



# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.  
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Issue No. 26

## Editorial

In the previous issue of the Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc. most articles were written by women and in this issue by men (with one exception). This is not deliberate policy but purely the free choice of our Editor.

*Arcvoice 26* is full of subjects for its readers to think about and to discuss.

John Buggy's *We all get past Santa Claus* would be a good basis for thinking, talking and writing about the question: *What do I believe?*

We would find support for that in the wisdom of Adrian B. Smith: *The Trinity* and of André Lascaris op: *To serve and celebrate*.

The other contributions in this issue of *arcvoice* should give rise to thorough attention from members and others.

In this connection I think of the local groups already operating or planned in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, NSW Central Coast, Perth and Canberra. Those who took the initiative find it difficult to get established and that was also the experience of James Voss in Sacramento, California who wrote us a letter (page 2).

In the last week of October we sent a letter to all the members of ARC with the request to help in the preparation of a Conference and AGM in the first half of 2008. So far, the reaction to that request is very disappointing.

We also sent another letter with ARC SURVEY 2007.

Fewer than expected completed survey forms were sent back to us. Some were supposed to be attached to an email, but they were not.

Whoever still wants to complete the survey form, please do so and send it in before Christmas.

Copies of both letters and survey forms are available if the originals were lost.

If you are interested in referring to previous articles in *arcvoice*, indexes of authors and subject matter for issues No.1-25 are now available on our Website.

*Jim Taverne*

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## Letters

I note that the Editor gave space in *ARCvoice* 25 on page 9 to Two Atheists: Lisa Pryor and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. I am not objecting to the inclusion, as Frank Brennan's quotation of Kahl Rahner at the bottom of page 9 recommends it – Catholics will have to get used to being more inclusive than their hierarchical Church has been in the past. Close reading makes me think that the two women were expressing happiness at being free from the tyrannies of organised religion. One wants her children to 'fear not smiting' and for the other 'the ever present prospect of hellfire lifted'. These should be goals for the committed person of faith too.

Personally, my faith is in the God of Love, who befriends us in the person of Jesus, and embraces us in the Holy Spirit. This faith enrolls me in a community, a family, and I am not in isolation. As for the tyrannies that have grown up, I eschew them and am working to remove them. They have mainly to do with men-in-charge, a first injustice from which others flow. These oppressions are not from my God.

*Ted Lambert*

**Editor's Note:** Bishop Robinson reminds us 'that the most radical changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council concerned religious liberty ... it defended the right of all people to chose their own religion ... this included the right to choose and practise no religion.' (Page 158)

Thanks so much for the interview with Bishop Robinson. I am sure he had had a lot of heartbreak over his own experience and now his realizations about the church.

I and a group of people from Sacramento worked for a couple of years in an effort to start a 'Voice of the Faithful' organization in Sacramento, CA at St. Francis Parish. The pastor was completely supportive, but we were not able to get any significant number of people interested. And this was during the years that the sexual abuse scandal had big news coverage here. I am not sure of the reasons for our failure. One, I think, is the inability to think that 'their church' could do such a thing.

However, for myself, the sexual abuse issue furthered my thinking about my relationship with the Catholic Church. That examination and study has been progressing for many years. I think the sexual abuse issue is symptomatic of much more behind the scenes. I've seen that my relationship with God does not have to be dependent on any particular church, organization, or 'mediator'.

I would think that Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) should be informed of the Bishop's coming trip to the US. I would hope that they would provide some coverage/publicity in their newsletter. I am still a member of VOTF.

*James Voss*

**Editor's Note:** James is interested in meeting other folks who are 'reeling from a lifetime of Catholicism' – in the Sacramento, CA area. This is a bit far from Australia! – but if anyone in California reads this message, please contact James on [voss\\_jim@yahoo.com](mailto:voss_jim@yahoo.com)

## Religion and Superstition

Jim Taverne

The bi-weekly Dutch publication, *Volzin*, gives a report of a conversation with the Dutch poetess Maria van Daalen, who is a Roman-Catholic and a Voodoo priestess as well. She believes in God, but also lives with the spirits. To be in trance gives her the same fulfilment as poetry: an ecstatic moment of happiness in the way already described by the 13th century mystic Hadewijch.

Voodoo is focussed on the here and now and that is a good combination with a religion which is directed to the hereafter. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are invoked in Voodoo prayers, but there is a more extensive contact with the spirit world. The angels and saints are much more active in daily life. When the earthly spirits help you they expect you to reward them.

The images on the Maria's Voodoo altar are those of Catholic saints. They are a sort of alter egos of the earth spirits. For Maria her PhD in Dutch language and literature doubted the wisdom of her becoming a Voodoo priestess but the poetess had no problems with that ordination. My question is: where is the borderline between religion and superstition? Is someone's religion another one's superstition?

