



arcvoice

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Editorial

Belief is powerful. It can drive people to all kinds of deeds, both heroic and evil. There are those who sacrifice a comfortable life to care for the poor and the less fortunate, contrasted with suicide bombers convinced that their actions lead to a better life. Belief is often also blind, so blind even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. We would laugh at anyone who would hold that the earth is flat, yet there are many who still strongly believe that the world as it exists was created in seven days. Belief like this defies most simple logic.

It is worth reflecting on this most powerful influence and to consider how belief may influence our actions and attitudes even unconsciously. Our Catholic tradition has emphasised belief in truths and doctrine, many of which are somewhat removed from daily life. Through this emphasis we may feel justified in being content that it is all we need to believe. In turn, the emphasis can dull our sensitivity to the wider responsibility we should be prepared to take for the sustainability of our world and the welfare of others less fortunate than ourselves.

The creeds that were formulated early in the history of the Church were not meant to be static, even though over time they were used to define whether people were part of it or not. As people grappled with what they believed, expression was given to a variety of perspectives. It is a tragedy that some of these were labelled as heresies to be condemned when their spirit was part of a community merely seeking understanding. An emphasis was thereby placed on a narrow approach to defining unfathomable mysteries to the detriment of how we relate to our God, people around us and the world we live in. When I come to examine what I really believe I find that some of the formulations called truths which I have recited and repeated over the years in various prayers and liturgies are not so relevant.

At our last ARC conference we attempted to address the question of how we might give expression to what we truly believe rather than mouthing words that we unconsciously accept that we should say. We did not get very far with this. Perhaps it is because we need a much longer time to make the transition from acquiescence to questioning what we have hung onto for so long.

Over the coming months it would be of great benefit to all members if at least some of us could simply write a few sentences expressing the essentials of what they believe – about God, about their relationships, about their responsibility, etc. It could lead to a series of credal statements that are alive and express the essence of what really drives us. At the very least it would stimulate others to worthwhile reflection.

John Buggy

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Letter

I had the pleasure of attending, for the first time, the recent ARC Conference at the Dougherty Centre in Sydney. Thank you to all who made it a most enjoyable day!

Much of the discussion during that day related to what ARC stands for and what is its *raison d'être*. Well, I have just read the first of a series of four newly published booklets under the general title of 'Voices'. It's an annual subscription-based series, one issue per quarter and available from John Garratt Bookshop – see details below.

Importantly, the first issue is by Max Charlesworth, and I can honestly say it will make the hearts of all ARC members sing with joy! It says (if I'm interpreting ARC correctly) all those things which we as ARC members are aspiring to, by way of change in the Church. The title of this issue is "A Democratic Church".

It seems, like so many other commentators, Max feels the need to say exactly what he thinks of the current state of the Church – without worrying about the typical reactionary and unjust treatment that has befallen so many contemporary writers at the hands of the Curia.

Well done Max! You dare me to hope that change may yet be seen in my lifetime! A must read!

*Jim Milligan
Melbourne*

Voices is a series of quarterly essays designed to inform and promote discussion on religion and look at ways of enhancing the church's missionary effort in Australia. Annual subscription: \$80

A Democratic Church: Reforming the values and institutions of the Catholic Church

Professor Max Charlesworth AO

Extracts from an interview with Stephen Crittenden
on *The Religion Report* 14 May 2008

INTRODUCTION: In his essay, Max argues for recognition of the equality of all believers, freedom of conscience, pluralism, democratic structures for the election of bishops. He says Catholic theologians when they are investigated by Rome don't even enjoy the most elementary standards of justice that would be expected in a liberal democratic society.

SC: Max, would you say that, in Australia, members of the Australian church are really at the forefront internationally of the movement for reform of the church these days?

MC: I wouldn't say that there have been very many moves towards democracy in our church. All sorts of people writing about it of course, but not getting very far with the powers-that-be in Rome for example. Though I think John Paul II had grave reservations about democracy, certainly democracy in the church, and I think that's true even more so of Benedict XVI. He's obviously very suspicious of the whole democratic thing; he seems to see it as being linked to what he calls relativism, as though democracy is a form of government that's just founded on the will of the people, the sovereignty of the people etc. I think the important thing, and this is something that I've tried to bring out in my book, is that democracy has a whole nest of values within it, that resonate very strictly with basic Christian values.

