasks of society: digging ditches, mending roofs and the like. The finer, more spiritual tasks of society are intended by our Mother in heaven for those more refined spirits and bodies, women.

This separation of roles is clearly evident in Scripture, where the males are said to have been created from dirt, while the women were created from human flesh. Moreover, women were created last, clearly marking them as the crown of God's creation. It was even suggested by one mother superior that Adam was a rough draft, Eve being the more refined and complete version of human nature. The mothers had a good many laughs on that one, and some decided to make it into a bumper sticker.

It was also felt that men were needed for military defense. A man's place is in the army, declared one wise perita, and all the holy mothers nodded in agreement. Besides, men would look silly in red dresses and lace. The sacred garb is clearly intended for women.

Profound matters of a theological nature were also discussed. One perita had prepared a long paper proving from the symbolic order that men could not be ordained. The division of humanity into male and female is a profound mystery that symbolizes the relationship of the transcendent and the immanent, the spiritual and the material.

Women represent the spiritual realm, men the material. The material must be ruled by the spiritual, just as Holy Wisdom presides over the physical cosmos as her household. Moreover, since the church is female, those who represent the church clearly should be female as well. There should be a physical resemblance between the priest and the church as holy mother. Obviously, this means that all priests should be mature women. The church is also said to be the bride of Christ, and brides are female. The priest, as representative of the church in relation to Christ, represents Christ's bride. Therefore, only women can be priests. Finally, it was noted that most of the people who come to church are women; Men tend to stand outside the doors of the church gossiping or sneak off to sporting matches. To have a man on the altar might distract a woman from her prayers.

It was hoped that, with so many clear reasons from both the natural and the theological realms against the ordination of men, this would settle the matter. Male impertinence would be silenced, and they would slink back to their proper sphere. *Roma locuta; causa finita.* □

The Qualities of Christ

Peg Fitzgerald

It is Sunday morning – or maybe the Saturday evening vigil. The Church is crowded with people expecting their weekly Mass. Time is going by and still Father has not appeared. He is always on time, so people are getting a bit uneasy. Where is he? (My mind has gone on the loose: What will we do if Father doesn't show?) Eventually some parishioners go over to the presbytery to find out the reason for the hold-up. It could be one or two of several situations: (1) Father has been called out to a serious accident or to assist a very sick, dying parishioner who has very traumatic family circumstances; (2) Father himself has become very sick, had 'flu' or some such and has fallen into a deep sleep. When eventually he is wakened, he cannot even croak out a few words. But whatever the cause, Father is not going to be there – what to do?

In this day and age of dwindling clergy, every parish needs to have an exigency plan for these and other emergencies. In many developing countries, situations like this can be regular occurrences but the people are quite used to coping and managing for themselves. They can easily substitute a community evangelical service without a priest. And these are people with only very limited numbers schooled to a secondary level.

It is quite ridiculous that any Australian parishes could ever be in a situation where there is a shortage of Ministers of the Eucharist. By Ministers, I mean fully functioning concelebrants, not mere distributors of the eucharistic bread and maybe wine! (left-over!)?

Way back centuries ago, when many of our Canon Laws surrounding the priestly ministry were formed, the whole make-up of society was entirely different. The level and opportunity for widespread education were extremely limited – much like what is available in some of today's developing countries. In most places the only educated people were the parish priest and his assistant priests. This being so, it is easy to see how and why those clerics built around themselves many rules and regulations that would safeguard and enhance their ever growing power structure. This could have happened very gradually, over a long time, without even a hint of a conspiracy theory driving it – until we get to where we are now, with a completely exclusive clerical caste, a magic circle like other professionals – lawyers, judges, doctors, educators and so on ... and all this could be perfectly all right. We need the highly trained professional theologians, scripture scholars and the rest. But what we need more urgently are the community level parish ministers, capable of concelebrating with small communities at the weekly or monthly gatherings. Built into this grassroots ministry is a non-elitist, no power structure component, so that it would

not attract power-hungry people, looking for positions with status symbols, real estate and other perks. This would be a simple ministry, with an appropriate and on-going training commitment and with a limited geographic range, maybe self-supporting and always accountable to the whole community, particularly to the elders and the 'professional' ministers. If all this sounds suspiciously familiar, cast your minds back to the early local churches at Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth and the others.

