



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

June 2008

Issue No. 28

Editorial

... I believe that the Catholic Church is in a prison. It was not evil people who put it in this prison. No, it constructed the prison for itself, locked itself in and threw away the key. That prison is the prison of not being able to be wrong. (Bishop Geoffrey Robinson *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* p.235)

Think of the way leadership in the Church handled the issue of contraception. Think of how it handles the issues of celibacy, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, women priests, the selection of bishops. Think of how it mishandled the sexual abuse crisis. Examine the way our best theologians are silenced. Look at how Roman authority constantly legislates about the way Catholics may or may not participate in the Eucharist. Look at the clericalism of the Church and its patriarchal attitude towards women. Think of Bishops wanting to use Communion as a political weapon. (Michael Morwood: *From Sand to Solid Ground* p.118)

Added to these statements are recent communications from The Vatican. We have: the silencing of prophetic priests and bishops (Geoffrey Robinson being the latest); threats of excommunication for any bishop performing an ordination ceremony and for the woman candidate involved; re-affirmation of *Humanae Vitae* (as if everyone took notice the first time!); revival of indulgences; warnings that Baptism is not valid when the celebrant uses a popular new formula; instructions on new postures and gestures at Mass (Stand, Sit, Bow – like a canine obedience school!). Then there are the declining number of priests, and recruitments (poaching) from developing countries; combining or closing of parishes; falling Mass attendance; and acute embarrassment amongst some Catholics at the shenanigans surrounding World Youth Day. It is not an inspiring track record!

Catholics are crying out for change to bring the church into the 21st century (not back to pre-Vatican II days) and Australian Reforming Catholics is just one of many groups and individuals who are trying to make this happen. In *arcvoice* we aim to show that there are other ways of being Church. A follow-up (page 3) to John Buggy's address to the Catenians (*arcvoice* No. 27) makes one wonder how many others in the Catholic population are equally 'confused, sometimes disheartened and unfulfilled spiritually'.

A subscription renewal form is enclosed. If for some reason you have thought of not renewing your membership, we ask if you would please reconsider. On the other hand, if you are reading this on the website or as a complimentary free copy, we urge you to become a financial member of ARC. And please come to our one-day conference in September. Support is vital to the continuation of our cause – we need your articles and letters to let us know what really matters to you!

Margaret Knowlden
Editor



A date for your Diary

**A one-day Conference and AGM
Towards a New Creed for a New Age**

Keynote speaker:

John Neill Collins PhD

(specialist in the nature of early christian community and the processes of ministry and the application of ministry to contemporary Catholic and Ecumenical theology)

Saturday 13 September 2008

Venue: The Dougherty Centre
Chatswood
from 8 a.m Registration
8.30 a.m. Starting time
Lunch
2 pm Annual General Meeting
4.30 pm Closing Liturgy

Refreshments and lunch provided
Cost: \$40 per person
concessions: \$30

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Letters

Referring to John Buggy's editorial in issue 27 of *arcvoice*, I couldn't help but think, where is our church going? I wrote a protest letter to *The Daily Telegraph* re the \$7.6 million our Government (State and Federal) is giving to the Catholic Church for World Youth Day! I stated the money would be better spent on the homeless or dental care for aged pensioners. My letter wasn't published. Age 75, I feel like giving away my Catholicity, but for what? Buddhism? I really believe Jesus is the Son of God, who came to show us how to live with each other. I don't believe in redemption by his death on the cross, but do believe in his resurrection. I'm not even sure he wanted the Catholic Church to be established. As it is at present, it is at odds with the man/God Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head. I was a nun for 24 years, but I'm not 'beating the drum' as a pay-back for those years. Keep up the good work.

*Clarice Mary Cummins
Belmore, NSW*

I wish to express my appreciation of the quality of the content in March 2008 of *arcvoice*, especially the editorial by John Buggy relating to World Youth Day of which I and many others have doubts on what, if anything, it will achieve. It is all at the behest of Pell, and the politicians dare not do anything but give support, despite the massive cost and inconvenience.

The comments of the Catenian Association are on the ball, as are many others. It is a shame the views expressed in *arcvoice* do not come to the attention of those many who are disenchanted with the male-dominated Church which has no intention of changing.

The views of the Pope in the USA on the problems over many years in Boston and other areas intrigue me as money has been paid to quieten those affected while the priests responsible, no doubt, continue to minister.

I appreciate the content and views expressed so clearly. How easy it is to be angry when there is no democratic way a forum can be called to involve the hierarchy in meaningful debate to discuss and solve the many unresolved festering issues which are leading to a Church which will have no pastors or parishioners. The lead of the Anglicans in Perth over twenty years ago to ordain women priests must have affected the Jensens here and has no doubt led to the recent appointment of a lady Bishop.

I thank you very much for your continued excellence on behalf of those of us who remain.

*Rod McDonald
Killarney Heights, NSW*

Reading *From Sand to Solid Ground* by Michael Morwood gave me a bit of a boost. Here is a writer who is clearing up many of the worries I have had about God – a God who is three-in-one (who made it so complicated?). I can understand Jesus was a lovely man and a great communicator, a Jew (he never changed) who gave us many examples of how to lead a good and loving life. A lot of us try hard to follow at least some of his teachings. But sadly a lot of us do not give it a go. I find it hard to tune into what happened to him after his crucifixion.