SC: Max, arguably after the defeat of Communism at the end of the '80s, the Catholic Church returned to its old 19th century default position of being at war with liberalism. But what you say in this essay is that liberal democratic societies actually provide the model for reform of the church, and its structures.

MC: Yes. Well I think this was the central intuition of the best part of Vatican II and that's the declaration on human freedom, which as you know was written by John Courtney Murray, an American Jesuit. And he unashamedly used the American experience and showed that the church ran all sorts of spiritual perils by being linked with Constantinian-type governments, and that the church fared better in a society in which – as America has been right from the very beginning – you have a separation of church and state. I think that he was dead right about that, I think that's a very important insight. At any rate, Courtney-Murray and the American bishops to their credit, forced that through against very vociferous opposition by Cardinal Ottaviani and other conservatives, at Vatican II. They forced through that declaration on human freedom, and I think that's the kind of thing that we ought to keep our eyes fixed upon. Courtney-Murray recognised that this was very much against the traditional teaching of the church. Democracy itself, as an idea, is barely 200 years old. John Stuart Mill's essay on liberty I think is the first coherent attempt to delineate the idea of democracy. He based it on the idea of personal autonomy, and claimed that the law ought not to interfere with a person's right to decide how he wanted to live, that people were able to engage in what he splendidly called 'their own experiments in living'. So democratic society is going to be a pluralistic society where people have different styles of life for example, and it is also a society in which freedom of conscience is a central value. Now they're all things I think that we could hope for in the Catholic church of the 22nd century.

For text of full interview, go to: www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2008

Questioning the Church

Kerry Gonzales

Recently I came across a few words in the 'Cross Reference Journal' of *Epiphany Australia* (an association of former Catholic priests in Australia and their families) that almost literally leapt off the page. They said:

Questioning is life's way of discovery. Religions that do not question themselves have no defence against their beliefs being used by extremists for evil purposes. Questioning contributes to a healthy rebirth of understanding.

I had not heard of this group before, but their journal presented some very interesting and challenging articles.

At first reading, the obvious assumption to make is that the religions talked of are certainly not Christian, because such words as 'extremist' and 'evil purposes' could never be a part of the religions that we contribute to and believe in, could they? Yet, these simple words kept coming back to mind, encouraging me to take a closer look at current Catholicism to see if in fact these words did or could apply. After a lot of thought, however, I feel they do, in many ways – both subtle and overt.

In a simple sense the Catholic Church is not into questioning. When my parents were growing up you certainly didn't question anything, because you relied on the Church to have the correct answer ready for all of life's tricky situations. My own generation questioned many things religious, but were generally met with broad statements like 'it's God's will'. My own children had lots of questions and we had many interesting discussions about the conflicting positions of Church and conscience and their relevance in the modern world. At their Catholic school, however, any broad ranging moral discussions, if they were held at all, always ended with 'that's what the Catholic Church teaches'. There is really not much to ponder in regard to the question of why young people are no longer involved in the Church. The great time of questioning during and after Vatican II is now relegated to the fringe of consciousness, where one wonders whether it actually happened at all. So, if the Catholic Church is a religion that does not allow questioning, it cannot be a path to 'discovery', or a contributor to a 'healthy rebirth of understanding'. Yet for me these are essential elements for spiritual growth.

In a more sinister and ironic way, within the Church today, the questioners are called 'extremists' while the non-questioners become the true believers. To question has become a test of faith, as those who search for deeper meaning and yearn for a greater demonstration of gospel values are labelled faithless and destructive. A religion that will not even allow discussion on an issue such as the ordination of women is a fearful institution that uses such

words as 'infallible' to demand conformity. Such fear leads to a need to protect ferociously the religious beliefs held, and this in turn leads to abuses of power.

I'm very sad to say that I can see, within the Catholic Church, blatant examples of instances where 'their beliefs are being used by extremists for evil purposes'. It seems a radical assertion, yet the more I reflect on what is currently happening within the structures and power base of the Church, the more these words ring true. For how can it be called anything else but 'beliefs being used for evil purposes' when Church leaders today, with total sincerity, call a specific group of believers 'intrinsically evil', or exclude others for their marital status, or when decision-making is controlled by a specific group of individuals far removed from the realities of life in many areas?

