



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
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Editorial

With reports indicating that the costs associated with World Youth Day are steadily rising, more and more people are beginning to question its real benefit to the Church. Naturally it will bring lots of revenue to the State of New South Wales and, hopefully, young people will have a good time, but if it does not lead to reflection on the direction of the Church and what we believe and practise, then questions about its worth are justified. The principal organiser of the last World Youth Day asked similar questions and I have read nothing to indicate that any serious evaluation was conducted.

The time for reflection on what we believe is long overdue. Recently I was asked to address members of the Catenian Association, an international organisation of Catholic professional men. They asked me to speak about the work that ARC does and to comment on the dwindling numbers of people who attend the parishes to which they belong. As I went through the many contradictions in the Church's official teaching and practice that confuse so many people, there were rising expressions of controlled anger that they had been taught to believe so many things if they wanted to consider themselves Catholic and to conform to practices under pain of mortal sin. As the discussion ensued, I detected a level of empathy for those who no longer find Church attendance supporting their spirituality and less inclination to write such people off as bad Catholics as they may have previously been tempted to do. All the back copies of *arcvoice* that I brought were quickly taken and a few have already become members of ARC.

Perhaps World Youth Day may have the effect of alerting more people to undergo similar reflection. It should do so if we see and hear any speeches or statements that call Catholics back to untenable past notions like the recent resuscitation of plenary indulgences by Pope Benedict. Already there are some extreme right wing elements saying that their presence during this time will help to bring the Catholic Church in Australia back on the 'right' track.

Hopefully, any sentiments like this will spur people to think about what they really believe and value.

The Secretariat of ARC has given much thought to how we may assist in taking that reflection forward on the assumption that World Youth Day will highlight many contradictions. Whether it occurs this year or next, we would like to consider a conference the title of which could be something like 'A New Creed for a New Age'. Such a conference, supported by at least one international expert, may enable participants to move towards some consensus in expressing what they truly believe as Catholics in modern day terms. What do you think?

John Buggy

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Survey 2007 – *arcvoice* comments

Letters

I would like to congratulate all who contributed to making *arcvoice* 26 so interesting and challenging. Two articles in particular stand out for me, 'To Serve and Celebrate' and 'We all get past Santa Claus'. In relation to the latter, I believe ARC can play a big part in urging bishops to bring about reforms in the way our faith is presented from the pulpit. One clear example being applying the truths of modern scripture scholarship, instead of encouraging a literal (fundamentalist) interpretation. Do our priests need more training in biblical scholarship, or are they just 'talking down' to the faithful, 'who might get upset if we tell the truth'?

Maureen Flanagan

My thanks for the fine work of the Secretariat in organizing the Conferences that I have attended - 2005 and 2006. As a veteran of many Conferences in different countries, the 2006 Conference was one of the best of its nature that I have attended. My profound thanks. Blessings and all good wishes for your important mission.

(Brother) Charles Howard

It is Christmas morning and, having attended a lacklustre Mass last night, my mind turns to the enormous challenge we have taken on in attempting to enliven our Church to the spirit of Jesus rather than words and ceremony. I hope we can continue to provide support to those who feel the same way.

John Buggy

Do other *arcvoice* readers agree with John? We invite you to share your Christmas experiences and offer suggestions on how we can enliven our Church (and – to quote Michael Morwood – stop embarrassing Jesus!). *Editor*

1. In building a building to the future ARCVOICE is an ideal media to communicate to (and from) members and beyond. Currently there is a preachy attitude to some of the leading articles/editorials
2. I really enjoy the articles – they are uplifting and inspiring. They are always well-written and provoking.
3. Very encouraging.
4. Great.
5. Excellent.
6. I am very happy to receive it and find the articles thought provoking.
7. Most interesting and informative.
8. Many articles and letters are reasonable and sensible. A few are too negative. I did not like Jim's comments on World Youth Day.
9. I read every word. I am proud to belong to ARC which has members that think as I do.
10. I look forward to receiving them and find the articles very good, especially over the past year.
11. Worth reading at times.
12. Most of it is excellent and I pass on my copies to other people – I've copied the information page and articles and sent them to friends, I'll keep trying because not many people want to commit themselves to taking on a Newsletter or Magazine. So I underline all the computer information.
13. I read it avidly every time it comes and share it with others to promote ARC.
14. Usually I find it of considerable interest.
15. Interesting. Informative.
16. Very helpful.
17. A model for all organisations.
18. Informative.
19. I look forward to ARCVOICE since I do not have a computer, etc. For general information on ARC. And to gather the articles published.
20. Informative, each contributor express themselves well. There is a good range of material published representative of ARC's concern. More is needed on Biblical Study – helping people make sense of the Biblical text for today.
21. V. good.
22. Interesting and encouraging.
23. Stimulating and encouraging. It's great to know there are others who are concerned about the Church and its future.
24. Very good.
25. Generally quite thoughtful – a good job given the resources.
26. I look forward to receiving ARC as it raises my spirits and gives me comfort to know there are others who think alike and almost despair of the diocesan church here in WA.
27. Interesting.
28. Very good. Resonates with where I'm at.
29. Pertinent.
30. Interesting reading.
31. Very informative.
32. I look forward to its arrival.
33. Interesting and relevant and frequently informative and at times conducive to anger at the behaviour of sections of the church. I'm also aware of the large responsibility of a few members in producing this valued publication.
34. Good, but often not original, e.g. Tablet material used frequently – comments on such secondhand material would be appreciated.
35. Vital.
36. Most interesting and well researched. It is always thoughtful, intelligent and reasonable.