Our children come out of our thousands of schools after 10/12 years of formal education, with many going on to tertiary level. Out of all those hundreds of students, an appropriate number ought to be ready to take some kind of leading roles in the faith community – if not during their younger years, then in their retirement, the literal Elders of the church. And here is meant fully functional, concelebrating people – yes, and even including women. No one in authority takes literally the reflection of Paul to the Galatians (3: 27-28) where he says:

All you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with the life of Christ [or taken on the Qualities of Christ himself] so there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people and between men and women, you are all one [equal] in union with Christ Jesus ...'

What do we mean by these Qualities of Christ? His qualities of teaching? Healing? Suffering? Prophecy? Miracles? Prayer? To mention a few. No one anywhere would question my ability as a baptised woman to take on any or all of these qualities – all the dimensions of the ministry of Christ – BUT somewhere, somehow, if I say I may share in his *priestly* ministry (not that he ever claimed this title for himself. If he had, he would have been killed a lot earlier than he was). Immediately the shutters come down and that becomes a 'no go' area. Somehow or other, over the centuries, that 'priestly' activity had slipped back into the old pagan or exclusively Jewish temple concept of priests – no longer the Petrine 'universal' priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-10) 'Building a Spiritual Temple where you will serve as holy priests to offer *spiritual* and *acceptable sacrifices* to God, through Jesus Christ'.

So back to that Saturday Vigil ... and the near miss, no Mass night! My resolution was firm. Contact Father this week. Call a special Parish Council meeting to hammer out a contingency plan to put to the whole assembly as soon as possible.

Surely we highly educated people of faith can do as well as the people in a mountain village of PNG and produce a set of parish booklets that would present a form of community prayer for a service without an ordained priest

– this to be used not only in emergency situations but fairly regularly in order to assist the one ordained priest who is now trying to do what was formerly undertaken by three parish clerics. In a roundabout way, such a procedure would help to prepare us to take up again the *roles* expected of the first Christians that St Peter spoke of. In past decades when ordained ministers were more plentiful, congregations more often content to pray, pay and obey and leave all the action to the priest. But this was an anomaly. All of us baptised into Christ have put on all his ministry – especially that of promoting God’s Kingdom and concelebrating it in the breaking of the bread – and the washing of the feet.

PEG FITZGERALD describes herself as being a ‘reforming Catholic’ all of her adult life (now 82 years). After 20 years in a convent, she then spent 15 years as a lay volunteer in PNG. From 1980 she has been involved in peace, justice and human rights activism mainly through Pax Christi. She has published three books, including: *Guidelines for Hitch Hikers on the Way to the Kingdom* (to be reviewed at a future date).

New Release

Michael Morwood:

From Sand to Solid Ground

Questions of Faith for Modern Christians

Spectrum Publications Pty Ltd

PO Box 75, Richmond, Vic 3121

Michael Morwood raises questions and issues of faith that are on the minds of many Catholics and other Christians today. While Church authority will not permit Catholic academics to raise or discuss many of these controversial topics publicly, Morwood boldly delves into the questions with clarity, courage, hope and inspiration from his extensive experience in spirituality and adult faith formation.

This is exactly the kind of book I have been looking for to explain my present sense of alienation from the Church. Morwood’s historical overview and sensible commentary on the many misconceptions which have formed Church doctrines provides a firm ground from which to reply to critics who see ARC members as lost souls!

\$20 mail order (plus postage)

for Order Form see www.morwood.org

Fundamentalism

Trish Madigan

Fundamentalism is a response/reaction to economic and political marginalisation occurring under the impact of modernity. An ideological defence of a patriarchal (political, economic, social and/or religious) order of society.

Religious fundamentalism can be described as a patriarchal politics of identity which is given a religious justification: a strategy or a set of strategies by which beleaguered believers, individually and institutionally, in a time of threat or uncertainty, attempt to preserve their distinctive identity and values (and social position!) as a group.