In churches in Spain we saw plaster hands and other body parts hanging around images of Saints with the thanks for healings. In the Catholic regions of Western Europe images of the Virgin Mary stand along the roads often adorned with flowers, similar to those of Buddha or various animal-gods in Asia.

Some years ago a well-educated lady of our parish told me she would pray to St. Anthony for the return of my little leather bag with mobile phone, cash and medicines, which I had lost.

Some Roman Catholics get into a trance during a charismatic celebration.

What do we think of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the past and still in the present? What of the Transfiguration?

**Editor's Note:** Perhaps other readers have comments or experiences they would like to share about their Catholic 'superstitions' – whether it be praying to St Jude for 'hopeless cases'; doing the nine First Fridays or whatever.

# ‘Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church’

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson

Review: John Russell

I have been carefully reading this book and I am finding it very rewarding. Geoffrey Robinson writes gently with empathy and insight, pointing to what he (and many like him including me) see as a range of historically and culturally conditioned problems that not only ‘confront’ the Church, but which have been alloyed into its very fabric.

The best thing is that he doesn’t write with that almost blind anger that so often disfigures polemics in this area. Nor does he write with the glibness I think I see in the works of the retired American Episcopal Bishop John Selby Spong (a frequent visitor to Australia).

Geoffrey Robinson’s critiques are profound and, in the current mode of Catholic thinking, probably insoluble in the short-to-medium term (which makes me more than a little depressed – not to the level requiring treatment, I might add).

Whether we deal with the Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox traditions of Christianity, the human and the historically conditioned seem so often to almost overwhelm the message of Jesus the Christ. Catholics can overemphasise tradition and Protestants underemphasise it. As a Catholic, and a firm believer in ‘tradition’, I see it as a positive – historically ever filling out the unfinished portrait of our faith given to the Apostles and the Early Church. However, tradition can also result in barnacles on the hull of the ship of faith requiring continual maintenance.

The best chapter of the book so far is Geoffrey

Robinson’s call for a ‘Healthy People in a Healthy Relationship with a Healthy God’. He calls for a move from ‘an angry God, not to a God of soft love, but to a God who, out of love, is never afraid to challenge us to grow’. In other words, no soft digestible Pelagianism, but neither an unforgiving Jansenist/Calvinist God looking for our continual abasement before Him (nothing worries me more with Puritan preachers than hearing endlessly of the ‘sovereignty’ of God). One other thing that the book has made me do is to worry about the implications of regarding God as ‘our Father’ – a great change wrought I think by Jesus, and in many ways so preferable to the Jewish and Islamic views of the distant unknowable God, but an idea with tensions of its own – have Christians anthropomorphised ‘God the Father’ into a cranky and horrible old man?

In any case it is great that this taciturn, dour, scholarly and articulate man has spoken out – he is still celebrating Sunday Mass at the stunning St Joseph’s Church on the Hume Highway in Sydney’s Inner West (according to the *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*: a superb example of Inter War Academic Classical Style of Architecture).

I know that not every one will agree with me and that doesn’t worry me. You are all friends who take these things seriously and I wanted to tell you how much I am enjoying this very important book. More power to people like Geoffrey Robinson and all the better that he is shy and non-flamboyant (I know only too well that flair can often smother substance!!!!)

Extract from *The Religion Report* 14.11.07

Stephen Crittenden reported that Bishop Geoffrey Robinson’s book *Confronting Sex and Power in the Catholic Church* ... ‘has been through four printings, and sold almost 8,000 copies, and it’s now being translated into Spanish. Meanwhile, Bishop Robinson himself has been left alone by church authorities. But if you want a window onto how power actually works in the Catholic church, listen to this: Prominent Sydney Marist priest, Dr Michael Whelan, who is the former president of the Sydney College of Divinity. He was a founder of the progressive Catholic movement Catalyst for Renewal, and Spirituality in the Pub, and he’s currently the director of the Aquinas Academy and a frequent guest on the ABC. Recently, the Marist fathers put his name forward for a key appointment, as parish priest of the famous Sydney City church of St Patrick’s, Church Hill. However, under canon law, the local bishop – in this case Cardinal Pell – has the right of veto over all parish appointments, even where a parish is in the care of a religious order, like the Marist Fathers. Cardinal Pell has vetoed Michael Whelan’s appointment as parish priest of St Patrick’s, Church Hill, and sources close to Michael Whelan say the Cardinal has even given a reason. You see, it was Michael Whelan who hosted the launch of Bishop Geoffrey Robinson’s book back in August.’

# Holy Places

Jim Taverne

In *arcvoice* 17 I wrote about a religious service of the Balinese Hindu community in Semarang in Java. That evening Margot and I were part of that community and God's spirit was in all of us.

A somewhat similar experience I had a few years later in the Hindu Prambanan temple in Central Java when I saw people praying in front of a Godly figure and felt as one of them.