New Beginnings

Kerry Gonzales

November 24 2007 marked an historic change in the government of Australia, and only time will tell what direction that change will take and whether it will benefit or detract from the lives that we currently lead here. But that's democracy, and I'm very grateful to be living in a country that has such an open and generally reliable political process.

The same however cannot be said of the church that I was baptised into – that being the Catholic Church. It may be 2007 in the wider world, but within the structures and constraints of the Catholic Church it feels more like the 1950's church of my earliest memories. A 'fire and brimstone' mentality that is fiercely protective of the current power structures, which is prepared to use all manner of words, threats and actions to hold the line against those who hold divergent views. However, in this new technological age where news is instant and world wide, these dissenters are 'coming out' and are realising they are not alone.

The Catholic Church is not a democracy and I have no expectation that it will suddenly become one. However, as a believer in the message of Jesus, I would like to see the church respond to all its members in a more Christ-like way. This is where I could cite lots of biblical 'evidence' to show how Jesus wanted his followers to live. However, using the bible as a weapon to defend specific 'truth' has contributed to much of the difficulty within the church today, and does nothing more than keep the argument alive.

So, what I would like to see the Catholic Church leaders do is to stop defending the indefensible and to really make some effort to enter into meaningful dialogue with the many disenfranchised members of the faith community, such as women, gays and lesbians, divorced and youth amongst others. Yet I hear the loud protests that the church already does this, and I agree there are many within church structures who do wonderful work in all these areas. However, at the highest levels of the Catholic Church, both here and in Rome, the encyclicals and public pronouncements often do not support and enhance the excellent work being done at the coal face. If it did we would see lay people in charge of parishes, gay people welcomed rather than rejected, women in positions of importance within the church, more young people seeking involvement in the life of the community.

Again I hear the clamour of the establishment deriding my views and suggesting, none too politely, that the rules are clear and if I don't like them I should go elsewhere. However, baptism and faith are not so easily abandoned and certainly cannot be taken away. Ultimately someone

needs to stay and agitate for change from the inside. Some people are called to be such a voice and this calling is no less valid than any other calling within the church.

When you take the time to look around, there are many hopeful signs, real beacons of light in the darkness of current practice. Of greatest hope perhaps is that Catholics – laity and clergy and religious – are starting to be heard in a variety of ways. Voices crying out from within the establishment can be heard in the secular press, on the internet and in other media. Admittedly these cries are few and far between, but they are there for all to see and can become the catalyst that will encourage and embolden others to follow suit.

Writers from both within and outside the mainstream church are also being given much-needed airtime. Two very inspiring books I have read recently are Michael Morwood's *From Sand to Solid Ground* and Michael Kelly's *Seduced by Grace*. Both these writers challenge and inspire, while raising perennial issues that are yet to be really acknowledged and taken up by our church leaders. These writers do not present extremist views, intent on destroying the church, but both present extremely well written and cogent attempts to awaken the Catholic Church to a new understanding of issues that are relevant to large groups of believers and are critical to the development of a truly inclusive and vibrant church. A church that discusses rather than dictates, embraces rather than excludes, and listens – really listens – with an open and compassionate heart.

For me however the greatest beacon of hope and delight are those voices now being raised from the pews. A powerful example is my 80-year-old mother and a few of her friends who regularly meet and discuss issues of concern. They keep up with what's happening, read up on all the issues and then discuss and act on what their consciences advise. Unfortunately for my mother, she does feel a bit guilty, disagreeing with the church she has devoted her life to. However as a spiritually adult Catholic she feels she has been called to speak, even if the hierarchy does not listen to her voice. But, please do not get her started on World Youth Day!!

So there is hope, for there are things happening out there, both within the clergy and in the pews. No doubt it will be a slow and painful change, yet I believe that it is inevitable that the voices of all the faithful, whether in agreement with the hierarchy or not, will continue to seek to be heard. Hopefully, the unfettered spirit of the universal Catholic Church will be allowed take the church forward, rather than backwards.

KERRY GONZALES is a Catholic woman seeking change within the church. This article was first published in *Catholica* (28.12.07).

God is not a Lawyer

Ted Lambert

The Catholic Church is both a preacher and worshipper of God and Jesus and the Spirit. It is a Community of love and comfort in their embrace. It is a practitioner of good works in their name. It is peace and goodwill to all. This is one version. Yet the modern faithful are held in the grip of the Nicene Creed, The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, all sanctioned by penalties and all administered by exclusively male clerics. The Roman bureaucracy prevails in remote isolation from the faithful in the parishes of the world. It reminds me of the cultures of South America of yesteryear.

I once followed a British TV Series about the Peruvian Andes communities, in which the narrator tried to explain how it was that the military dictators had been able to dominate the continent for a century. According to him the reason lay in the people themselves, namely that they eschewed responsibility. If someone dropped a cup s/he said: 'Oh, the cup dropped'. Such a person would happily want someone else to take charge. Another example of how language affects life. (I am aware that their ancestors under Bolivar and others took responsibility for forcing the Spanish rulers and bishops into exile and that the people, with few bishops left, maintained the faith themselves for generations.) But the narrator's diagnosis suits my purpose. The modern Church is in some way like that South America.

As a Catholic for 81 years, a cleric for 30 years and a priest for 27 years, a laicised and sacramental husband for 22 years and now an active member of Australian Reforming Catholics for seven years I think I've acquired an insight. It may be simple and, for some, even simplistic, and it is not the complete diagnosis. This insight has something to do with misguided devotion to law, which is really the same as not trusting the Spirit.