“Why would women join a movement that often explicitly seeks to limit their economic and political opportunities and general freedom of movement?”

Valerie Hoffman
The Fundamentalism Project

Personal reasons why women join and support fundamentalist movements:

Personal alienation: women share much of men’s alienation arising from urbanisation, colonisation and nationalist appeals. They are as fearful of change as men and stand to lose more than men in the loss of security of wide kinship links in the social changes associated with modernisation. The general fundamentalist message of a return to ‘tradition’ as the key to all modern ills is readily accepted by women as well as men.

Lack of economic independence: the fact that many women are excluded from the labour force or relegated to lower status jobs means that they do not have the same access to economic resources that they can control independently and hence are unable to establish independent lives, especially if they have children.

Lack of education: women raised in fundamentalist circles, for whom education has not been a necessity, are inhibited from discovering and exploring alternative values and ways of life. They may have few outside contacts of any depth.

Fear of reprisal: women may fear male reprisals, in the form of further restrictions and seclusion, legal actions such as divorce, or even violence, if they do not conform. They may also fear divine disapproval or exclusion from the religious community.

Family support: fundamentalist networks frequently assist women in their efforts to domesticate men and support them in securing their husband’s active commitment to them and their children.

Complexity of modern life: many women find that modernity subjects them to a bewildering array of difficult choices and fundamentalist movements help them to simplify and justify these choices: e.g. faced with the double burden of working outside the home and continuing to be solely responsible for running the household, unsurprisingly young women are far from dismayed with insistence that a woman’s place is in the home.



No One Is In Charge – All Are In Charge

Ted Lambert

Australian Reforming Catholics' Survey 2005 enunciates this principle in Proposal A4 of www.e-arc.org under Menu ARC Surveys. It appears contentious and inefficient to the modern mind and the competitive spirit of the corporate world of which the Catholic Church is part. Religious cohesion (called unity), economic security and growth and Group pride require strong leadership, which is selected in combative exchange – the election of the Pope being subject to fierce lobbying (behind the scenes) and, be it noted, the only electoral process permitted in the Hierarchical Church. All other appointments are made by male clergy, with no consultation necessarily required. A reform group like ARC should be looking for a mode of consultation and decision-making that offers a better way to the Hierarchical Church. Religious Orders have a somewhat different system, but the Pope has a veto.

This idea flies in the face of corporate efficiency and vertical structure. It would offend the sense of rapid or free progress that even do-gooders might want for their causes. American military tribunals would kill to prevent the very idea gaining currency. I contend it is as old as christianity but has never been given a chance. 'Who put me in charge over you?' Jesus said to one person wanting something from him – was it an argument between brothers? It stiff-arms many old attitudes, like 'The husband is the head of the household!' Its model is the Holy Trinity and the true Christian family. It does not suggest, I think, that all have equal voice but that all have a voice. In the short term it might not get things done

but, if at least tied to the masthead, it will bring it about that wonderful things occur, in the realms of love, friendship, justice and on and on. Unreal? Some would say that the way the world goes on is unreal.

Time, patience and kind encouragement, all parts of true love, do more to grow human beings and their social progress than smart thinking, boundless energy and the authoritative decisions of those who count themselves powerful. 'Who put you in charge over me?' is a good question and a just one. In many cases the answer would have to be: 'I worked and fought for myself and got to the top. You are now under me.' Jesus chided his followers for having this discussion.

Jesus' great Commandment is 'Love one another'. Unreal? Perhaps, but we are not thereby exempted. It is the rule we must follow, however haltingly. I say, 'No one is in charge, all are in charge' is another such imperative which issues from the great commandment. If some are born great, or acquire greatness or simply have it thrust upon them, the Christian ideal is that they use it for the good of others, share it, distribute it. Is it also the Socialist ideal?