This temple was built in the same age (9<sup>th</sup> AD) as and close to the Borobudur, the largest Buddhist temple in the world. The building materials had to come from other areas. The populations must have had adequate wealth and manpower to build these two giants and also be tolerant of each other.

What made people build such edifices as the Golden Pagoda in Rangoon, and the Pyramids in Egypt and Mexico, the Hagia Sophia, St Peter's Basilica, the Great Mosques? Many are full of physical treasures including silver, gold and diamonds. What make present-day believers still building elaborate houses of worship? Is all that to please (their) God(s)?

What makes for me a place or event holy? I try to explain that, in the first place to myself.

I found the Cathedral in Chartres a holy place where you meet the dedicated masons who built it (1194-1260).

In the garden of St Francis in Assisi I felt his presence and the presence of his God. I walked on sacred ground. But in his magnificent basilica with his sarcophagus and Giotto's beautiful frescos I felt no more than being a visitor. I believe that St Francis would have felt embarrassed to know of the building of a basilica in his honour.

I have been a visitor to the St Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, the Notre Dame de Paris and Westminster Abbey, but at Stonehenge I was in a holy place where long ago people worshiped. Stone circles we entered a few years ago in Scotland inspired me in the same way

Often, close to all those magnificent buildings many of the poor live and that reminds me of what Jesus told the rich young man and what Dom Helder Camara did when he became archbishop of Recife: he turned the Episcopal Palace into an orphanage and moved into three rooms in the

outbuildings of a parish church. He had no car. The successor of this saintly man lived in the palace again. (Helder Camara should have succeeded John XXIII as Pope.)

The Basilicas and the Palaces remind me also of the Salvationist who handed out *The War Cry* every Wednesday morning at Turramurra Station and we often talked a little with each other. One Wednesday not far from Christmas *The War Cry* carried a picture of St Peter's Square where cardinals in full canonicals were getting out of their chauffeur-driven limousines, observed from one of Rome's hills by a young man standing next to a donkey that carried a young woman and a baby and he said to her: 'It was quite different in our time!'

On the shore of the Lake Galilee I felt the presence of Jesus showing me the way.

At the silent empty shore of Shark Bay we marvelled at the stromatolites, the deposits from the one-celled blue-green algae, the first organisms which more than 3.5 billion years ago began photosynthesis. It was as if God wished to show us one of the great moments in the development of her creation.

The same sort of awe I felt when we drove towards the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, where the human race originated a few million years ago. There was total silence around the four of us. There was very little vegetation and the plain was wide. We could not even get to the Gorge itself because it was a public holiday in Tanzania.

At the foot of Uluru is a spot full of geological, biological and human history. I was alone, but at the same time I was not, in that place of the spirit.

These and other experiences show clearly to me that 'traditional' Christianity – Catholic or Protestant – does not necessarily inspire all the 'faithful' all the time anymore.

Roman Catholics are not the only ones who fully enjoy God's grace: in fact, God's imperishable spirit is in all people. (Wisdom 12:1)

Let's go back to the beginning and sit around a table or on the ground with Jesus our leader and our friend, for a meal of bread and wine or rice (perhaps with fishes) and water or corn and beer. □

# The Trinity

Extract from Adrian B. Smith, *Tomorrow's Faith*

(the first in a new series of articles)

**B**elief in the Trinity is the highest affirmation of our Christian faith. Yet many Christians are surprised to learn that the word Trinity appears nowhere in the Bible! It is a theological 'definition' of the Godhead which is the product of the Greek mind in the early centuries of the Church expressing analytically what is found expressed holistically in Scripture. Jesus never mentioned the word 'Trinity' but from the way he spoke about God it became apparent that he was aware of a diversity in God's unity.

Although this belief is at the very heart of Christianity it took hundreds of years for the doctrine to be formulated. As one theologian has said, the doctrine of the Trinity is simply the attempt to formulate in a comprehensible language what God has revealed in the experience of some people who knew Jesus and recognised the mystery of God in him, of people who experienced the power and life of the Spirit of Christ after the Resurrection. Its formulation, as 'three persons in one God,' however, was not developed until the decades immediately following the Church Council of Nicaea in CE 325 at which Jesus was declared to be 'God the Son'.

Even to use the word 'person' of God is to employ an analogy because the only kind of person we know is the human person. In fact such a 'definition' of the mystery of God has even less meaning now than it had at the time of the Council of Nicaea. At that time the Latin word 'persona' meant the mask that people held in front of their faces to depict their role during a theatrical performance. With the development of the science of psychology today the word 'person' has a much richer content. The value of the word has changed. So to understand what the Church meant by its arid definition we need to go back to that earlier meaning. Otherwise it appears only as a dry theological-mathematical formula, hardly designed to enable us to draw closer to the God who is at the centre of our being, living out His diversity-in-unity within us.