As Christians organised themselves I believe they went corporate rather than remaining communal. They sought and/or accepted the bureaucracy of external rule rather than adherence to the Spirit of Jesus. They put their faith in strong horses rather than God. Humanly understandable, this unhappy inclination lifted the Church to imperial heights. When Pope Gregory VII accepted obeisance from the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV who knelt in the snow at Canossa it is obvious the Church had lost the plot. At this peak of Church aggrandisement there came into being that totally alien institution, the Princes of the Church. Throughout Church history Ecumenical and other Councils defined a towering list of doctrines that might have surprised Jesus. They certainly burdened the people.

What am I suggesting, that the Catholic Church has largely got it wrong? Well, yes. How can this be so? In response to someone who said that christianity had been tried and found wanting, G K Chesterton correctly stated that christianity has not yet been tried. This has not yet reached the scale of an unmitigated disaster. The past fifty years has seen the espousal of worldwide charity, sometimes poorly administered, but a growing christian initiative. The Roman bureaucracy has not spearheaded this Jesus outreach – disciples of Jesus have. The Roman bureaucracy has not yet understood or acknowledged the wrong turn taken early on. Modern western studies have clearly identified that the civilisation the Church was born into was patriarchal. Patriarchy is being depreciated today by human goodwill, but Rome hangs on to it. Jesus' values of equality and justice now somewhat enlighten the parliaments of the world. Why does the Catholic Church lag behind?

Paul Keating used a word on a non-christian Asian government leader, calling him 'recalcitrant'. 'Not susceptible to control; refractory' says my dictionary. In my view an accurate description of the Church bureaucracy, patriarching its way through history.

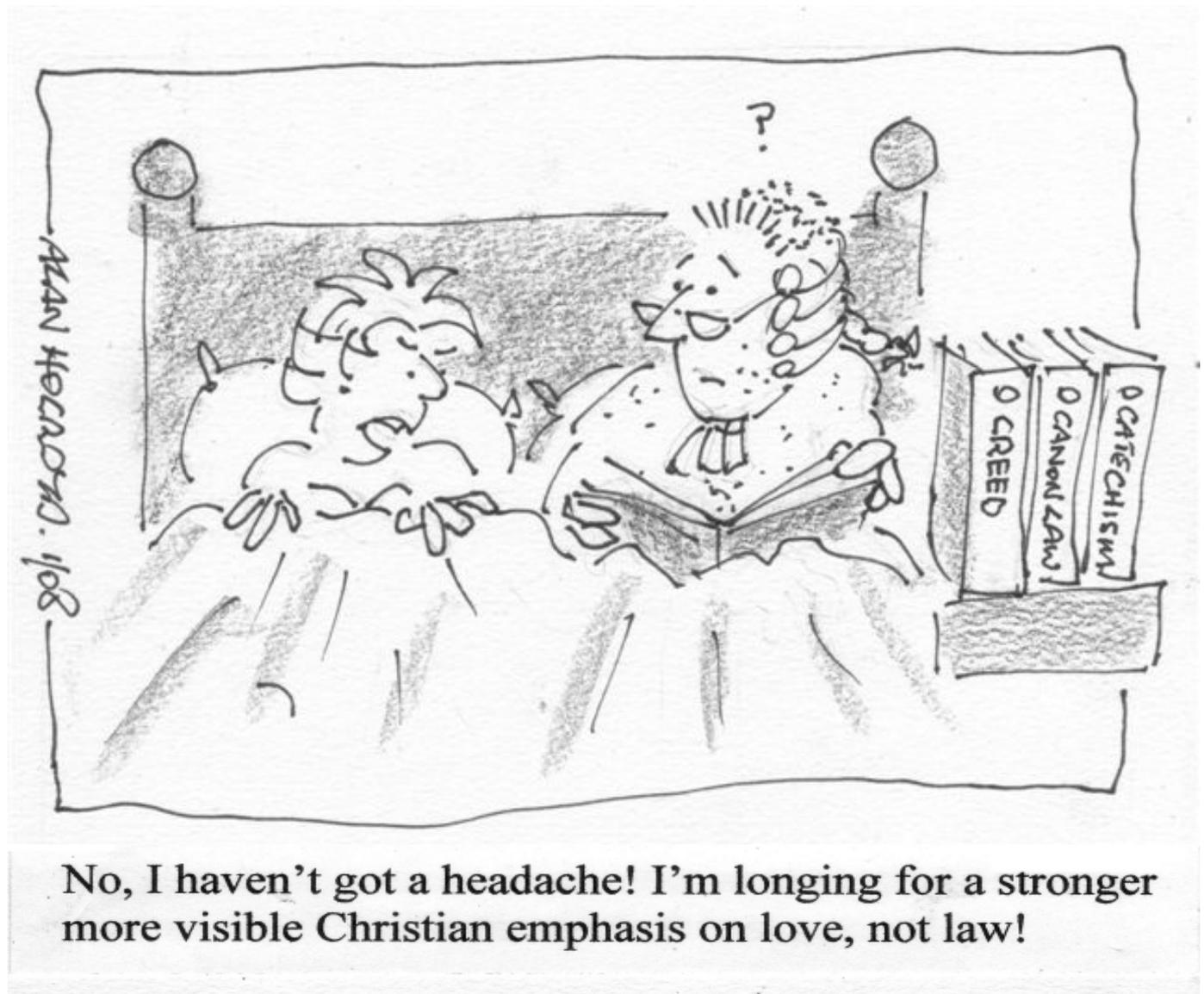
It has always been right, empowered by God over the people, indeed over the world. The ancient Greeks came closer to a (limited) science, democracy and expanded human rights system which disappeared under the Church's divine authority. Morality and, I suspect, doctrinal truth became 'a priori' pronouncements, true because Church authorities said they were rather than because of external evidence. Church authority was still doing this in my time when it used a newly developed 'Principle of Totality' to ban human organ transplants. It was declared 'a priori' (prior to evidence from experience being educed) that the organs in the individual human body were ordained by God only for the use of that individual. That argument is now accepted as nonsense; a recalcitrant authority finally gave way to reality, and charity now even persuades people to offer spare kidneys, corneas, etc. to save the lives and faculties of fellow human beings.