If we find this hard to comprehend, let's think of its opposite, the horrible anomalies in Christian history when authority has been usurped from the people and used for personal power. Slavery and serfdom (the feudal system), the suppression of women, the divine right of kings, blessing of wars, the acceptance of clericalism (divine male right to rule), the worst of capitalism, the worst of communism and much else. All these are inextricably related to presumptions of power. If no one is in charge, all are in charge, then none of this would ever have happened. A certain untidiness might occur until we learn how to do it together. Tell me, do you consider the list of abuses I outlined above to be tidy?

Other modern discussions are just beginning on some things, like smacking of children, sexual orientation, abortion and euthanasia. Will we let people 'in charge' decide these issues?

This is one of those truths which is hard to grasp but, once grasped, is mind-blowing and humbling. It is also purifying. When I realised that God, not a male, did not give males exclusive power in the Church, I had one of those revelations. Since then I have suffered with women being systematically downgraded and abused, with soldiers and civilians killed violently and deliberately, with the billions committed to hell by the Church's exercise of power. I am not satisfied that these things are nobody's fault, that they had to happen, that the Church 'is only human'. The truly human strength is to trade male-power, or any dominative attitude, for love. We are not exempt from trying. □



Thirsting for joy

A positive experience of [being] church

Lynne Green

Two things seemed to make our Day of Pilgrimage in Sydney's Western Suburbs special: the people at each of our stopping-places who made us so welcome, and the challenge to each of us to step outside our normal, expected routine to do something very different.

Sydney is a very large, sprawling city, and the places we visited are home to people from many different backgrounds: of faith, of origins, of culture, of experience. In many ways we who have lived in Sydney a long time pride ourselves on how varied that experience is, and how cosmopolitan we are. Yet, when it comes to Saturday, at the end of a busy week, we often want to stay close to where we live, clean up, do shopping, watch the football, enjoy 'time out' in the garden. Certainly not get up very early, try to find our way on very unfamiliar roads and move on in a steady, purposeful way to meet unknown people in four very different places, 'from dawn to [well beyond] dusk'?

As People on the Road, that unseasonably hot Saturday, a small group of modern pilgrims did just that, and at each of our stops had a chance to quench our thirst. A thirst for a new way of being simply present to each other, trusting, trying to respect each other, needing to understand ...

The first stop, for Morning Prayer and a time of reflective silence, was at an Anglican Church. We were made welcome by the local minister, and joined for our time of prayer by a priest from the Coptic Orthodox Church, which was to be our next meeting place. It was good to have time to draw breath and breathe out some beautiful song/prayer – was it Benedict who said, 'who sings, prays twice'? Then, joy! In the time of silence after the prayer, we found we had a chance – in a new place – to do some of that 'mooching' (sitting or strolling around), that we like to do back at home at the end of the week!

After this, we walked a short distance further down the street to the Coptic Orthodox Church, with its distinctive cupolas and blaze of colourful icons, and smell of incense. Once again a simple welcome from the priest and people of the community, including some young men who had come for a 'working bee' – another great aussie tradition! Then, a time of prayer with the beautiful Taizé chants, Scripture reading and time for silence. We were privileged to have parts of our prayer together chanted by the Deacon in the Coptic liturgical form. Afterwards we were welcomed to the community's hall – a few steps from the church through the now-blazing midday sun – for a wonderful lunch: all vegetarian – the women who waited on us explained – because of Lenten abstinence from meat. It was a special joy to experience their hospitality, pride in their tradition

and a willingness to swap notes on food preparation. Good, for some of us, more eager ones, to try and say the names of dishes in Arabic – helped by our host, a laughing Lebanese woman.

In case we became too comfortable, however, all too soon we had to leave, and experience once again the uncertainty of finding the way, by now through 'snarly', full-volume Sydney suburban traffic. Next stop, The House of Welcome.