Within mainstream society we have come a long way in terms of accepting people for who they are and how they live, rather than on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race or creed. When large numbers of women and children are condemned to poverty and exposure to HIV due to the Church's position on the use of condoms, how can this use of power be anything but 'extremist'? Once again, I suspect that most thinking people would place the health benefits of some of the world's most vulnerable people above the need to enforce a religious belief. These are but two examples that come to mind.

Ultimately, while in exasperation we might answer a child, after they have posed some difficult-to-answer question, with 'because I said so', it can never be an acceptable response in a religious context with adults. For a life unquestioned may well be a very secure life, but it is also surely a life that is not lived to the fullest. For as Catholics we should be striving to be true to being 'made in the image and likeness of God'. The prime responsibility for the Catholic Church, and perhaps the most important Gospel mandate, must surely be to encourage and develop a religion that allows and even demands questioning, whilst acknowledging that it does not have all the answers. That sort of religion is unlikely to be beset by extremist use of power, but will more probably be a religion that is growing and maturing.

So perhaps it is time that all Catholics looked at the structures and methods currently employed by the Church worldwide. Only then can we become more aware of and sensitive to the extreme positions taken by our leaders, and – by silent consent – by most of us as well. For there is no doubt in my mind that the Catholic Church, by its insistence and hard line on questioning, leaves itself open to further abuses of power and evil acts in the name of a God who would shake his head in wonder at what his Church has become. □

Certainty: A Reflection

John Hiller

Humans *need* certainty. The financial crisis showed this. There was uncertainty, lack of confidence, widespread worry. The uncertainty provoked over-reaction and paralysis.

Certainty comes up in many contexts; this note is about certainty in Catholicism and my experience of it. It muses on how much certainty I want.

I left school in the mid-1950s with a good familiarity with the Catholic faith. I *knew* what was right. I was *aware* of the bases for views and practices. I was *familiar* with Limbo and was *letter-perfect* on the Catechism. I *knew*; I could *quote*; I could *recall* minutiae. I was well-placed for life as a Catholic. Well, actually, I wasn't. I had *knowledge* but I *understood* little and did not realise it.

When religion related to public issues, the bishops issued pastoral letters; the priests explained during their 7-minute homilies; the Catholic press reported. All was straightforward; it was clear how we *must* react. Any discussion was with like-minded folk and alternative positions were viewed through a Catholic lens. It was not necessary to *think*, in the Socratic sense of that term.

The Catholic position was correct. Things were sorted out in Rome. We had *infallibility*.

There was something called conscience but it was unconscionable to disagree with the official position.

My certainty came from acceptance without reflection. My religious thinking did not get switched on. I wasn't unusual.

So much for early days. How has my interaction with certainty changed? Unsurprisingly, thinking is still the problem though now another projection is more significant.

Most of my difficulties come from context. What is appropriate in one perspective may not be in another. Likewise, what can be said in one forum may not be proper in another.¹

Prelates do a number of things. They make public statements; they preach; they counsel individuals. What they can do and say depends on their role and the forum. Tax-exemption rules limit political advice from the pulpit; in counselling the emphasis is on the individual making the decision. Context also varies. Public statements give broad principles; counselling allows the interplay of the particular.

Some bishops play hard-ball in their advice. Recent comments by the Bishop of Lancaster illustrate²:

'One of the greatest errors of the current age is to hold that an individual's conscience is an infallible and autonomous guide to mortal action. We have lost the sense that conscience, particularly one damaged by habitual sin, can make profoundly erroneous judgements.

'Aware of this predisposition to judge badly, the best option available when considering whether to act against the teaching of the Church, is to "assume that the Church is right, and that I am wrong".'

From his point of view this is fine, but what about the guilt heaped on those who may not follow his advice? As Cardinal Heenan put it in an interview in 1968³:

'The teaching of the Church is very clear: that a man is bound by his conscience, and this is true even if his conscience is in error. This is a basic teaching of the Church: that every man, the Pope, you, I, everyone, must follow conscience.'