Then along came the storytellers who started the Christian church and put God out of reach of the ordinary people unless they abided by the rules and regulations of the Popes and their wise men. Michael Morwood makes a lot of the 'Faraway God' or the God you can't get to unless you have passed your test and have a valid licence. I have decided to think that there might be a friend who will look after me when the lights go out.

It is hard to believe that the Catholic Church gets away with the side-lining of women – half the population of the world don't sit in on the making of rules and the general running of things (I thought there were no Glass Ceilings in the Vatican!). Women have always been presented as second to men, not to be trusted in church affairs. Mary is depicted as neither male nor female, a person of sorrow. My goodness! She was the mother of Jesus, but she was a woman.

This is how Michael Morwood's book moved me and cleared my thoughts a little as to what is happening in the church today. Why not encourage people to think about God – or the Divine or whatever you choose – as a friend always with us, and have a talk to him whenever you feel like it. Maybe if we were more loving to the family next door when our time comes we may just meet a nice guy and his name could be you-know-who!

*Joe Baillie
North Turramurra, NSW*

From Sand to Solid Ground by Michael Morwood is a most challenging book and is a must for those seeking spiritual truths. Not being a Catholic and currently worshipping in a non-orthodox church I had already reached agreement on many of the issues raised in the book.

*Roy Haigh
North Turramurra, NSW*

The members of ARC Secretariat send best wishes to Barbara Campbell (the founder of Australian Reforming Catholics). We hope that she will make a speedy recovery following her recent operation and installation of a PaceMaker. Barbara has recently moved to live in Lithgow.

Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff

Noel Carrig

The Catenian Association is celebrating its centenary this year. It was founded in England to combat rabid anti-Catholicism and is very strong in the UK. In Australia there is reasonable membership, but the association is relatively unknown to the general Catholic community and virtually unknown to those in the broader community. Catenians is – in Australia – a ‘club’ of like-minded (and hopefully broad-minded) Catholic men. It is comprised of groups referred to as Circles and each Circle tends to be introspective. Catenians is – like the Catholic Church itself – suffering from a rapidly aging core group and is looking for a format which can take it into the future in some meaningful way. Pittwater Circle – of which I am a member – asked John Buggy to come and address us as part of an ongoing endeavour of attempting to find out ‘what is going on out there’ and not to be constrained, necessarily, by what The Church/The Pope or The Cardinal/Bishop/Priest says is so. Our members, whilst proudly Catholic, tend not to be Bible bashers and it is fair to say they ‘like to think NOT TO BE THUNKED!!!!’

I think the Catenian average age is now 60+ and, as such, many of us have carried along the baggage of our pre-Vatican Council education/indoctrination and in many cases have never stopped to question contradictory statements and/or myths and legends. I guess we were too busy or too something to sort the ‘wheat from the chaff’. We just ate the bread and trusted the bakers. The vast majority of Catenian members would attend Mass weekly, but many of their children would not and this is an oft-spoken concern.

I wondered prior to John Buggy’s talk:

- how some Catenians would take John Buggy’s views, and indeed if some might ‘take to’ John Buggy (as we would have said in the 50s before American slang and phrases supplanted our old Aussie ones)?
- what response John would get when jousting at some long-standing truths?

In fact, a diverse mixture of responses was observed:

- Some politely sat back and wished this heretic well and hoped John might – before his death – recant such heresies and die a ‘good Catholic’ and be prepared for his very long stretch in Purgatory as he would no doubt get from our avenging/judging/condemning judge – oops! – I mean God.
- Others were lost; not really contemplating before that not everybody accepted virgin birth, bread and wine into body and blood of Christ literally etc.

- Still others stopped, gulped and exclaimed ‘%^&* I never thought about it before but now I do. It ain’t necessarily so!!!’
- Some were passionate when quoting and questioning the terrible things imposed/IMPLIED by THE CHURCH (well actually by narrow-minded control freaks within it) upon hapless followers who, for example, lost children before baptism and for forty years suffered severe mental and spiritual anguish because they were told their baby could never go to heaven; or the stories about physical abuse to some members during school years; and especially the recent exposés of sexual abuse and the church’s initial course of action to hide, deny, divert and/or whatever to just make it disappear, and even blame or discredit the victims.

Our members are very rarely bigoted and more often than not have children and grandchildren who have not adopted their faith or formal practice thereof. John’s very well delivered talk opened their minds. But I still feel many of the ‘open minded’ Catholics – not just Catenians – are looking for solutions to get back to ‘the good old days’ and find it too painful or incomprehensible that in the future there might be far fewer priests, even if we allow married ones, as this has not been the panacea as experienced in other Christian Faiths. Many of our members don’t seem to be against women *per se*, but have always thought that there is some Divine law (New York Yacht Club Type Rule) handed down from Jesus himself which says its OK to let the women sleep inside, but don’t ever, ever, ever ordain them as priests.