Apart from the time we were able to spend with those who staff this centre as part of the NSW Ecumenical Council's work with and for asylum-seekers in our country, two things made this visit special. Both concern simple contact with local people who just happened to be around when we arrived. One was a woman on her way home with the shopping, who asked what we were looking for, and showed us the way, and shared a joke as she walked part of the way with us. The other was a local man who spends a good part of his day 'busking' outside the House of Welcome, singing in a confident, slightly off-key voice. Over time, money people have given has helped him buy a guitar, which he strums with great gusto. His song continued during most of our visit, interrupted only when people stopped to talk with him. As we sat with the door to the street open, because of the heat, his singing wove its way into all that we heard, from the people who work there, and who helped set it up. Part of our joy, there, sprang from knowing that church people are standing in solidarity with some of the most disadvantaged, trying to bring them hope. There, too, we had a chance for prayer, in a simple, improvised prayer space. Through it, the sound of the local 'busker', reminding us, too, of our responsibility to the first people who lived in our land.

Then, on to the Catholic Cathedral in Parramatta, with part of our still-unfamiliar journey spent 'back-tracking' over part of the road by which we had come. This Cathedral has just recently re-opened following a long period of re-building after a devastating fire some years ago. The original church has now become a chapel/baptistry through which we pass to enter the new, lofty, building, which is a centre for many new outreach programmes in this most culturally diverse part of Sydney. Its Dean, a friend of some years from previous visits during the Taizé pilgrimage, gave us a warm welcome, which was repeated many times by different people during our stay.

In the late afternoon there was a chance for those who had travelled all or part of the way together, or just joined us, to spend some time reflecting on the Letter from Taizé, To the Wellsprings of Joy. A focus was on the need to find

opportunities to reflect and pray during busy, challenging daily lives: a welcome chance to share.

When we gathered for evening prayer after sharing a light meal, it was already dark in the small chapel. The starkness of the setting – against stone walls damaged by the fire – was offset by beautiful pale Australian timber detailing, including an altar table. The space was lit by candles and soon resonated to our song. It provided a cool, restful oasis at the end of a hot day of constantly moving on. At this time, the group of travellers was joined by others, some

who came from the Mass which had just finished, some from more far-flung places. It was heart-warming to see these newcomers being looked after so spontaneously by Cathedral ‘regulars’.

The day ended with supper and more meetings and reunions with ecumenical friends in the hall across from the cathedral. After a day of much activity, interspersed with periods of calm and welcome, there were a lot of tired people. Strange, that even then, some dawdled, and yarned some more, in the Cathedral car-park! □

Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church

The ARC Secretariat recently enjoyed a visit from Fr Pat Connor, an Australian priest resident in the United States and member of this New Jersey, US-based organisation with whom we share an almost similar acronym: ARCC.

Below is one extract from their Charter.

Seven Rights of Catholic Parishioners

Human rights are based on the dignity of our human nature. Baptism adds another dimension of dignity to our nature and forms the basis for the 32 Rights of Catholics that are identified and proclaimed by ARCC in its **Charter of Rights** of Catholics in the Church. Though some may choose not to claim or exercise these rights they remain inalienable. Their proclamation is meant to serve as sign post. The denial or suppression of these rights indicates a misunderstanding of the message of Christ.

The following seven rights found in the **Charter of Rights** pertain to the parish community. ARCC proclaims these rights with the understanding that they are subject to change as we grow in wisdom and grace before God and men and women, as Christ did.

1. All Catholics have the right to a voice in all decisions that affect them, including the choosing of their leaders. (ARCC Rt. 5)
2. All Catholics have the right to have their leaders accountable to them (ARCC Rt. 6)
3. All Catholics have the right to receive from the Church those ministries which are needed for the living of a fully Christian life including:
 - a) Instruction in the Catholic tradition and the presentation of moral teaching in a way that promotes the helpfulness and relevance of Christian values to contemporary life.
 - b) Worship which reflects the joys and concerns of the gathered community and instructs and inspires it.
 - c) Pastoral counseling that applies with love and effectiveness the Christian heritage to persons in particular situations. (ARCC Rt. 12)
4. All Catholics have the right to have church office holders foster a sense of community. (ARCC Rt. 17)
5. All employees of the Church have the right to decent working conditions and just wages. They have the right not to have their employment terminated without due process. (ARCC Rt.23)
6. All Catholics have the right to expect that the resources of the Church be fairly expended on their behalf without prejudice to race, age, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, state-of-life, or social position
 - a) All Catholic parents have the right to expect fair material and other assistance from Church authorities in the religious education of their children
 - b) All Single Catholics have the right to expect that the resources of the Church be fairly expended on their behalf. (ARCC Rt. 27)
7. All married Catholics have the right to withdraw from a marriage that has irretrievably broken down. All such Catholics retain the radical right to remarry. (ARCC Rt. 30)

3150 Newgate Drive, Southampton, MA 017073
Phone 413-527-9929, Fax 413-527-5877

If you would like to know more about ARCC
check their website:
www.arcc-catholic-rights.net
arcc@arccsites.org

Dare we even mention the 'A' word?