Today theologians are proposing other expressions to give a contemporary meaning to our belief in a triune God. For example, thinking of God as Being (not as 'a' being nor even as 'the' being). John Macquarrie proposes 'movements' or 'modes' of Being. The Father may be thought of as 'primordial' Being, the Son as 'expressive' Being, the Spirit as 'unitive' Being.

Others propose that the Biblical Father, Son and Spirit can be understood as different modes of God's action — Knowing, Serving and Loving — or as three distinguishable ways in which the one God is experienced as acting in relation to us: as Creator, as Redeemer, as Inspirer. Or again, God

the Father is the Ultimate Reality to which we are drawn. Jesus is the example of what we are called to become and the Spirit is the energy that enables our becoming. What is common to all these expressions is that in the Godhead there is both unity and diversity. God is relationship as well as consciousness.

In our patriarchal society it was inevitable that the symbol of the Trinity should be a triangle or pyramid with the Father on top. How much more meaningful if it had been a circle to symbolise that the very essence of God as triune is relatedness.

The concept of God as Trinity is unique to Christianity among the three monotheistic religions issuing from 'our father Abraham'. In fact the very idea that there might be three aspects of God is anathema to both Jews and Muslims. Yet curiously in Hinduism we find a similar expression of a trinity of deities: Brahman (the power which sustains everything), Shiva (the deity of both good and evil, the creator and destroyer) and Vishnu (the playful god who shows himself to humanity in different incarnations or avatars, the best known being Krishna). In Hinduism there is also an understanding of creative energy as pure knowledge, pure consciousness, which develops in a tripartite dynamic of the Knower (Rishi), the act of knowing (Devata) and the object Known (Chhandas). This is not dissimilar to the model favoured by St Augustine: The Father is the Knower, the Son is the Known and the Spirit is the relationship between them: the bliss of knowing. Or we can say that since we understand God as Love, in God there is another tripartite dynamic: a Lover (Father), the act of loving (the Spirit) and the Beloved (the Son).

Another understanding of the Trinity symbolises the three elements in God's relationship with all things in creation, namely, God, Creation and the Love which flows between them. This is sometimes expressed as Source, Manifestation and Presence.

Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote (in *The Grammar of Assent*, 1870): 'Is the doctrine of the Trinity the elaborate, subtle, triumphant exhibition of a truth divinely revealed — completely developed and happily adjusted and accurately balanced on its centre and impregnable on every side... or does it come to the unlearned, the young, the busy and the afflicted as a fact which is to arrest them, penetrate them and support them and animate them in their passage through life?'

The really important thing is the experience and not the formulation: no formulation can never ever replace the lived experience. □

# To serve and celebrate

André Lascaris

**Four Dominican theologians have caused a furore in the Dutch Church with their new booklet, arguing that the Church in future will have to allow ‘inspired members of the community’ to celebrate the Eucharist. Here, one of the authors explains their beliefs about who should preside.**

The Catholic Church is a eucharistic Church with the celebration of Mass at its very heart. However, the number of priests in the Netherlands is declining and in many cities and regions it has become increasingly difficult to find a church where the Eucharist is celebrated on a Sunday.

It is against this background that the 2005 Provincial Chapter of the Dutch Dominicans decided to try to clarify the relationship between Church and ministry. This was done in the form of a booklet, *Kerk en Ambt* (‘Church and Ministry’), sent to all parishes at the end of August, which sought to shed light on various aspects of this relationship, including the ministry of those who preside at liturgical functions. Not least it proposed that in the absence of ordained priests, laypersons – men and women – should be allowed to celebrate the Eucharist. The booklet is not intended to be a dogmatic declaration, but rather an attempt in clear and simple language to renew a discussion on the subject. It does not claim to say anything new: it is based on statements of the Second Vatican Council and on publications of professional theologians and pastoral experts.

The Catholic Church in the Netherlands numbers 1,557 parishes, with 1,112 priests, many of them elderly, 286 deacons and 774 male and female pastoral workers. Officially, there are more than 5 million Catholics (out of a total population of 16 million, of whom 1 million are Muslims). Less than 10 per cent of the Catholics are regular churchgoers. Most young people do not relate to any Church. It is expected that, by 2020, some three-quarters of the population will not belong to any Church.

Church authority follows an unambiguous policy, especially with regard to the Eucharist. In the absence of an ordained priest a celebration of the Eucharist is out of the question. However, this position does not appear to be shared by a part – probably a large part – of the priests, pastoral workers and volunteers active in the field. Many parishes and groups of the faithful are confronted with the simple fact that, now or in the near future, an ordained priest will no longer be available and that there is no hope of a remedy for this situation. The bishops try to meet this growing shortage either by importing priests from abroad, or by joining parishes into a region in which one priest has to be of service to several parishes.