In short, Catenians – I believe – are a cross-section of the general older Catholic population: confused, sometimes disheartened and unfulfilled spiritually, but worried that too much time and effort has gone into where they/we are now and, as there is too little guidance as to how to turn things around, there is unlikely to be a spontaneous counter-reactionary renaissance from this group. Thus I fear we are more a representation of ‘gee I wish we had the good old days of the RC Church again’ where too much religious guidance was hardly enough, but without all the bad things we have recently heard happened under that type of regime.

John Buggy’s talk to the Catenians provoked discussion and thought. It showed clearly that intelligent demystification of the church’s practices captures, momentarily, the hearts and minds of most. However, it will take many such thought-provoking moments and a clearer ‘way forward’ and true leadership – perhaps from John Buggy and ARC – to really see the potential need and desire for change materialise into some meaningful change in the church proper. □

Youth spirituality and World Youth Day 2008

Donella Johnston

In the lead-up to World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney in July, I have been doing some reading about youth spirituality. Last year I came across two sources in particular that have informed my thinking in this area. These are: *The spirit of generation Y: Young people's spirituality in a changing Australia* (2007) by Mason, Singleton and Webber, and David Tacey's *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of a contemporary spirituality* (2003).

So what does youth spirituality look like and what are young people looking for in their search for spirituality? Mason, Singleton & Webber report in *The spirit of generation Y: Young people's spirituality in a changing Australia* (2007) that 'there is a strong drift away from Christianity among Generation Y' (p.302); 'Just over half of Generation Y said they believed in God (51%); 17% said they didn't believe, and 32% were unsure.' (p.301). 'Almost half of Australian young people between the ages of 13 and 24 do not belong to or identify with any religion or denominations' (p.80). Gender makes little difference in religiosity in Generation Y (p.154). This has important implications for churches because in previous generations women tended to be more inclined than men to attend services, to enrol their children in sacramental programs and religious schools and promote religious practices in the home. The report indicates that 'overwhelmingly it is practising parents who are enthusiastic about their faith that influences young people towards a more committed level of Christian spirituality'. No effect of attendance at church schools was detectable, except in the case of 'Other Christian' schools. However, a majority of those who believe in God and attend church schools say that religious education at school is helpful/very helpful in strengthening their faith.' (p.302). *The Spirit of Generation Y* project and many other studies have established beyond any doubt that family support for traditional spirituality is available to only a very small minority of young people (p.165).

There are a number of reasons why young people are turning away from traditional religion. As indicated above, if the parents of Gen Y (Gen X and Baby Boomers) aren't active in their faith it is highly unlikely that their children will be so. Another reason is that young people find Church teaching problematic. For example, 'Australian young people are reluctant to declare that only one religion is true – only

13% of Generation Y make such a claim' (Mason et al, 2007, p.302). Issues with Church teaching, especially moral teaching, is listed as one of the reasons why young people are no longer active in their faith. Young people have concerns about teachings on homosexuality. Other moral teachings that were disliked include the church's attitude towards women especially the ordination of women, rules about sex before marriage and the prohibition of abortion. Literal interpretations of the bible were also a problem (p.80). Generation Y distrust organisations and are not 'joiners' (p.351), their outlook is experience-centred (p.345) and 'they placed a high value on close relationships with friends and family' (p.304).

According to 1998 figures, 97% of young Catholics have abandoned practising their faith within 12 months of leaving school. 94% of graduates from Catholic secondary schools had defected from established faith practices within 12 months (Tacey, 1998, p.13). If these figures don't alarm those working in religious education, they should. One should also keep in mind that these figures are now 10 years old. Tacey writes that 'Youth culture today has an instinctive fear of single answers, absolute dogmas, and exclusive religious programs' (1998, p.16) and yet, he claims, 'young adults want spirituality back on the public agenda' (2003, p.74). If the Church does not respond to this challenge, particularly in light of the millions being spent in Australia on World Youth Day 2008, it would appear to have a pertinacious death wish.

If the Christian churches are alarmed at declining numbers perhaps it is time that they start listening to (and acting upon) what the young are saying to them. Tacey is convinced that Christianity has much to offer, but to survive it needs to 'shift from moralism to mysticism' (2003, p.193). He says 'if religion wants to play a role in the future, it will have to start listening to the world' (p.195). If, Tacey argues, Christianity starts to listen to the spirit of the times and revitalise and make available the richness of its monastic and mystic traditions it might become relevant again. Tacey declares that young people have a 'spiritual hunger' (1998, p.13) that Western religion in its current form is not satisfying. Tacey writes that 'Youth spirituality is more interested in listening to the inward conscience than in obeying the external dictates of religious authority' (2003, p.80). Tacey suggests that young people should be reminded that the

mystical or 'peak' experiences that many say they have felt in nature have also been felt by mystics, saints and visionaries in religious traditions; 'if Western religion wants to renew itself it would do well to help people embark on interiority and internal exploration' (2003, p.83).

Young people are looking for an integrated, holistic spirituality. They want a spirituality that is consistent with and complements other aspects of their life. They aren't prepared to take on some of the cognitive dissonance that traditional religious teaching might impose on them. David Tacey writes that young people are looking for 'a new holistic ethic'. They want a spirituality that is both personal and social (1998, p.12). Tacey suggests that youth spirituality is less concerned about perfection than it is about wholeness and integration (2003, p.79). Sound spiritual education 'seeks to educate the whole person' (Tacey, 2003, p.104).