Lisa Pryor

extract from

The fervour in returning to my flock SMH 6.7.07

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

extract from

Infidel – My Life (p.281)

Atheism is having a moment now. *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens are bestsellers. In Australia, the number of non-believers is growing. In the latest census, 3.7 million Australians claimed no religion, up from 2.9 million in 1996. Now 19 per cent of Australians are faithless heathens. Curiously, the most heathen state is home to the city of churches. In South Australia, 24 per cent of the population are godless. Make of that what you will.

As the number of heathens grows, there will be more people like me: people who have not chosen atheism as a conscious, rational choice; second-generation atheists who 'choose' atheism in the same way most people 'choose' religion – because it is what they were taught by their families and the indoctrination has left them with a gut feeling that is not easy to escape.

Not everything about atheism is perfect but the overall values are positive and life-affirming and should be encouraged. Children raised as atheists know their minds are their own. They do not believe that every private thought is monitored by a higher being ready to punish wrong thinking. They fear not smiting.

When the time comes, I will raise my children as atheists because I want them to have all the advantages and values I enjoyed as a child. At heart I am a conservative who believes in family values and I think it would be nice for my parents to see our tradition of heathenism carried on. Atheism is a wonderful gift to give a child.

One night ... I looked in the mirror and said out loud, 'I don't believe in God'. I said it slowly, enunciating it carefully, in Somali. And I felt relief. It felt right. There was no pain, but a real clarity. The long process of seeing the flaws in my belief structure and carefully tiptoeing around the frayed edges as parts of it were tom out, piece by piece – that was all over. The angels, watching from my shoulders; the mental tension about having sex without marriage, and drinking alcohol, and not observing any religious obligations – they were gone. The ever-present prospect of hellfire lifted, and my horizon seemed broader. God, Satan, angels: these were all figments of human imagination. From now on I could step firmly on the ground that was under my feet and navigate based on my own reason and self-respect. My moral compass was within myself, not in the pages of a sacred book.

... In Islam you are Allah's slave: you submit, and thus, ideally, you are devoid of personal will. You are not a free individual. You behave well because you fear Hell; you have no personal ethic. If God meant only that which is good, and Satan that which is evil, then both were in me. I wanted to develop the good side of me – discipline, generosity, love – and suppress the bad: anger, envy, laziness, cruelty. I didn't want any more imaginary guides telling me what to do, but I needed to believe I was still moral.

This reminds me of my daughter who, on entering university, met her first self-styled 'Atheists' – and was surprised to find that 'they were very nice people'!!

Editor

In the article 'Frank Brennan Answers the Atheist Manifestos' (*Eureka Street* 11 July 2007) we are reminded that one of the great Christian theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner, in volume 22 of his *Theological Investigations* (Crossroad, 1989) asked two questions about dialogue and tolerance as the foundations of a humane society:

- Are you really willing to grant freedom to the other person, insofar as it can be done without harming others, even when you hold a different opinion and have the power to prevent others from doing what they want?
- Are you willing and patient enough, as far as possible, to find out and try to feel what others (or another group) want to be and how they want to understand themselves?

International Observations

Jim Taverne

The reintroduction of the Latin Mass by the Pope and the Vatican statement that characterises Protestant denominations as not proper churches do not seem to be consonant with the *Sensus Fidelium* of the ordinary Catholics. Or, in other words, these declarations by the Pope do not enjoy ready acceptance by the entire world's Catholic Church Community.