This recalcitrance of Church authorities still leads to the 'a priori' subjugation of women. The deprivation of equality and justice is enshrined in Church law and practice in the very name of God and the identity of Jesus as male. This is so patently wrong that it is surely a case of the blind leading the blind. The Catechism formulation of Original Sin and the horrific notion of God as a vindictive punisher is another example, in my view, of an 'a priori' pronouncement or, at least, a misinterpretation of the evidence. It is meant to

preserve the doctrine of Salvation in the Divine Jesus but makes God, and therefore Jesus, a monstrosity. Love is vitiated. While not denying the reality of sin and sinfulness it would surely be better to look at the evolution of morality in the overall evolution of human intelligence, emotion and culture to explain human waywardness. The Incarnation then becomes part of God's evolutionary plan to enrich us with love, show us the way. The Crucifixion is a typical piece of human nastiness to which Jesus responded with love, and not an edict from God that Jesus must die to vindicate the divine 'Justice'. It is time blood sacrifice was abandoned as belonging to primitive (early evolution of) religion and, as the prophets so often stated, NOT pleasing to God.

How can this legal and structured framework be undone, when the authority is casehardened recalcitrance? The Spirit of Jesus will enliven the ordinary faithful. The charity that is issuing in good works around the world will continue. Community will be unified more by communication and literacy within church members (and others of goodwill) rather than by dependence on directions from Rome. It will happen more completely if the bishops of the world listen to the people and become part with them; some already do. Australian Reforming Catholics at www.e-arc.org under ARC Survey menu has articulated a desire in Theme B, Proposal 2, 2005: 'People are longing for a stronger, more visible Christian emphasis on love, not law'. □

TED LAMBERT is a member of ARC Secretariat.



Every saint has a past and every sinner a future. *Oscar Wilde*

Going to church on Sunday no more makes you a Christian than sleeping in a garage makes you a car. *Garrison Keillor*

The Catholic Church in Norway

Tove Bull

Historically speaking, the Catholic Church in Norway is more or less as old as the kingdom itself; dating back to around 900 A.D. Christianisation was largely the work of Anglo-Saxon missionaries, though the official version gives the king Saint Olav the honour of completing the Christianisation of the country through his death in a battle in 1030. He is still referred to as the eternal king of Norway.

Unlike the situation in other northern European states, the Lutheran reformation was imposed on Norway from outside, by the Danish king (in 1537). Since then and until the 1840s Catholicism and Catholics were banned in Norway; there was in fact a death penalty on Norwegians converting to the Catholic faith. On the other hand, due to the fact that people were not at all prepared for the Lutheran reformation, Catholic habits, customs and traditions survived in remote parts for centuries. A small anecdote might illustrate this. In the last years of the 1980s I did linguistic fieldwork in a small bilingual village in Northern Norway, around 120 km from Tromsø where I live. There I came across a beautiful custom I had not heard about anywhere else. Late at night, on Christmas Eve, young boys and girls in the village meet one another outside in the darkness and start singing Christmas carols. They walk around and sing outside every house. This has gone on for as long as anyone can remember. To me the name of this solemn and beautiful tradition was indeed very puzzling. They call it singing 'daban'. I could not at all understand what 'daban' means, until I realised that it probably is developed from Stephanus or Stefan, the first martyr in the Christian Church. Since saints and martyrs have no place in the Lutheran Church, in some odd way this tradition in this small village must have some links back to pre-reformation times.

Most Norwegians are not at all aware of the fact that the Catholic Church has deep roots in Norway. To them, Catholicism is something foreign or even alien, something exotic. Quantitatively, the Church is definitely a minority church, and most Norwegian Catholics have a foreign background, as immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Thus, Norwegian-born Catholics are a minority within the minority church, a position from which it is very interesting to be an observer. I read in a serious newspaper that the Catholic bishop in Oslo stipulates the total number of Catholics in Norway to be around 180,000. (This of course includes a lot of unregistered people. There are many guest workers from Poland and Lithuania among whom the Catholic church does a lot of social work, and for whom they get no financial support.)

Norwegian society is increasingly a secular society. Anti-Catholicism that used to prevail is long ago outdated by indifference. Before this happened, religious sisters working in hospitals and schools did much to overcome negative sentiments. Nowadays, there are no Catholic hospitals left; every one of them is taken over by the state, and only a couple of Catholic schools are still operating.