Tacey believes that the word 'spirituality' is 'code-language for: "refuse to become a victim of materialism", or perhaps, "I will not succumb to consumerism"' (1998, p.14). It is an attempt by youth culture to 'support itself against the evil and encroaching tide of consumerism and destructive materialism' (p.14), 'a survival mechanism'. Tacey writes that 'youth culture's quest is for a mystical and creation-centred theology, and this clashes with Western religion's fall-and-redemption theology' (2003, p.84). Young people see the world as good and that creation is graced by the presence of the divine, and therefore do not recognise the urgency in Christianity's need for a saviour or redeemer. Tacey sees a middle path; evil does exist in the world but youth is also right in that we do need to be able to see divinity in creation, that is, the world is charged with the grandeur of God. Both sides can learn from each other.

Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007) report on young people's 'desire for connection and community' (p.339). Being part of a community is an antidote to individualism and isolation. David Tacey writes 'individualism leads to isolation and loneliness because it encourages us to think of ourselves as self-sufficient and self-enclosed, whereas we are deeply communal creatures who need the support and communality of others' (2003, p.41). Since 'spirituality is best conveyed, and communicated, by word of mouth' (Tacey, 1998, p.19) this might suggest that a school community or parish youth group would be an ideal place to convey some of the fundamental themes of this spirituality. In other words, young people witnessing to other young people about their faith is one of the most powerful ways of turning young people onto religion. A World Youth Day experience could be a very effective way of achieving this outcome.

David Tacey is convinced that young people are looking for mystery and mysticism. He says, "The only true way that religion can claw back authority and meaning is not to shed its mystery, but to show a new way into its mystery" (Tacey, 1998, p.16). He believes people actually want 'angels, rituals and mysteries' (1998, p.15). Tacey (1998) suggests that Christianity needs to renew its mystical traditions. Churches need to present a 'renewed emphasis on mystery and sacramentalism' (p.16). He suggests that some of the fundamentals of monastic life could be introduced in Religious Education programs and calls for a recovery of contemplative tradition, and a 'resacralisation'. David Tacey is also convinced that people are looking for ritual (2003, p.193) and that organised religion, generally speaking, can do ritual very well. Tacey suggests that churches could become centres of existential spirituality; people want to rediscover the God within.

For World Youth Day 2008 not to end up a colossal waste of time and money, the Catholic Church needs to respond to the spiritual needs of young people and re-image how it does church. It needs to look at what its church communities currently offer young people and listen with the ear of its heart to what young people are asking of it. The Church already has a lot of the things young people are looking for: a wonderful rich tradition of mysticism, ancient rituals, eco-theology, contemplative prayer, life in community. Its challenge is to dust off some of these things and present them in a way that is appealing to the young. While the Church is renewing some pre-Vatican Council II practices one wonders the extent to which young people have been consulted. How many young people born after the Second Vatican Council would even know what the Tridentine Rite or Plenary Indulgences or Eucharistic Adoration were?

References

- Mason, M., Singleton, A. & Webber, R. (2007). *The spirit of generation Y: Young people's spirituality in a changing Australia*. Mulgrave: John Garratt.
- Tacey, D. (2003). *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of a contemporary spirituality*. Sydney: HarperCollins.

Other sources

- Crawford, M. & Rossiter, G. (1995) 'Religious education and youth spirituality' *PACE*, 25, 15-21.
- Tacey, D. (1998) 'Youth spirituality and old religion: Open, urgent and political' *Conference*, 15 (2), 11-20.

The Boy-Priests of China

Kevin Baker

The Religious Affairs Bureau of China recently released the statistics for religions in China in 2006. Of the 1.4 billion people in this officially-atheist country, at least 300 million were recorded as believers. I say 'at least', because this is an official and conservative figure. Most of the believers are Muslim, concentrated in the far western provinces. The rest are Buddhist, Taoist, Christian and others. There are officially in excess of 40 million Catholics.

These Catholics belong to the officially-supported Patriotic Catholic Church and not the so-called 'Underground' Catholic Church that adheres to Rome, but this distinction should not be overestimated. If the Communist government in Beijing was to change its policies overnight, and allow local Catholics to enter into communion with Rome, then almost all would certainly do so. They can be counted as unofficial Roman Catholics – 'closet Catholics', but only because they have to be.

Consider the implications of this statistic of 40 million for a moment. We can assume that most of these Catholics would be practising, because to confess your faith is a brave act in a society where your confession has consequences in terms of limited promotion in your work unit, no chance of your family going to university and inferior-standard housing, so you would not say you were Catholic unless it meant a lot to you and you attended services whenever it was possible.

In the United States, using round figures, there are around 50 million Catholics, but the estimate is that only 20% are committed and practising – which equals 10 million practising Catholics. In Western Europe, there are 200 million Catholics, but the estimate of the proportion practising is even less – around 10%, or 20 million practising.

This means that there are many more practising Catholics in China than there are in the United States and Western Europe combined. The Church of the 21st century will no longer be the Church of the West.