There was a time that the Catholics and the Churches of the Reformation considered Pope John Paul II's *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995) a large step in the right direction towards Ecumenism. I must admit that I was less enthusiastic. In fact, I was somewhat sceptical. *Dominus Jesus* (6 August 2000) increased my scepticism and for me the statement of 10 July 2007 damaged Ecumenism further. The assertion by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that there had never been a change in the Catholic doctrine on the Church is no improvement. It would appear that for the Vatican Ecumenism means that Protestants ought to convert to Catholicism.

At our parish primary school we learned that Protestants 'erred in good faith': they didn't know better. I have been married to one of those aberrantes since 1949!

Germany is eminently the country of the Reformation and also of Ecumenism where Eucharistic sharing is a matter of course. *Wir sind Kirche* calls the statement a renewed and superfluous slap in the face of the Ecumene. How sincere is the Church in its striving to achieve ecumenism, when at the same time claiming the world's monopoly as the only genuine Christian Church? The Vatican statement has reached a pinnacle of hubris.

A close ecumenical relationship between Roman Catholics and the Churches of the Reformation also exists in The Netherlands, to the chagrin of the bishops, who have destroyed combined Catholic-Protestant communities and drastically reduced their contributions to the Netherlands Council of Churches.

The *Catholic National Reporter* in the USA introduced letters from readers about the Vatican statement with 'A blow to Ecumenism',

For your further reading . . .

One of our members, Elaine Spillane, has very generously donated to ARC a number of stimulating books that should be of interest to many of us. All you need to do is phone John Buggy on 0419217543 and you can borrow any of these. He has provided a short description to whet your appetite.

A Long Way From Rome – Chris McGillion (editor)
A number of prominent writers reflect on why the Catholic Church is in crisis

In the Heart of the Temple – Joan Chittister *A collection of best essays from this outspoken American nun*

Papal Power – Paul Collins *Traces the papacy from that of service to almost absolute power and its effect in stifling the Spirit in the Church*

An Open Heart – The Dalai Lama *This inspiring leader outlines his spirituality through Buddhism and meditation*

One River, Many Wells – Matthew Fox *Faith and religious vision that goes beyond the restriction of dogma and domination*

Tomorrow's Catholic – Michael Morwood *A vibrant discussion that bridges the gap between Church doctrine and the Gospel message that is Christianity*

Is Jesus God? – Michael Morwood *Towards new images of God that enable the person and message of Jesus to have more profound meaning*

A new Christianity for a New World – John Selby Spong *An outline of the limits of traditional faith, the effect of outmoded beliefs on human life, and the toxins that are poisoning the Church*

Jesus, Our Story – Frank Anderson MSC *An inspiring journey through some selected Gospel readings that bring Jesus much closer as a human being like us*

A Short History of Myth – Karen Armstrong *Explores myth as an art form that changes our perceptions, enabling us to move beyond the literal sense in ancient and contemporary writings*

ARC Prayer

In *arcvoice* 24 we asked readers to nominate their preferred prayer. The one selected is reproduced on the enclosed bookmark – which we hope you will use or pass on to some one else. If you would like to print off more copies and spread them around, the text is available on our website: www.e-arc.org

The beginnings – and end – of *Women-Church* Journal

The following is the text of an advertisement which appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday, 22 November 1986, two days before John Paul II arrived in Sydney. To raise the money for the advertisement, the group of concerned church women had simply used the networks of its members to circulate the *Creed* and ask for donations. Over 300 people contributed about \$4,000. The advertisement appeared at a cost of \$3,500 and there was money to spare. This was the seed fund for the beginning of *Women-Church* Journal and at that point the group started working on the first issue. All writing, cartooning, designing, editing were done voluntarily. The money was used for the unavoidable expenses of printing and posting. From then on the journal survived on voluntary labour and the contributions of subscribers. This has now changed and for the last couple of years, with an increasing shortfall, the journal has had to depend again on donations. And that is part of the end of the story. After twenty years and forty issues, *Women-Church* journal has ceased production.