The guilt approach works well with Catholics who are prepared to be *told* what to believe, how to vote, how to assess situations. Sorry, but I do not think we can delegate our consciences; *we* need to think.

Strong positions from the Church are not working. A recent example was voting for Barack Obama. Some 25% of US bishops took strong positions labelling him as 'pro-abortion' and arguing that no Catholic could in good conscience vote for him. Not only did their statements contain errors of fact but, as noted in *The Tablet*⁴, they ran counter to the Pope's advice '..... [T]he Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about ...'.

Infallibility has its problems. The advice from John Paul II that one may not even discuss the ordination of women, followed by the decision from Benedict that infallibility applied to the ruling, provoked further questioning of the merits of infallibility at all. And there is the 'creeping infallibility' of Bishop Robinson⁵:

'I do not deny the teaching authority of the church, What I question is the teaching on infallibility and especially on 'creeping infallibility', in which, even without the formal apparatus of infallibility, Catholics are told that they must believe many truths. The bishops appear to brush aside the very real problems associated with this phenomenon.'

In the same article Robinson stressed the importance of asking the difficult questions. Issues have to be confronted, and not just managed.

The Church is part of a changing world. Its evolution needs to be inclusive but past positions get maintained, often inappropriately. Cardinal Martini puts the matter simply⁶:

'Being able to admit one's mistakes and the limitations of one's previous viewpoints is a sign of greatness of soul and of confidence. The Church would regain credibility and competence.'

Is *certainty* what we need if it comes with creeping infallibility, and categorical advice? I think not. Reasoned argument will be valuable and help with conscience decisions. But, as was said above, I cannot delegate my conscience.

JOHN HILLER spent much of his professional life in universities, both as a teacher/researcher and as an administrator. His current research is on decision theory, particularly in relation to membership of groups. He is a member of the ARC Secretariat.

John Hiller is working on applying decision theory to membership of groups. This article is a tangential aspect. Comments can be sent to jhiller39@hotmail.com

Footnotes

1. For example, note the distinction made by Cardinal Turkson in Roberts, James, 'African Leader Advocates Pastoral Approach on Condom Use', *The Tablet*, 20th October 2007.
2. Norton, Thomas, 'Anti-Catholicism Flourishes, Warns O'Donoghue', *The Tablet*, 11 October 2008.
3. 'Informed Conscience', *The Tablet*, 25 October 2008.
4. Winters, Michael Sean, 'Why They Didn't Listen', *The Tablet*, 15 November 2008.
5. Robinson, Geoffrey, *Catholica*, 5 July 2008.
6. 'Cardinal Martini's Jesus Would Never Have Written 'Humanæ Vitæ'', *Chiesa*, 3 November 2008, [http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/209045?eng=y,downloaded 3 November 2008](http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/209045?eng=y,downloaded%203%20November%202008)

Christmas

Margot Taverne

The woman looked out of the window, over the scorched fields, shimmering in the hot sun. The land was harsh, so different: everything was different. Even Christmas – no, especially Christmas – was different. She could never get used to Christmas in the summer. Christmas needed cold weather, snow, blazing log fires, people coming in with red cheeks and noses, shaking the snow from their coats, eagerly stretching out their cold hands to the warmth of the fire; the sound of pine cones crackling in the hearth, the tangy scent of the tree – freshly cut in the forest or, better still, alive in a pot, ready to be planted in the garden afterwards; the festive table waiting for hungry guests, and the food, rich and hot ...

But, above all, the Christmas tree lit with real candles; the children, their faces upturned in wonder, gazing at the small flames which made the decorations sparkle; the stable under the tree, on a white sheet to resemble a snowy landscape, and the small village: the houses and the church, which she and her husband had made for their first Christmas together. That village was important. As long as she could remember, there had been Christmas trees like that, with the stable and the village. It had been her mother's way of preparing for Christmas and, after her marriage, she just had to continue the tradition set by her mother.

Carols – church – visits to elderly family members, all that was part of it.

Of course, she knew that that was not what Christmas was about: Christmas meant new life, new hope in dark days – it can be celebrated wherever you are and in whatever circumstances you are. She remembered her mother telling her about the Christmas she spent while a prisoner of the Japanese secret police. There was nothing to feel festive about

– there was only the uncertainty of what was to be their fate: the grim and very real possibility of a death sentence. Then the women in their cells started to sing Christmas hymns. They sang loud enough for the male prisoners to hear them. It sounded like a miracle, like a host of angels to the men. The real miracle was that the guards allowed the women to sing, to bring solace to each other and peace to themselves.