The Church in China has a huge problem in ministering to its widespread and numerous flock. A reasonable proportion of people to pastor would be 500 to 1, but this means that the Chinese Church would need no less than 80,000 priests. Even a proportion of 1000 to 1 would require 40,000 priests to minister to their sacramental needs. Because the government strictly controls the number of places able to be offered in Chinese seminaries, there are barely 2000 seminary places throughout the country, even though there are six or seven applicants, sometimes as many as fifteen, for every vacancy in a seminary intake. On the basis of

seminary places, and seven year training, the Chinese Church can turn out only around 300 priests each year, when it needs 3,000 to cope with the mighty demand.

What can be done?

Look sideways for a moment at the Chinese education system. Students leave middle school at 14 or 15. Some – the favoured few with contacts and impeccable political connections as well as comparatively wealthy parents – go on to university ('Da Xue', or 'Big School') where they can emerge seven years later with a degree. Most middle school graduates enter the workforce, probably to an allocated place at their parents' work unit.

Only a minority of Catholic graduates who aspire to the priesthood can be found places at a seminary. Many bishops are keen to meet the needs of the others, and their call to vocation. They can offer them a couple of years of part-time study, followed by a 'mentoring' process – assigning the aspirant to a parish and a parish priest who will educate the aspirant 'on the job', as it were.

Now, what status can be granted these aspirants in a culture where everyone must have an assigned place? This is an important question. If the aspirants are to be employees, then they must be paid minimum wages etc, which would be beyond the means of Chinese parish priests, caught between a flock kept poor because of their beliefs and a government determined to make it difficult for the flock to grow and raise funds. It would be illegal for the church to seek to raise support or funds outside the country – under laws struck to ensure that never again would foreign missionaries have influence within China.

The option is to make the aspirants ordained ministers, as then they would fit into an official niche of bureaucratic society, and they would not need to be paid as employees, although the Church would instead guarantee their livelihood.

The result of this practice which is virtually forced upon the Chinese Church, especially in rural areas, is that there are many priests who were ordained when they were aspirants aged eighteen, and some as young as seventeen or sixteen. These young men are called the 'Boy-priests' by local Catholics.

Their existence is not considered too unusual for in Asian cultures, particularly in Buddhist practice, monks and ministers may be very young. Of course, ordinary believers do not grant them a high status, although they carry out sacramental duties while their older priest-mentor continues their practical instruction in the role and practices of ministry.

The existence of these boy-priests is also not unlike the medieval practice in Europe, when priests were ordained at a very young age (although the practice was ended by the reforms set in train by the Council of Trent). The Canon Law of the Church now sets 22 as the minimum age for ordination to the priesthood.

So, will parishioners of the Church of the future attend Mass said by a teenage priest? Hopefully not, but who can say what future cultural practices may be in a worldwide Church with a majority of adherents from non-Western societies.

Dr KEVIN BAKER has been a university lecturer in China over much of the past fourteen years. He is the author of *Wise Men from the East – a History of the Orthodox Church in China*.

Prayer for Vocations

Shepherding God,
You show us the way that leads to everlasting life.
Through Baptism, you have called us to proclaim the
Good News.

Bless and strengthen those who have made a
commitment to service in the Church.
Guide and give wisdom to those discerning their
vocation.

Enrich our Church with dedicated married and single
people, with deacons, priests and religious.

Filled with joy and your Holy spirit, may we follow
Jesus, our Good Shepherd, now and always.

Amen

A backward step towards Ecumenism

Ann Gilroy

Let me tell you a story... My mum and dad, both Catholic, live in a country area in New Zealand which has a small town as the centre. Now, as has happened in lots of country areas, the population has declined so that church-going people are few and mostly in their older years. In Mum and Dad's area there is a handful of regulars at each of the three churches – Catholics, Anglicans and combined Methodist Presbyterians. And none of the churches has a full-time priest or minister.

So gradually they started informally to pool their resources: The Anglican minister, who is also a small-holding farmer, invited everyone to a regular bible study group; they helped out at each other's church working bees; they combined for a Christmas service; and had a common prayer chain to pray for the sick, etc. Then came the time for the Catholic church to hold its centenary and, in solidarity, all the church people rolled up their sleeves to help in the preparations.

On the big day the Bishop arrived to preside at Mass and all those who had helped came along to take part – as singers in the choir, as caterers and as representative of their own Christian tradition. It was a big day for the district!

All went well until it came time for communion. The line formed in front of the Bishop and in the line was the Methodist leader who presented herself to the bishop for communion. 'I'm sorry,' said the Bishop, 'this communion is only for Catholics – but let me give you a blessing'. There was a community gasp! Maybe every other person on the line received communion from the Bishop because he didn't recognise them as Catholic or not – but that one refusal of a

good friend of the church was unforgivable as far as the locals were concerned.

My Dad was truly infuriated at the lack of hospitality, of ingratitude, and of the disregard for the local people that he thought the Bishop's action indicated. 'What kind of Jesus Christ and God does the Bishop believe in? Why did he use his authority to override the local people? Why use his authority to override the Methodist person's conscience?' he kept asking. Whatever else, the Bishop certainly provoked theological arguments that continued for months.