The Church is formally divided into three church districts: the diocese of Oslo and the prelatures of Trondheim and Tromsø, with 32 parishes all in all. The bishop of Tromsø, where I live, died suddenly a year ago. He was originally German, but had lived in Northern Norway since the early 1960s and was a true naturalised Northern Norwegian. The new bishop has not yet been appointed, and it goes without saying that the ones of us who belong to the prelate are anxious and wonder what kind of bishop the Vatican eventually will appoint. The late Bishop Gerhard was a wonderful man. He was wise and tolerant. He used to say that we are far away from Rome, and that has both advantages and disadvantages, probably mostly advantages. He also used to say that it is only a question of time till the Catholic Church appoints female priests. He stopped saying that at a certain stage, and when I asked him why he said that it is going to take longer than he used to think.

With Bishop Gerhard as the local and regional shepherd of the Church I never felt any need of being a member of any reform movement (except for Australian Reforming Catholics while living in Australia). More and more, I realise how lucky we were, here in the northernmost Catholic diocese of the world, to have such a wonderful, non-condemning person as our bishop. Recently, however, I have started investigating relevant reform movement options in Norway. There exists, indeed, a branch of the German and Austrian *Wir sind Kirche*; the Norwegian name is 'Også vi er Kirken'. They have a web page and they send out newsletters. It is a small organisation, rather anonymous, seemingly centred in Oslo. The web page, however – though it is not updated – is rather interesting. The latest newsletter deals with liberation theology, the latest pontifical encyclical and discrimination against women in North American Roman Catholic dioceses among other things.

I suppose it would be correct to say that backlashes after Vatican II have also been experienced in Norway. However, as we are far away from Rome and from any Catholic centre, we are probably not that much affected by ups and downs in the large Catholic world, at least not by trends that do not last for long. We live our religious lives in a secular society; our Christian brothers and sisters are mostly Lutherans belonging to the Lutheran Church of Norway. The very varied groups belonging to the Catholic Church, geographically, ethnically, socially and culturally, add to this diversification both inside and outside the Church. This very varied and diversified reality is not easily changed – neither for the better nor for the worse – by any encyclical or any other pontifical dictum from Rome. □

TOVE BULL is a professor of Scandinavian linguistics, specialising in sociolinguistics, at the University of Tromsø, which is the world's northernmost comprehensive university. She is a convert to the Catholic Church – from way back in time.

Take it or Leave it - the Virgin Birth!

On the one hand but on the other

Pell says Virgin Birth no legend

Sydney's Cardinal George Pell has vehemently disagreed with the worldwide Anglican head, who has said Christians don't need to believe Christ was born of a virgin.

The Australian reports that the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams implied in a BBC interview that the story of the three wise men is a legend, as 'stars do not behave like that.' Furthermore, Archbishop Williams added it was unlikely Jesus was born in December and Christians can 'take or leave the virgin birth'. 'I believe it (the virgin birth) but that's not a pre-condition for being a Christian,' Archbishop Williams said. 'Matthew's Gospel says they are astrologers, wise men, priests from somewhere outside the Roman Empire, that's all we're really told. 'It is unlikely Jesus was born in December at all. Christmas was when it was because it fitted well with the winter festival,' he said.

Opposing the Anglican Archbishop's comments, Cardinal Pell said those who doubt or deny the virgin birth are departing from Christian teaching. 'What is important is that the Christ child was and is the son of God,' Pell said. 'For this belief and fact, the virgin birth is essential.'

South Sydney Anglican Bishop Robert Forsyth sided with the Archbishop of Canterbury saying Jesus' birthday was 'probably March as the Holy Land is very cold in December and if there were the shepherds in the field, it is likely to have been another time of year.' '(The virgin birth) is not the first thing you have to believe to become a Christian – the resurrection is that. If you believe God raised Jesus from the dead, you are open to the questions like the virgin birth.'

Source: 'Three wise men leading us astray'
(*The Australian*, 21/12/07)

The Wisdom of Michael Morwood

Extract: *From Sand to Solid Ground*
(Richmond, Vic: Spectrum Publications, 2007)

Q I find it incomprehensible that as a Catholic I am not supposed to question the teachings on the virgin conception or the 'virgin birth' when I know many of my Catholic friends no longer believe them literally and, more importantly, that my faith is not diminished by not believing them any more. They are not an essential part of the structure of my Catholic faith.

A You have plenty of company. The literalness of the virgin conception of Jesus is no longer accepted unquestioningly in mainstream Catholic theology. As far back as 1966 the Dutch bishops resisted Rome's insistence that the virgin conception as a literal fact be included in their catechism. They compromised by allowing an appendix to record the Vatican's teaching. Raymond Brown in his book *The Birth of the Messiah* devoted an appendix to the question of the virginal conception of Jesus and concluded 'that the scientifically controllable biblical evidence leaves the question of the historicity of the virginal conception unresolved. The resurvey of the evidence necessitated by the commentary leaves me even more convinced of that.'

This statement of Brown highlights the need to keep in mind the distinction between *belief* and *factual data*. Christian tradition considered the evidence available to it, considered that evidence in a theological framework, and made a judgment that Jesus was virginally conceived. Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, upholds that belief. But what he and others who believe in the virgin conception of Jesus do not have the right to do is to elevate the virgin conception to the status of indisputable fact when the research of Church scholars indicates the historicity of the event is 'unresolved'.

Beware of confusing religious values and beliefs

Letter to the Sydney Morning Herald (21.12.07)

Most of us grew up in a society built largely on Christian values. These are all good things, like tolerance, compassion and generosity. They are, however, Christian values, not Christian beliefs. The distinction is important.