The woman at the window smiled and shook herself. Christmas was near! No matter if the children and grandchildren preferred other ways to get in the Christmas mood. Humming an old hymn, she started to prepare for Christmas her way – the real tree with candles (and a bucket of water nearby, just in case), with the stable and the village. Food? She always had plenty of food, an after-effect of the war and the many months of hunger. But the food would be cold – the only concession she made to the climate.

'The children have their own life,' she thought, 'they are happy, and we wanted them to be like that: happy and independent. And we still have each other and all our memories ...'

The phone rang. 'Mum, would it be awfully inconvenient if we all came to have Christmas with you? Somehow, it does not seem quite real, without your Christmas tree and all the things you do to make it special. And the children too, they want to have Christmas "Oma's way" this year. I know it is a lot to ask, but ...'

The woman smiled. Of course, all these traditions were not the soul, the essence of Christmas, but they helped. They paved the way to open yourself to the miracle that is waiting to be rediscovered, time and time again. □

Making love with Jesus

Alan Holroyd

At the time of writing, three events happened that by coincidence prompted this essay to be written. One, World Youth Day was not long over; two, the media were reporting that charges were being laid against clergy for the sexual abuse of children in a NSW Catholic high school; and three, I had just attended a lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales entitled 'Bernini and Mystic Eroticism'. The lecture was one in the Decoding the Baroque series of 2008 and the lecturer was Dr Louise Marshal, an internationally renowned academic in art history.

Reading history and reading artworks share commonalities. However art is ambiguously interpretive, so for linking Bernini in 1650 – to WYD and sex abuse by clerics in 2008 it helps to bear ambiguity and interpretation in mind.

Patriarchy and religion are good bed-fellows. In the Roman Catholic Church celibacy was introduced on a progressive basis about three hundred years after the time of Jesus, so we can assume that, as the formal religion developed, so did the need for power and control. In 401 St Augustine wrote, 'Nothing is so powerful in drawing the spirit of man downwards as the caresses of a woman'. Between 590 and 604, Pope Gregory 'the Great' said that all sexual desire is sinful in itself (meaning that sexual desire is intrinsically evil?) By the fourteenth century a bishop Pegagio complains that women are still being ordained and hearing confessions! In the fifteenth century 50% of priests are married and accepted by the communities. The sixteenth century has the Council of Trent stating that celibacy and virginity are superior to marriage whilst in 1517 along comes Martin Luther and Henry VIII in 1530. The seventeenth century sees The Inquisition and the emergence of the Baroque period in art, music and architecture that followed the Renaissance and Mannerism.

the Renaissance and Mannerism.

Within this environment emerges Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) who is regarded as the transformative genius of the Baroque with Rome and the Vatican in particular being blessed with the magnificence of his work.

Between 1645-52 Bernini carved a statue called the

Ecstasy of St Teresa, commissioned by Cardinal Federigo Cornaro to honour Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) who had been canonised in 1622 with Saints Ignatius Loyola and Francis of Assisi. Yet according to the cardinal, her sanctity



had not been equitably acknowledged. Bernini did his homework well, researching into the Old Testament and into the writings of the saintly woman who as a Carmelite nun helped found the Discalced Carmelite order. To help understand the statue, to read the design, the composition and intricately brilliant carving and the thinking behind the work, the cover note of Dr Marshal reveals some salient points.

(At this point, readers are recommended to use the Internet, to Google or other, to see photographs and text. Simply type in: [Bernini's statue of St Teresa](#))

Visual artworks of visionary and mystic experiences are rare in earlier Italian art but had become very common in the seventeenth century – due to the Counter Reformation's response to claims of Protestantism relating to the cult of the Virgin and of the saints generally. The emphasis was on the inspirational role of art that echoes the enduring influence of the Old Testament's Song of Songs, or Canticles that inspired many including Bernini in relation to the composition and expression of the two figures that make up the carving. The Canticles, an impassioned love song between two lovers, was interpreted in mystical terms to reflect the love between Christ and his mystic bride, the Church, and to the individual Catholic believer as well. The heady eroticism of the Canticles was extremely influential with writers and artists. In Teresa's writings she describes a somewhat bridal and amatory mystical experience of ecstasy – called her transverberation – from an angel who, according to her own description of the vision, plunged an arrow with a flaming tip into her heart and entrails again and again.