A Protest Creed

We women of the church protest that:

- Women are half the human race
- Women are sexual
- Women are bearers of life
- Women give us our daily bread
- Women heal by listening
- Women are the first teachers of humankind
- Women are baptised into the church community
- Women were the first witnesses of the resurrection
- Yet men’s experience shapes language, informs decisions, defines knowledge and interprets the divine
- Yet men officially baptise into the life of the church
- Yet men preside at the eucharist table
- Yet men reconcile in the name of the church
- Yet men are the official theologians
- Yet men are ordained as its ministers
- Yet the witness of men is given more authority
- Yet our spiritual tradition presents asexual models

God has another face, another energy, which demands to be recognised:

We believe in the Creator, active in the strength with which a woman pushes a child into the world. We believe in Christ crucified again in the woman raped, in the woman vulnerable to men. We believe in the Spirit revealed in an emerging sisterhood, an authentic sign of the times. We affirm that the divine has been nurtured by the black women of Australia, by women from other lands, by women, convict and free, by women of the cities and the outback, by all our foremothers. There is no need to be afraid. In Christ, She is risen. Therefore, we now celebrate.

Women-Church #40 is a triple issue and features a wealth of historical material and personal reminiscences from women and men who have been active in religious reform and spirituality in Australia since the late 1960s.

Contributors include Veronica Brady, Patricia Brennan, Edmund Campion, Jean Gledhill, Leonie Liveris, Lesley McLean, Dorothy McRae-McMahon, Angela Moloney, Bernice Moore, Colleen O’Reilly, Camille Paul, John Pomeroy, Janet Scarfe, Lee Miena Skye, Jacqueline Ninio & Lucy Taksa, Barbara Thiering, Heather Thomson, Marie Tulip, Elaine Wainwright, Ann Wansbrough, Erin White, Ali Wurm, Margaret Knowlden and many others.

Traditions covered include Aboriginal Women’s Religion, ecotheology, Anglican, Catholic, Uniting Church, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, PaGaian Cosmology, polytheism and Goddess, as well as movements including WHO?, Christian Women Concerned, Movement for the Ordination of Women, Women And The Australian Church (WATAC), Sophia, Ordination of Catholic Women, Women-Space and The Grail. There’s a great selection of new cartoons by Graham English; poetry; articles on women and religious education and on women and religion/ literature/ history; and an index for the last ten issues.

This issue will become a significant historical resource in years to come (as well as offering a fascinating read right now): the players themselves talk about from where they’ve come, what has been achieved, and how far they have yet to go.

#40 available for \$25 each
(includes postage)

Back issues also available for \$5 each
(includes postage)

CHEQUES MUST BE MADE PAYABLE TO
WOMEN-CHURCH INC.

Send orders to:
Women-Church
16 Cowles Road, Mosman NSW 2088

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Have your say!

ARCvoice is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic church.

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

(maximum length:
articles 700 words, letters 100 words)

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the editor or of ARC

Please send material to:

The Editor
ARCvoice

32 Awatea Road
ST IVES CHASE NSW 2075

OR (preferably) email: knowldenl@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

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

ARC Website:

www.e-arc.org

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Certificate of Incorporation as an Association

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that the undermentioned Association is incorporated in New South Wales under the Associations Incorporation Act, 1984

Association Name: AUSTRALIAN REFORMING CATHOLICS INCORPORATED

Incorporation No: INC9887854

Date of Incorporation: 24 July 2007

ARC Brochure

This brochure is available on request. It includes a Membership Application form and addresses the questions:

- ◆ What is Australian Reforming Catholics?
- ◆ How was ARC established?
- ◆ What does ARC do?
- ◆ How is ARC organised?

Distributing the brochure is an important way of helping our movement to grow. Enquiries:

Australian Reforming Catholics

c/- Jim Taverne 4/1035 Pacific Highway, Pymble NSW 2073



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Would you like to be part of ARC's on-line Yahoo Discussion Group? YES / NO

Would you like to share in the work for ARC in any way? YES / NO If yes, please let us know what you would want to do.

Send to ARC c/- Jim Taverne
4/1035 Pacific Highway, Pymble, New South Wales 2073