Remember, these country people had been reading, sharing and praying scripture together for several years before this incident, so that they had thought a lot about and articulated their experience and growing insight into the spirit of Jesus, and of the God of Jesus, in that time. This incident, however, brought them face-to-face with their disempowerment by the clerical power in the Church which overrode their power as people of God and give them no standing in front of ordained power. It let them do everything to prepare for the centenary except invite the believing community to receive communion. Their apology to the Methodist leader could not make up for the insult given by the Bishop.

Now that's from my Dad and Mum's perspective. What might it have been like from the Bishop's perspective? What kind of climate was he operating in? The Bishop may have thought he was doing right by keeping the rules of the Church – namely that only Catholics in the state of grace can receive Catholic communion because of the Catholic belief in the real presence in the consecrated bread and wine.

If that was his concern, might he not at least have considered the pastoral situation where Christians were coming to Catholic Eucharist because they don't have access to communion in their own churches? At such an ecumenical gathering, might he not have consulted the locals beforehand as to the best way forward?

Or the Bishop may have been worried about his own good standing in the hierarchy of the church. For example, if he had given communion to the Methodist leader, then some righteous Catholic might have written to the Holy Father in Rome to complain about the Bishop's lack of orthodoxy. Then the Bishop would have received a letter from Rome questioning his judgement and recommending that in future he not give scandal to those in his care. So the Bishop may have been feeling the burden of the constant surveillance and disapproving frown of parishioners and hierarchy which caused him to act circumspectly and 'by the book', but which wrings the life out of his leadership. Think of what it must be like to live in that kind of climate – he becomes a puppet to the invisible puppeteers. On the day of the centenary he may have felt that the consequences to him were not worth the risk of giving the Methodist leader communion.

Whatever the Bishop's motivation, his actions portrayed a rigid church. A church lacking in hospitality, of not hesitating to polarise believers for the sake of a rule – even of a church lacking the spirit of Jesus. For how might we interpret the story of Jesus for example in Matthew and Mark's gospel accounts, when Jesus feeds the thousands – Jews like himself and gentiles as well – to show that God's

vision is for all people? How does authority in the Church, as practiced by the bishop, justify ignoring the experience and wisdom of the people of God in decision-making in their local Church? Why would he even want to disregard the people? What are the drives, conscious and unconscious, that allow the clerical hierarchy to think that they can learn nothing about God from the people of God?

Now it seems to me and to Geoffrey Robinson, that neither the people alone – as my Dad and Mum's community, or the clerical leadership as the Bishop in the story – can on their own have the whole understanding of God's vision for the world. It seems to me that we are church so that together – as people of God and leadership – we grow more and more into an understanding of and in relationship with God. This means that Bishop characters need to listen deeply to the people of God and the insights they have into God's will – just as they expect the people of God to listen to and to obey them.

What if we rewind the story?

On the day of the centenary celebrations the locals welcomed the Bishop and introduced him to all those who had helped prepare for the centenary celebrations and who now wanted to participate in Eucharist together. The Bishop was humbled by the group's attitude: 'Your faithfulness to the spirit of Jesus in this country area where we as leaders have not been able to assist you much, inspires me! Thank you so much!' And when it came time for communion the line formed beginning with the Methodist leader.

The Bishop said – 'Body of Christ, faithful one.'

And she answered, 'Amen'.

Ann Gilroy is a New Zealander who has recently been appointed to the Leadership Team of the Josephite Sisters and is now living in Sydney. She spoke at the 2007 WATAC Conference. This article is an extract from a talk she gave at the WATAC luncheon at Parliament House on 14 May 2006. It is printed with her permission.

Unity without uniformity

During our three weeks spent recently in Germany where we were visiting our daughter, her husband and our new granddaughter, we experienced at least four Masses in different parts of the country. Interestingly, and despite our lack of experience in the German language, we were surprised and at times quite uplifted by the Eucharistic celebrations, which in some details differed from what we had been brought up to believe: 'You can go to Mass anywhere in the world and the structure/set formulae will be the same!' Three of the Masses were Sundays and major liturgical holy days – Pentecost, Trinity, Corpus Christi [a Thursday and public holiday!]. One of the churches was the Dom in Cologne; another was a small local village church; another a suburban city church.

All the churches had pipe organs. In one local church the organ was accompanied by a beautiful orchestra and music replaced the singing of all the parts of the Mass and most of the traditional hymns. The congregations applauded the musicians at the end of each Mass. What was common at each Mass was the singing of a verse of a German hymn of praise instead of the formal *Gloria*. There was only ever one reading preceding the Gospel, with no responsorial psalm, and a rather joyful verse of a popular hymn to welcome the proclamation of the Gospel (without the formal inclusion of 'Alleluia! Alleluia!'). The formal Creed was not said; but instead one or two verses of a hymn of 'faith' were sung. Singing was generally robust; women had some (limited) roles, but there were altar girls and boys who were beautifully trained; Communion was received only under one species; there was no Offertory Procession; and there was only ever one collection!!

We came back home to be greeted with the inclusion of formal 'bowing' and more standing, and with the 'suggestion' of more directed and rigid rubrics to follow! And, in this, we are led to believe that the whole world is doing the same!