Bernini sets the masculine angel above, one hand disrobing Teresa's garment while the other holds an arrow, poised... His facial expression projects both joy and sympathy. In a way the Inquisition's modesty requirements helped the sculptor to express the inner and external turmoil that convulsed the flowing garments of the woman's body. Bernini was selective in revealing her sublimely beautiful face



with open lips; her almost closed eyes, her languid hand and naked feet that so evocatively portray the sensuality of the moment. This masterpiece was well read and understood by the Vatican of the day as one commentator is reported to have said, 'If that is divine love, then I have known it!'

1930: Pope Pius XI: Sex can be good and holy.

1962: Pope John XXIII, Vatican II: Marriage is equal to virginity.

1966: Pope Paul VI: Celibacy dispensations.

1980: Married Anglican/Episcopalian pastors are ordained as Catholic priests in the USA and in 1994, in Canada and England.

And so it goes. The power brokers of the Church of Rome still live in denial, still clinging with white knuckles to Augustine's statement, a titanic struggle with gender, sexuality and the denial of the reality of God's unique being in the form of both woman and man, each with a sensual, ecstatic capacity for making love with God that transcends any construction ordained by the men of Rome.

More About Language and Creed

Ted Lambert

Credo in Unum Deum, Patrem Omnipotentem. Pardon the Latin, but I hope you realise that it still lurks in the background and helps clog the Catholic mind and imagery. In fact some recent Roman decisions are tending to return it to some favour. The Latin Creed has direct translation in the vernacular Creeds parrotted every Sunday by scores of millions in Catholic churches around the world. 'I (we) believe in one God, the Father Almighty?'

Can you hear the old Mediterranean patriarchy coming through – Egyptian, Greek and Roman? The western (historically christian) world has since been through the Renaissance, the French Revolution, the Marxist Socialist experience and God's new revelation in the expansion of understanding through the endeavours of 'Science'. But God remains locked for us in the culture preserved in the language of ancient and pre-christian times.

Fatherhood is a valid and rich human concept and experience. But God is beyond the maleness it must imply. God, as Love, is right into friendship, which St Thomas Aquinas defines as 'mutual good-willing shown between two (persons)'. How much more peaceful the world would be if we changed our devotion from monarchical and patriarchal to friendship models? Even in the Church! Start by ditching the offending and confronting language. And instituting a liturgical feast of Jesus our Friend.

Nearly two millennia have passed since early Councils stuck us with their contemporary models. Can we now claim our full heritage and declare: 'I believe in one God'. 'I no longer believe in God as a Father Almighty'. Instead we have the warm assurance of Jesus who does not call us servants but names us his friends. This is a quantum shift in the understanding of God/human relationships. The same Jesus fled into the hills out of reach of the misguided who sought to make him their 'King'. Yet we still do it with our feast each November! Don't we read the Gospels? Adults flee

the churches while church authorities insist on and persist in anachronisms.

Australia is heading towards becoming a Republic – non-violently, as befits our dreams of peace and democracy. These sociological urges are true, perceived as a human advance on the old imperialism. But Catholics think their God cannot understand this. 'His' understanding is limited by a fixed Latin text, embedded in an ancient time warp. Do not believe that maleness is not in the Latin texts – it is! 'Pater' is equally as male as 'Father', 'Filius' always means the male 'Son'! Yet male God isn't, of the very divine nature.

This factual error alone makes the Creed remediable. It must be changed from God-maleness to permit God's natural gender-freedom. From expressions of male-might to grateful worship of the divine loving friendship. From a series of human metaphors describing the experiences of the authors to a truer series of statements about the selfhood of God. God is ungraspable, indescribable, yes – but that is no excuse for the false assertions our language has made of God. Better let the Creed go than mutilate God with it. 'Man' used to like vertical human structures and male inheritance and shed much blood over it, including Christ's. Then man made a Creed in his own image. Human society is now seeking to act out of kinder and more generous patterns which seek equality without the old discriminations. We should extend God the same privilege.