Christianity, or any religion for that matter, tends to assume it has the values market cornered. They link belief in their god with the values we all see as worthwhile, but the link is unnecessary and ultimately dangerous. It leads people to believe that others cannot possess these qualities because they believe in a different god, or no god.

Many people like myself grew up in the church but now find the belief system it demands too much to swallow. The values we were taught remain a good and valid framework for our thoughts and behaviour. It is the god bit that ruins it.

So please don't think of people like me as being in a 'strange place' or devoid of goals other than prosperity. Leave that to Cardinal Pell and his like. We atheists live highly rewarding lives, full of love, wonder and excitement.

Allan Young, Roseville

Resurrecting The Feminine

Annie March

The following letter was written just before the author went on an eight-day silent retreat, to the priest who was to conduct the daily Masses. The name of the retreat-house has been changed at the request of the religious sisters involved.

Dear Peter

*Woman transformed
Woman clothed with the sun
Woman crowned with stars
Pray for us.*

One sunny morning last year we were sitting in the park drinking tea and talking about the role of women in the Church. I asked if you'd ever spoken with the Bethany sisters about their vision for the Mass; how they might like to see it celebrated in the chapel of the retreat-house they so lovingly tend. You said you hadn't, and were, I think, surprised by the question. I'd asked it lightly enough but, over the months since then, I've come to see that the issues it raises are profound; and that the questions within the question in fact shed light on much that troubles women in the Church at this time.

There's a Native American saying, *'to walk a mile in someone else's moccasins'*. I interpret this as meaning a willingness to enter with imagination and empathy into another person's experience. I've been wondering what kind of moccasins I can lend you, how I might enable you to feel from the inside what it is that is so distressing and alienating Catholic women.

This is where I've reached.

Just suppose that you, Peter, were to come knocking on the door of a church that I, Annie, am – heaven forbid – running along Catholic lines. The only difference is that the gender roles are reversed. You ask what a man can expect in this church; where you fit in. These are fragments of my answer.

During our services you are to sit and silently, passively receive whatever a woman – elected by other women – chooses to teach you. What she says, as God's mouthpiece, is couched in language that barely acknowledges the existence of a gender other than her own. The ritual and the liturgy explicitly and implicitly deny the existence of men, and refer to both human beings and God as female, as she/woman/daughter/mother/princess/Goddess/queen.

As a man, you may not proclaim the Gospel because only women have that right. You may act as lector for the lesser stories, though nearly all of them are about women, with men having only incidental and ancillary roles.

Violence against men by women is regularly implied and sanctioned by our teaching. Only women are empowered to consecrate the bread and the wine; to administer the holy oils; to anoint the sick and the dying; and to speak the sacramental

words. Men are expected to abide by the moral and sexual choices made by women on their behalf.

Our teachings define men by and large in terms of their sexuality, then demean them because of it.

Men find particular fulfilment in devotion to the Virgin John who, having immaculately begotten God's only Daughter, is now a model of manly piety, docility, humility and obedience.

Much of the guilt, shame and fear implicit in our teachings is blamed on men, but may only be remitted, absolved, redeemed by a woman.

Men's roles include laundering the vestments, doing the flowers, the vacuuming and the washing up, and scraping wax off the carpet. In perpetuity.

Peter, what effect do you think exposure to such an experience, infinitely repeated, would have not just on your spirituality but on your very sense of personhood?

Can you see that the wrongness might all but cancel out the beauty? Can you see why the very act of going to Mass might, for women, feel like colluding in intolerable oppression and injustice? When does respect become collusion?

In May, I'm doing a silent retreat at Bethany. You, I imagine, will be there most days to 'preside' at the Eucharist. In the lovely, intimate chapel, in the vulnerability and luminosity of retreat, both the wrongness and the beauty are intensified. The purpose of a retreat is to deepen our spirituality. Yet for women, who make up the majority of retreatants, this nourishing is only conditionally reflected in the Mass celebrated as a keystone of that experience. With one hand you as priest most truly and honourably speak of love, tenderness, mercy, justice and peace. With the other, you enact oppression, exclusion, violation, dominance and hierarchy, which are the roots of war.

Women are simultaneously given wings and put in chains.

Sometimes, I can't, won't stand in that incongruence, that dissonance. Sometimes, exile is the lesser pain. And instead of going to Mass I choose to sit with the she-oaks on the cliff, or walk on the beach. Here, communion is infinite. Here, female and male are integral to each other, co-partners in an intricate, inclusive, evolving, diverse, mysterious, staggering dance of interdependence.

As for transubstantiation, out here it happens as a matter of course. Rot becomes roses. Eggs become caterpillars become chrysalises become butterflies become eggs again.

Every morning the porridge I have for breakfast transmutes into yoga, music, work and words. My body spent seven years making babies or making milk to feed babies. How powerful, how sacred, how transubstantiative is that?

*Before the breaking
of bread and death,
the breaking of her
body in birth.
Before the offering
of the cup,
the offering of her breast.
Before his blood,
her blood.
And by her body and blood
alone, his body and blood
And whole human being.**

Peace be with you.

* From 'Before Jesus', in *Accidental Wisdom* by Alla Renée Bozarth (New York: Universe Inc, 2003). Reprinted by permission of the author.

ANNIE MARSH lives in Hobart. She is a writer, conservationist, feminist, radical Catholic, fledgling musician, linguist and gardener. She finds particular pleasure in being a WWOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) host, and loves compost heaps and whatever it is puts oak trees into acorns.