Maureen Brian

Trinitarian Intelligibility

Jennifer Anne Herrick

‘The Trinity is a matter of five notions or properties, four relations, three persons, two processions, one substance or nature, and no understanding.’

I begin with a quote from a significant medieval scholastic Christian philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas:

That God is threefold and one is solely an article of faith and can in no way be demonstrated, although some arguments can be given that are not necessarily convincing or even problematical, except to a believer.

The Trinity denotes that which characterises the Christian God. The character of the Christian God has its roots in the biblical narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament, and in the Christian Scriptures, which Christians call the New Testament.

This trinitarian understanding of God came to be expressed as ‘three persons in one God,’ or ‘three persons in one nature’, the ‘persons’ traditionally being referred to as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three names derive from a combination of Judaic and Christian theology and philosophy together with Greek philosophy. They express and denote identities in the Judaic and Christian biblical narratives.

In recent times the term person, used to denote the three depicted in these narratives, has become problematic. It is to this issue, and efforts to overcome the problem, that this paper is addressed.

Bernard Lonergan, a prominent contemporary American Christian philosopher and theologian, has been known to comment wryly in his lectures on the theology of the Trinity that ‘The Trinity is a matter of five notions or properties, four relations, three persons, two processions, one substance or nature, and no understanding.’ This quote reflects the often tortuous efforts to handle the notion of the Christian God in metaphysical terms, something at which Thomas Aquinas, for one, was quite adept. Thomas’ influential but difficult legacy lives on.

More than a few people regard the Christian trinitarian doctrine as a statement of Christian nonsense: $1+1+1=1$. Indeed American feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson pronounces that, in the West, the triune symbol has become neglected, literalised, treated like a curiosity or analysed with conceptual acrobatics entirely inappropriate to its meaning. She sees as little wonder that it has become unintelligible and religiously irrelevant on a wide scale.

This situation poses a powerful challenge to contemporary Christian theologians. Christians are losing a sense of their identity and non-Christians are losing a sense of what distinguishes Christianity theologically.

There is a need to contextualise Christianity in a religiously pluralistic age. The importance of trinitarianism is that it asserts the distinctiveness of Christianity. German Lutheran Jürgen Moltmann is an example of one Christian theologian who decries any attempt to adhere to general pluralism. For him dialogue with other religions is not helped if Christians relativise that which is distinctively Christian. But dialogue requires an intelligible platform from which to work.

It is the case that shifts in systems of thought are required to keep pace with linguistic and cultural change. Recent trinitarian writings have been grappling to make the inherited Christian tradition more intelligible and more relevant to a postmodern, rapidly westernising, age. The last two decades of the 20th century saw an addressing and confronting of past philosophical systems, a return to scriptural witness, while all the while engaging with postmodern thought. Out of this has emerged a collective enthusiasm for the category of relationality. It is seen to provide an alternative to the traditional metaphysics of substance. This reaction is to an entire historical process.

There emerged towards the end of the 20th century a widely held contention that language of the Christian trinitarian God becomes intelligible with a redefinition of the traditional static notion of person by a dynamic relational model. A relational model of person seeks to redress and/or reinterpret past legacies. These are, respectively, Greek substance metaphysics, German subjective idealism, Cartesian and Kantian Enlightenment and modern notions of the individual self, and Barthian [after Karl Barth] and Rahnerian [after Karl Rahner] notions of person as ‘mode of being or mode of subsisting’. The model of person as relational receives support from, and is sustained by, postmodern philosophical thought, and has been appropriated in recent times by many western trinitarian theologians.

Trinitarian theologians seek to equate three with one and one with three. In this they try to avoid three ancient heresies: tritheism, viewing God as three Gods, subordinationism, viewing one of the persons of God, the Father, as more divine than the other two, and modalism, viewing God as having three modes or masks. In avoiding these heresies it has been necessary and fundamental to reconsider the concept of person. As American Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson asks: ‘Is the Trinity itself a personal reality? If the Trinity is personal, as are each of Father, Son, and Spirit, how many divine identities are there? Are there Four rather than Three?’

The dilemma emerges that, if God as Trinity is properly not to be regarded as personal, it will have to be regarded as impersonal. It is considered that Christian scripture does not support such a notion. In addressing this point, and confronting past philosophical systems through a return to scriptural witness, Jürgen Moltmann speaks for current trends in finding that it makes more sense theologically to start from biblical history, and therefore make the unity of the three persons the problem, than to take the reverse method and start from the philosophical postulate of absolute unity in order then to find the problem in the biblical testimony. That this former way has not always been taken is part of the Christian story.

In reconsidering the concept of person, German Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg points out that 'person' is a specifically Christian concept. It was acquired in the first five centuries of the Christian era, as the functional categories of the New Testament were translated into ontological ones borrowed from Hellenism. Elizabeth Johnson explains that for contemporary theology the intrinsic difficulty of the meaning of 'person' is compounded by the semantic drift of this term over the course of the centuries. In particular, since the Enlightenment the understanding of 'person' has come to take on that of 'an individual centre of consciousness and freedom'. In acknowledgement of this, German Roman Catholic theologian and Cardinal Walter Kasper concludes that, with modern subjectivity and the

associated modern concept of person, the idea of 'three persons in one nature' has become impossible. The reason is clear. It leads automatically in a tritheistic direction, one of the heresies that must be avoided.