In this way the hierarchy opts for maintaining the clerical form of the priesthood over and against the right of church communities to the Eucharist. Although in theory the Eucharist is said to be the centre of the Church’s liturgy, celebrating it is, in fact, made dependent on the person presiding at it, which in consequence makes ordination the most important sacrament.

Pope Pius X (1905-1914) was hardly a progressive leader of the Church but he promoted the active participation of laymen in the celebration of the Eucharist. He stands at the beginning of the liturgical movement; the Second Vatican Council would not have taken place if Pius X had not pleaded for the renewal of the eucharistic practice.

In many parishes the celebration of the Eucharist is often replaced by a so-called Word and Communion Service: after the ordinary Service of the Word some prayers are said and Communion takes place with hosts, consecrated in a celebration of the Eucharist elsewhere. In the Netherlands the number of celebrations of the Eucharist on a Sunday fell between 2002 and 2004 from 2,200 to 1,900; the number of Word and Communion Services increased from 550 to 630. Many people do not notice the difference between such a Communion service and the celebration of the Eucharist. They call both celebrations ‘Mass’.

What is happening today at grassroots level in the Netherlands is in accordance with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Council stated that the people themselves and their salvation are the goals of the Church. It took the view that the hierarchy is at the service of the people of God and is therefore, strictly speaking, of secondary importance. This marked a departure from the ‘vertical theology’ that still dominates the minds of the present conservative majority of bishops. This theology depends very much on the philosophy of Neoplatonism, in which everything comes from above like the water of a cataract and is handed over from one level of authority to the next inferior one. It sees the priesthood as part of a pyramid. The top of this pyramid reaches into heaven and therefore participates in divine life to the maximum extent. From this peak supernatural life flows down, through priestly mediation, to the lowest regions of the Church and finally reaches the base of the pyramid – that is, the laity. In this model a priest is admitted into the special domain of the holy and supernatural, which takes him beyond the domain of the natural and profane.



In the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, a different model of the Church came into better view: less strictly hierarchical, more organic and directed towards the community as a whole. This view is in line with the Pauline image of the Church as Christ's body. This change also made room for a different view of the function of leadership in this community. A minister receives a place or 'order' in the body of the Church.

Recent letters from the Vatican, including Pope Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, published last February, almost deny that the Eucharist is a meal. By contrast, our booklet says that the Eucharist is rich in meaning. In the common sharing of bread and wine, in doing what Jesus did, He is present in our midst. The bread that is broken refers explicitly to Jesus' life and death, the wine points to his life force, to his strength of mind and spirit, to his blood; in the Bible 'blood' means life force. Jesus' surrender of himself in his life and death may be called a 'sacrifice'. This sacrifice is made present in the Eucharist in the shape of a common meal, and the faithful join Jesus' act of sacrifice and surrender themselves. The leadership in a community is indeed a 'service' in this view.

The booklet urges the parishes to take the freedom which is theologically justified to elect their own leader or team of leaders to celebrate the Eucharist. According to the text, 'Those who preside in local celebrations should be inspired members of the community in question. Whether they be men or women, homo- or heterosexual, married or unmarried is irrelevant. Of interest is whether or not their faith attitude is stimulating and inspiring.'

The parish community should then ask the bishop to confirm its choice of leader after due consultation by the laying-on of hands. This was the ordinary practice in the early Church. If a bishop should refuse such a confirmation or 'ordination' on the basis of arguments not involving the essence of the Eucharist, such as obligatory celibacy, parishes may be confident that they are able to celebrate a real and genuine Eucharist when they are together in prayer and share bread and wine. It is to be hoped that bishops may in the future live up to their commitment to serve and confirm the leaders of local communities in their office.

The Dutch bishops have given a furious reaction to the booklet. Even before reading it in full, they declared that it contains elements 'in conflict with the faith of the Roman Catholic Church'. They think it improper for one group of faithful to address another without their prior consent.

Following pressure from the bishops, the Dutch Dominican Provincial, Fr Ben Vocking, has called off a conference the Council of the Dutch Dominican Province was planning to discuss the booklet's proposals. But the matter will not end there. Already there are signs that other Catholic groups in the Netherlands want to look closely at what provisions can be put in place to celebrate the Eucharist if no ordained priests are available. The Dominicans have also invited the bishops to set up workshops jointly with them. As yet the bishops have not responded but I hope they will agree. The matter is too important and urgent to brush aside. □

Source: *The Tablet* 22 September 2007

<http://www.thetablet.co.uk>

## International Observations

Jim Taverne

On the occasion of the election of Parish Pastoral Councils in several dioceses in Germany the *Wir sind Kirche* (We are Church) Group issued a press release in which it proposed that pastoral councils demand the co-responsibility for the future of the parish and its finances and that they realise their ability to act. *Wir sind Kirche* encourages the councils to use the possibilities of the existing Church laws, to expect to be consulted and to participate in decisions. It is unacceptable, if council members are expected to work with (for) the parish priest but cannot share decision making.