.....
This article was first published in the Ordination of Catholic Women newsletter (*OCW News*) in August 2004 and is reprinted with permission.

The Vatican fiddles while Rome burns

Closing the windows opened by Vatican II

INDULGENCES

To mark the 150th anniversary of Mary's appearance to St. Bernadette Soubirous near Lourdes, France, Pope Benedict XVI authorized a special Indulgence to encourage renewed holiness. Catholics can receive a plenary indulgence for taking part in any public or private devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes, said U.S. Cardinal J. Francis Stafford, head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican court dealing with indulgences and matters of conscience. The Vatican published the cardinal's statement announcing the indulgence and outlining the requirements for receiving it on 5 December. An Indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due for sins committed. A Plenary indulgence is the remission of all punishment. Cardinal Stafford said the indulgence can also be applied to the souls of the faithful in purgatory. (Source: *CNS News* Dec 5 2007)

It certainly brings back memories of the old Green Catechism!
Other examples of Indulgences can be found through a
Google search on the Internet

Editor

GOD'S NAME

Gender-neutral phrases used in the Liturgy have been ruled as invalid by the Vatican saying anyone baptised using any other term other than 'Our Father' will have to be re-baptised. *The Age* reports the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith said variations such as Redeemer, Creator and Sanctifier arise from 'feminist thology' and are used to avoid using the words Father and Son which are held to be chauvinistic. 'The traditional form of Father, Son and Holy Ghost have to be respected,' a statement read from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. (Source: *CathNews* March 3 2008)

SEX SCANDALS

The Vatican has called on Catholics to atone for the sex abuse scandals that have engulfed their church in recent years by taking part in what may be the largest global prayer initiative ever seen. Cardinal Cláudio Hummes told the Vatican's official daily, *L'Osservatore Romano*, that every diocese in the world should name a priest to work full-time on the arrangements for the 'perpetual adoration' of the eucharist. This would involve parishioners taking turns to keep a round-the-clock vigil in front of a consecrated host representing the body of Jesus ... The latest initiative is in line with the pope's frequently expressed view that the church should concentrate on spiritual methods and practices rather than becoming a charitable NGO. (Source: *The Guardian* Jan 7 2008)

One has to wonder what the victims of the sexual abuse scandals think about this initiative!

Editor

COMMUNION ON THE TONGUE

A battle is being fought along liturgical lines as Catholics are encouraged to receive Holy Communion kneeling and on the tongue. (*Vatican Newspaper* January 9, 2008)

LIMBO

Pope Benedict XVI has reversed centuries of traditional Roman Catholic teaching on limbo, approving a Vatican report saying there were 'serious' grounds to *hope* that children who die without being baptised can go to heaven.

At least this is one bit of good news (albeit somewhat tentative)
- although I understood that Vatican II had squashed the notion
40 years ago!

Editor

International Observations

Jim Taverne

It is not only in Australia that petitions are sent to its bishops. A large number of men and women religious in The Netherlands expressed their concerns about the sorry state of the Catholic Church in their country and proposed that the bishops should read the signs of the time. This letter has been translated into English by Rob Brian and is available from my address or ARC's website.

Nous Sommes Aussi Eglise (We Are Also The Church) in France wrote an open letter to their bishops expressing support for the booklet *Church and Ministry* from the Dutch Dominicans (see pages 6-7 in *arcvoice* 26.) The English translation of the letter by Christine Roussel is available from the website of the ARCC (Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church) in Philadelphia) through the link from ARC's website, or from my address. *Wir Sind Kirche* in Germany fully supports the discussion paper *Church and Ministry* (subtitle: *Towards a Church with a Future*) that the Dutch Dominicans distributed to all the Catholic parishes in The Netherlands. WSK calls its members and all German Catholics to take action by reading, distributing and discussing the booklet and sending comments to the Magister Carlos Azpiroz Costa of the Dominican Order in Rome with a copy to the Provincial of the Netherlands Dominicans.

The Dutch Dominicans were forbidden by Costa to hold seminars or workshops about their discussion paper to the distribution of which he had objected in the first place. Costa had the French Dominican Herve Legrand write a contra paper in which the Dutch are accused of schismatic actions and that a follow up of those actions by parishes would be considered as the establishing of sects.

In its regular newsletter *Wir Sind Kirche* objects strongly to the reintroduction of the Latin liturgy and has called upon the Catholic Parishes and the Bishops to follow the decrees of Vatican II and adhere to the practices emanating there from. *Wir Sind Kirche* denounce:

- The hushing up of sexual abuse
- The reintroduction of the Latin rites
- The decline in Ecumenism (but Samuel Kobia, Secretary General of the World Council of Churches expects full Eucharistic sharing by 2050).
- The discouragement of the laity
- Obligatory celibacy
- Destruction of parishes (closing down and 'amalgamation')
- Canon 1024: Only a baptised man can validly receive sacred ordination
- Disrespect for Human Rights
- Abuse of power against feminine theologians

Wir Sind Kirche, the world largest Catholic reform movement, uses a variety of means of communication: website, emails, press releases, open letters to the hierarchy and regular newsletters. WSK prefers demands over petitions because the priests and the bishops are the servants of the Church and the Pope is the servant of the servants (John Paul II).

The Mariënbuurgvereniging (see *arcvoice* 11 p.7) sent me a questionnaire about their brochure *Witnessing to the Spirit who lives in us*. This brochure was printed at the beginning of MV's activities 25 years ago. The questions are:

What do you still consider important/ positive? What is still essential?