This problem of tritheism led to the need to make further choices in interpreting the concept of person. Two giants of the twentieth century western theological scene, Swiss Protestant Karl Barth and Austrian Roman Catholic Karl Rahner, sought alternative terminology. Barth proposed speaking of 'three manners of being' and Rahner 'three distinct manners of subsisting'. It has come to be contended by many however that substituting 'mode' or 'manner' of 'being' or 'subsisting' has ultimately served only to reinforce the idea of God as Subject and with this the perception of the trinitarian persons modalistically, another heresy to be avoided.

To be continued in arcvoice No. 29 - September 2008

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Dr JENNIFER ANNE HERRICK is an Online Lecturer with Australian Catholic University, National. She is the author of *Does God Change?: Reconciling the Immutable God with the God of Love and Trinitarian Intelligibility: an Analysis of Contemporary Discussions*. She has been an educator in NSW for over 30 years at both secondary and tertiary levels.



International Observations

Jim Taverne

The *Mariënbuurgvereniging* (see page 7, *arcvoice* 11) 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 any more?
- 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 renewal of Vatican II. In 1983 great disappointment was expressed about the abundance of regressive policies and attitudes from Popes, Cardinals and Bishops. Since then, the situation has not improved. (The sexual abuse scandals and lack of financial transparency were not mentioned in the brochure of 1983.)

Post-modern belief

In the same post I received a booklet written by André Lascaris o.p. for the *Mariënbuurgvereniging*. Its title is *Believing after the Modern Time*. Lascaris uses the words 'after the modern time' deliberately: because based on the natural science since the 17th century 'modern' was the state of knowing exactly how the world and all on, in and around it was created. This caused the people to feel more certain and safe. To increase that sense of safety 'modern' men tried to organise society along defined lines. That included also the Churches, especially the international Roman Catholic one with its total centralisation of power, 'to believe is to accept all that the Catholic Church (i.e the Pope) instructs you accept'. As long as you obey this command, you are safe.

This certainty has gone and now we live in the post-modern world. Lascaris compares post-modernism to the experience that the time-table for the bus is faultless in itself but that the bus often does not follow the finely tuned time-table. Perhaps the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church do not fit reality. Lascaris states that the 'modern' people now live in a world of risks and conflicts.

The subtitle of the booklet is *Who chooses the way to the unknown is vulnerable*.

Whereas the word 'modern' suggests a certain unity, 'post-modern' indicates that people realise that their society is not governed by one set of thoughts, by one religion, by one centre of power, by nationalism. Globalisation makes the national states weaker and the new channels of communication enable us to meet people of the same mind or who need our help. It becomes harder to make the division between 'them' and 'us', but at the same time it appears that inner unity is illusory.

In the post-modern world, believers are thinking for themselves; they are in the first place an individual and after that possibly a member of an organisation. The church is not central anymore but at the border. There is movement and flexibility and promise. People like to meet in the spirit of Jesus. That can happen in drawing room, park, street, spirituality centre or church. When Christians no longer live in an atmosphere of 'them and us' they enrich themselves by coming in contact with traditions which offer new possibilities to talk about the world, God, Jesus and salvation.

Post-modernism means that we don't belong to one particular tradition, but that we are the heirs of many traditions. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Animism enrich the 'Western' palette.

We realise that God reveals herself always to a limited degree. The world and every human person – therefore also the human Jesus – are limited and therefore also the way God can reveal herself in Jesus and in the Church. Humans, Christians or not, experience God in diverse ways. One can compare and criticise such experiences, but God remains always greater than the measure in which God appears in such experience. To add up all such experiences and try to unite them is therefore of no use.

The post-modern time can bring Christians back to the essence of their belief in today's language. To believe, to follow Jesus, is to adhere to the dual command of love: to turn to the God of Jesus who invites us to be the neighbour of who needs us, and to be free of envy, resentment, rivalry and violence. God loves us and accepts us without conditions.

Towards the end of booklet, Lascaris states: 'It is said that the end of Christianity is near, but I think that Christianity has not yet begun.'

Quotes

'So you think that, because of her weaknesses, Christ will forsake her? The worse his church and ours is marred by our failures, the steadier he will support her with his tender care. He could not deny his own body.' (Dom Helder Camara in *The Desert is fertile*)

'If you make a statement that nobody else has ever made before, chances are it will also never be made after you!' M.A. Beek (1909-1987) (Exegete [interpreter] (from *Volzin* 8 Feb 08).

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Please send material to:

The Editor
ARCvoice

32 Awatea Road

ST IVES CHASE NSW 2075

OR (preferably) email: knowldenl@bigpond.com

Tel: 02 9449 7275 Fax 02 9449 5017

ARC Secretariat

Barbara Brannan 02 9451 7130 barabran@hotmail.com

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

Donella Johnston 02 6242 8024 donjohnl@tpg.com.au

John Hiller 08 9335 4352 jhillier39@hotmail.com

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

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

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

Margaret Knowlden Editor 02 9449 7275 knowldenl@bigpond.com

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

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