The shortage of priests leads to a growing number of parishes without one. This will make the participation of other members of the congregation in its leadership essential and urgent. The press release refers to the brochure from the Dutch Dominicans who propose that Eucharistic celebrations be presided over by selected lay parishioners.

It also quotes Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Democracy in the Church*: 'The Parish Pastoral Councils have become an important element in the parish community. We cannot anymore imagine a parish without their contribution.'

The KRO (Catholic radio station), *Trouw* (Christian daily newspaper) and Ten Have (publishers) in The Netherlands were the promoters of the first celebration of *Spirituality Month* November 2007.

The Chief Editor, Mr. Jan van Hooydonk, of the bi-weekly *Volzin* (opinion paper for faith and society) heads his editorial of 2 November with 'Spirituality makes a difference'. He points out that modernisation and secularisation have not extinguished the religion. On the contrary: modern secularisation has created an inner chilliness in many people, so that they began to search again for 'more', for inner warmth and inspiration, for personal authenticity, for 'spirituality'.

Van Hooydonk writes that Christian spirituality is not a sort of alternative to religion. It is rather characterised as faith in practice. Spirituality and care for one's neighbour belong together. Spirituality makes a difference. It improves the world and adds beauty. Our personal lives become richer and more fulfilled. □

# We All Get Past Santa Claus

John Buggy

The twelve theses of Bishop John Spong (who recently lectured in Australia) raise significant questions about the way that we educate children about the Christian faith (let alone the Catholic tradition) in Australia. Stories about Jesus are fine, but the connection between them and the dogmas that are part of the faith package must be more and more a puzzling mixture for any thinking person who moves beyond a passing interest in the religion into which they were born.

The main problem that we face with religious education is the fact that so many of us learn so little about our religion after we leave school. The allegories and stories that are used to teach us about God when we are children are inadequate for a deeper understanding in later life. Exhortations from pulpits to lead better lives are part of the liturgy and various prayer or discussion groups that foster personal spirituality are fine. But seldom are we given the opportunity to bring our other education and reason to a more mature understanding of our faith. Blind faith is not a virtue, despite what we may have been told.

In the early centuries of the Church a great deal of effort was put into building up the understanding of who Jesus Christ was and into explaining the teaching and legacy of what he left. At the same time the Church has always said that the gift of faith and the explanation of that faith are separate and that different generations will understand the faith in different ways. But if we only cling to the explanations that satisfied those of centuries past, then we do ourselves a great disservice.

One of the most significant statements from the Second Vatican Council was the re-iteration that the scriptures teach religious truth rather than historical or literal truth. Many parts of the scriptures are stories that illustrate the oneness of God, the goodness of creation, a particular moral virtue, etc. In order to understand more clearly what we mean by the growing

to an appreciation of religious truth, perhaps we can use the analogy of engendering the spirit of Christmas through the myth of Santa Claus. Children are introduced to the universal virtue of giving and generosity through the myth of Santa Claus and all its trappings. They are able to believe in Santa because their world is small. When the time comes for them to move beyond the myth, the spirit and underlying truth of gift giving, generosity and simple goodwill remains with them because of the experience of that belief. They move beyond Santa Claus just as we should move beyond the myths that nurtured our early faith and the explanations that satisfied people of more primitive times.

In this aspect Bishop Spong is not radical, he is only saying what the Church has already said before, although there are many conservatives today who try to pretend that it hasn't been said. Miracles are easily explained and the healing that took place in Jesus' time takes place today in a similar fashion. The scripture writer's understanding at the time influences the manner of expressing how God speaks to man. Modern biblical scholarship recognises that angels are merely a literary form to express how God speaks to man, especially since the Hebrews believed that this could not occur directly. When we come to what Jesus said we have to be more careful in taking the meaning in context. For example, the word used for hell is 'gehenna', the word for the garbage tip outside the walls of Jerusalem that was constantly burning (a great image for showing what it would



be like to be rejected for refusing God's love). It is an image, nothing more.

If people are going to continue to believe in angels and devils as reality, then why not add in fairies, elves and leprechauns? And keep Santa going as well? While ever we continue to have nonsensical ideas in our religious language and liturgy, our religion will tend more and more to become quaint practice. I know of very few people who really believe in guardian angels, the virgin birth, immaculate conception, limbo, purgatory, hell, and infallibility, but they will not say so openly for fear that they might have to explain or justify too many other things. The time is fast approaching when, in order to keep Christianity relevant and help others to move closer to its real meaning, we may have to be more explicit about just what we **do** believe.