What could be deleted? What is not topical anymore?

What is characteristic of the present time?

The Mariënbuurgvereniging stresses the responsibility and the right of all Catholics to take initiatives in respect of the follow through on the renewals of Vatican II...

In 1983 great disappointment was expressed about abundance of regressive policies and attitudes from Popes, Cardinals and Bishops.

So, the situation has not improved. (The sexual abuse scandals and lack of financial transparency were not mentioned in the brochure of 1983.)

ARC Secretariat welcomes two new members

Donella Johnston is a high school teacher and has been in the Catholic education system for almost 15 years. She teaches Humanities – Languages, English literature, Religious Education and Social Studies – with a special interest in contemporary and youth spiritualities and Educating for Environmental Sustainability.

Donella is married to Gary who is also high school teacher, teaching Science. They love going to see movies, bands and music festivals and have a cat and five gold fish. Donella is looking forward to working with the Australian Reforming Catholics (arc) Secretariat to serve and support the wider ARC community.

John Hiller was an academic for some 40 years. He is still active in research, principally in the area of membership of groups. He is looking at conflicted views of group membership.

John describes himself as one who left school with a religious knowledge that did not grow. It is only in retirement that he has reflected on what is 'expected' of a Catholic. He may shortly move from Western Australia to Europe, and we expect that his contribution to the ARC Secretariat will become that of 'Foreign Correspondent'. He may also contribute some book reviews.

This article first appeared in *Women-Church Journal, No. 11*, Spring 1992
 As Easter 2008 approaches, It is a reprinted as a reminder of how some things have changed for the better
 – but also as a warning for all those who would like to put the genie back in the bottle
 and revert to the pre-Vatican II church!

For Us Men and For Our Salvation

Margaret Knowlden

Genuine Parish Bulletin Notices – 1992:

No. 1: MORE ALTAR SERVERS WANTED - ANYONE INTERESTED, PLEASE APPLY

Silly me, and silly any girl who felt a flutter of excitement that at last the barriers were being dropped from this exclusive all-boys club. Of course, everyone knows that 'anyone' means 'boys only'.

No. 2: LADIES WANTED TO CLEAN THE CHURCH

In the real world, it is claimed, women do 70% of the chores around the home. In Mother Church (exempt as She is from Legislation) it is 100% jobs for the girls. At least the hierarchy recognise that the chaps lack the dedication, ability, muscle-power and humility for this important role.

No. 3: 12 MEN'S FEET WANTED FOR HOLY THURSDAY

In this parish's dim distant past, a woman once slipped through the net – there were some complaints so it has never happened again.

And so this year it came to Pass(over) and the few faithful straggled in for Mass – empty pews bearing witness to the numbers of the absent unfaithful as 'standing-room-only' crowds of yesteryear are perhaps saying with their feet that they will no longer be drawn by patriarchal rituals and platitudinous homilies. 'Roamin' Catholics' seek greener pastures in more enlightened, undiscriminatory parishes where the footwashing ceremony takes on a whole new dimension of meaning as family groups or parish representatives of both sexes reaffirm their commitment to the community.

In the parish in question, at the appointed hour, the Bishop, in gold-trimmed vestments and mitre, crook in hand, shepherded forth his frocked flock – priest, elderly acolytes, altar boys – for this highly symbolic, annual re-enactment of a simple Jewish family feast. Right on cue, those eleven men and one boy who had answered the Bulletin's call rose from the congregation and seated themselves for His Lordship's ministrations – twelve male feet exposed to view: well scrubbed, nails in-offensively unpolished.

In a homely gesture, Christ's vicar rolled up his sleeves and donned an apron for the humble task ahead. For this he was accompanied by an acolyte bearing on outstretched arms – with all the aplomb of an actor in a *Dri-Glo* commercial – a pile of pale yellow, neatly folded, bath-size towels. These were solemnly passed out to each of the 'apostles' for use after a perfunctory sprinkling of their nether parts and then collected for laundering – by whom? (*refer No. 2 above*).

Why twelve towels? I asked myself. In a parish where we are admonished to all drink from the same communion cup, is

there such a risk of cross infection between male feet that one towel would not have served for all? *And why bath-sized*, when a hand (foot) towel would have done just as well? Why not a pocket-handkerchief, a tissue, a rag or even the hem of the aforesaid apron? Were the feet so large – or was it to do with the size of their owners' egos and need for pampering'!

In a parish where it is claimed that there is no money for an inclusive-language missal or hymn books – in a world where so many lack even the basic necessities of life – wherein lies the justice (or theology) for such extravagance? As the homeless shiver damply under newspaper on park benches, it would be cold comfort if they knew that the wherewithal to partially relieve their discomfort is stored away in a cathedral vault, ready for once-a-year service for the greater glory of man*kind*.

A richly symbolic ceremony, indeed – for men. But how do the symbols work for women? Given our conspicuous exclusion from the *Sacred*, let's at least fantasise on the *Profane*.

The towels, as I said, were not 'blue for a boy' or even (Heaven forbid!) 'pink for a girl'. They were yellow. Some might see this as a symbolic warning, like the flag of a plague ship – to be approached at one's peril! I try, however, to remain optimistic and see yellow as sun-coloured, a symbol of light, of a new dawn rising, the birth of a new era. Perhaps our dreams for equal opportunities and justice for all in the Church will one day come true – at which time the choice of a safe, inoffensive, unisex nursery colour-scheme will prove to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. □

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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Send to ARC c/- Jim Taverne

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