But you don't hear too much from pulpits that is likely to assist you to be more enlightened. Many people say that they go to church because of the other people who go. I guess there are times when we all might question why we go now that the fears engendered in our childhood have long since passed. I am comfortable in saying that the only reason why I attend is for the Eucharist, my understanding of which is intricately linked to "when two or three are gathered in Christ's name in the breaking of the bread". This event could occur in many places, it just happens to occur often at the church. However, a lot of what is said and sung does not

help my faith nor does it assist me to express what I understand about Jesus and God.

The manner in which we talk about God is so inadequate – we tend to make God into something that is far too small. I am reminded of the statement made in one of Thomas Keneally's earlier novels: 'Man was created in the image and likeness of God and now man has returned the compliment.' Do we make God according to our image? The God of the scriptures was seen to have created the earth as the centre of the universe with the stars fixed in the dome or firmament above the earth. How do we speak about the creator of the universe that we now know it to be expanding at a billion kilometres per hour? We have next to no chance of explaining the problem of evil if we talk of God intervening in all sorts of events in response to prayer. The ancient pagans got around it by having forces of good and forces of evil. This dichotomy was simply assumed by the writers of the scriptures, but it is not good enough for us today.

We need to encourage those with whom we worship to question and challenge the way our faith is presented to us in preaching and liturgy. We should take time ourselves to understand more about the tradition from which our faith has emerged in addition to simply loving one another and doing things that show it. For the life of the Church in the future, I certainly hope that a significant number of us would make that effort. □

## Typos in the Monastery

A new monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to help the other monks in copying the old texts by hand. He notices, however, that they are copying copies, and not the original books.

So, the new monk goes to the head monk to ask him about this. He points out that if there was an error in the first copy, that error would be continued in all of the other copies. The head monk says, 'We have been copying from the copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son'.

So, he goes down into the cellar with one of the copies to check it against the original. Hours later, nobody has seen him. So, one of the monks goes downstairs to look for him. He hears sobbing coming from the back of the cellar and finds the old monk leaning over one of the original books crying. He asks what's wrong.

"The word is *celeBRATE* not *celiBATE*", says the old monk with tears in his eyes.

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- \* planes by Boeing; nobis quoque pick up Airibus
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- \* the one true airline!

(Contributed by Fred Jansohn - with thanks)

# Pope gets radical and woos the Anglicans

Damian Thompson

Source: *The Daily Telegraph* (UK) 16/11/2007 (published with permission)

Two and a half years after the name 'Josephum' came booming down from the balcony of St Peter's, making liberal Catholics weep with rage, Pope Benedict XVI is revealing his programme of reform. And it is breathtakingly ambitious.

The 80-year-old Pontiff is planning a purification of the Roman liturgy in which decades of trendy innovations will be swept away. This recovery of the sacred is intended to draw Catholics closer to the Orthodox and ultimately to heal the 1,000 year Great Schism. But it is also designed to attract vast numbers of conservative Anglicans, who will be offered the protection of the Holy Father if they convert en masse.

The liberal cardinals don't like the sound of it at all. Ever since the shock of Benedict's election, they have been waiting for him to show his hand. Now that he has, the resistance has begun in earnest – and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, is in the thick of it.

'Pope Benedict is isolated,' I was told when I visited Rome last week. 'So many people, even in the Vatican, oppose him, and he feels the strain immensely.' Yet he is ploughing ahead. He reminds me of another conservative revolutionary, Margaret Thatcher, who waited a couple of years before taking on the Cabinet 'wets' sabotaging her reforms.

Benedict's pontificate moved into a new phase on July 7, with the publication of his apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum*.

With a stroke of his pen, the Pope restored the traditional Latin Mass – in effect banned for 40 years – to parity with the modern liturgy. Shortly afterwards, he replaced Archbishop Piero Marini, the papal Master of Ceremonies who turned many of John Paul II's Masses into politically-correct carnivals.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor was most displeased. Last week, he hit back with a 'commentary' on *Summorum Pontificum*. According to Murphy-O'Connor, the ruling leaves the power of local bishops untouched. In fact, it removes the bishops' power to block the ancient liturgy. In other words, the cardinal – who tried to stop Benedict issuing the ruling – is misrepresenting its contents.

Alas, he is not alone: dozens of bishops in Britain, Europe and America have tried the same trick.

Murphy-O'Connor's 'commentary' was modelled on equally dire 'guidelines' written by Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds with the apparent purpose of discouraging the faithful from exercising their new rights.

A few years ago the ploy might have worked. But news travels fast in the traditionalist blogosphere, and these tactics have been brought to the attention of papal advisers.

This month, Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith, a senior Vatican official close to Benedict, declared that 'bishops and even cardinals' who misrepresented *Summorum Pontificum* were 'in rebellion against the Pope'.

Ranjith is tipped to become the next Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, in charge of regulating worldwide liturgy. That makes sense: if Benedict is moving into a higher gear, then he needs street fighters in high office.

He may also have to reform an entire department, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which spends most of its time promoting the sort of ecumenical waffle that Benedict abhors.

This is a sensitive moment. Last month, the bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion, a network of 400,000 breakaway Anglo-Catholics based mainly in America and the Commonwealth, wrote to Rome asking for 'full, corporate, sacramental union'.

Their letter was drafted with the help of the Vatican. Benedict is overseeing the negotiations. Unlike John Paul II, he admires the Anglo-Catholic tradition. He is thinking of making special pastoral arrangements for Anglican converts walking away from the car wreck of the Anglican Communion.

This would mean that they could worship together, free from bullying by local bishops who dislike the newcomers' conservatism and would rather 'dialogue' with Anglicans than receive them into the Church.

The liberation of the Latin liturgy, the rapprochement with Eastern Orthodoxy, the absorption of former Anglicans – all these ambitions reflect Benedict's conviction that the Catholic Church must rediscover the liturgical treasure of Christian history to perform its most important task: worshipping God.

This conviction is shared by growing numbers of young Catholics, but not by the church politicians who have dominated the hierarchies of Europe for too long.

By failing to welcome the latest papal initiatives – or even to display any interest in them, beyond the narrow question of how their power is affected – the bishops of England and Wales have confirmed Benedict's low opinion of them.

Now he should replace them. If the Catholic reformation is to start anywhere, it might as well be here. □

# Mulieris Dignitatem

## twenty years on

In February 2008, the Pontifical Council for the Laity is organizing a conference in Rome to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the publication of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women

Is this an anniversary worth celebrating? The answer must be, 'Yes, partly!' In a profound examination of what it means to be human, the Pope John Paul II identifies in this encyclical, the equal partnership of men and women and their identical, ultimate, goal, namely, to become truly human in the image of God by making a sincere and a complete gift of themselves. In speaking specifically about women, Pope John Paul II quotes Vatican II documents: 'The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved.'

The Pope movingly describes Mary's intimate, pivotal role in the central salvific event in humankind's spiritual history. She achieved 'a unity with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit'; that 'supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ, which determines the ultimate finality of the existence of every person both on earth and in eternity.'

Even so, as far as Pope John Paul II is concerned, the salvific role of women can never include the priesthood. Departing from the profundity of thought which went into his writing about the dignity and equality of women in the early part of the encyclical, the Pope abruptly changed tack. And it is not simply a question of stating that by choosing not to have women as his apostles Jesus showed that women must not be ordained. Basing himself on Ephesians 5:25-32 which presents the image of the Bride and the

Bridegroom, the Pope contends that the deepest reason why only men can preside over the Eucharist is that only men as males can represent Christ the Bridegroom who in turn represents the Father.

*Mulieris Dignitatem* closed the door so firmly on the possibility of women's ordination in 1988, that it is highly unlikely that its 20th jubilee conference will review the decision. It would be a great surprise if the conference were to re-examine the question of women priests (or even deacons), even though, during the 20 years since the encyclical was written, in every developed country in the world, the role of woman has been transformed.

For this reason, in 2008, womenpriests.org will organize a simultaneous online conference, allowing theologians around the world to shine the light of current theological thinking on the encyclical and onto the validity of Pope John Paul's conclusions about the ordination of women. To facilitate the discussion, *Mulieris Dignitatem* has been divided into six parts:

- Equal dignity of men and women in creation
- Jesus Christ and women
- Women as mothers
- The Bride and Bridegroom
- Women and the Eucharist
- Women and the Primacy of Love.

Each topic merits separate examination and discussion.

At the same time, CIRCLES has opened a separate forum on the issue. There is already plenty of material to mull over and to comment on. <http://www.womenpriests.org/circle>

Best wishes and prayers

Leonie Russell

Editor

Catholic Internet Library

## Letters to the *Sydney Morning Herald*

written by your editor – still relevant today

4/6/94:

Congratulations on your editorial 'Women priests – the ban on the debate'. If the Pope would only get his head out of the clouds and descend into the catacombs under his feet, he would see frescoes on the walls which clearly depict early Christian women conducting communion services. Whether they were called 'priests' or not is surely irrelevant.

20/4/91:

No one to tend the flock – indeed! (*SMH* April 17). Catholics who persist in sheepishly following their leaders, believing that only men can be shepherds, need to open their eyes to the possibilities and benefits of change and growth.

Slavish adherence to a patriarchal tradition set nearly 2,000 years ago makes no sense in today's society where equal opportunities are enshrined in law. Why should the Church be exempt? After all, there have been shepherdesses since time immemorial.

Even if Bo Peep did lose a few of her flock, it will be nothing to the general exodus from the church of frustrated, thinking women whose talents, creativity and compassion are rejected.

Margaret Knowlden

## 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

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

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