One would hope that Australian bishops might do something about this but they stutter helplessly from a Rome-oriented 'yes' culture. The back-looking symbol and reality of imperialism are still reflected in their very garb, royally resplendent at WYD. (I do not intend to wrong them, individual bishops may seek a humbler profile). But the Greek and Latin language and culture ties still bind. If I hear one more time, 'The Church is not a democracy!!! Now repeat after me, 'Yes, yes, yes ...'

There would still be a place for mystery and metaphor. I throw in part of a hymn, which is perhaps as ancient as the Latin Creed, because I like it. I recite it often. It does not demean me (and God) as parts of the Sunday Creed do.

'O blessed holy Trinity,
Serene and certain in your ways,
You are the Light of endless days'. □

Vatican Secrets – Selection of Bishops

Paul Collins

October 28, 2008

It is a safe bet that this is a document you will have never seen. Catholics for Ministry came into possession of the Questionnaire which the Papal Nuncio sends out to a very select group of priests and laity seeking opinions about priests whose names are being proposed for the bishopric. First, have a read of the document which fell off the back of the proverbial truck, and then have a read of my commentary. After that you may be tempted to participate in our consultation. We're trying to draw up a document for the selection of bishops that improves on this rather inadequate document. Here is the document:

APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE, AUSTRALIA QUESTIONNAIRE for EPISCOPAL CANDIDATES

- A. This questionnaire is “**sub secreto pontificio**”: it must be returned to the Apostolic Nunciature with your answer.
- B. Please state how long you have known the candidate and in what way you have come to know him.
1. **PERSONAL**: Appearance, health, application to work. Family's condition. Any predisposition to hereditary illnesses?
 2. **HUMAN QUALITIES**: Intellectual abilities. Temperament and character. Balance and Soundness of judgment. Sense of responsibility.
 3. **CHRISTIAN & PRIESTLY VIRTUES**: Prudence, Fairness, spirit of faith and charity. Piety: daily celebration of the Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours. Marian devotion.
 4. **BEHAVIOUR**: Moral integrity. How does he relate to people and to public authorities in the exercise of his priestly ministry?
 5. **CULTURAL FORMATION**: Is he competent and up to date in Theology and other Ecclesiastical Sciences? General cultural attainment. Foreign languages. Works published.
 6. **ORTHODOXY**: Doctrinal orientation. Loyalty to the Doctrine and Magisterium of the Church. In particular: the attitude of the candidate to the Documents of the Holy See on the Ministerial Priesthood, on the Priestly Ordination of Women, on marriage, on sexual Ethics and on Social Justice. Fidelity to the genuine Tradition of the Church and commitment to the authentic renewal promoted by Vatican II, and adherence to the “**Statement of Conclusions, 1998**”.
 7. **DISCIPLINE**: Devotedness to the Holy Father, the Holy See and the Episcopal Hierarchy. Support for Priestly Celibacy and general and particular Laws of the Church. In particular: as to Liturgical and Clerical Discipline.
 8. **PASTORAL EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDES**: Evangelization and Catechesis: preaching and teaching. Aptitude for public speaking. Readiness to administer the Sacraments. Promotion of Vocations. Interest in the Missions and Ecumenical activities. Formation of lay people in the Family and Social fields of apostolate: of young people, of workers, defenders of human rights?
 9. **QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP**: Does he have a capacity for leadership: for dialogue, for evoking and accepting collaboration, for analysis and programming, for making decisions and ensuring that they are carried through? Does he appreciate the role and collaboration of religious and lay people (men and women)? Is he able to delegate and share responsibility? Has he shown an interest in the problems of the Universal as well as the local Church?
 10. **ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY**: Does he exercise due care of the Church's property? Ability in administration. Sense of justice. Readiness to enlist the help of those experienced in such affairs?
 11. **PUBLIC IMAGE**: Has he gained the respect of his fellow clergy? Of the people and of the public authorities?
 12. **GENERAL OVERVIEW**: Give a comprehensive judgment on the personality of the candidate and of his suitability for the episcopate. Indicate, if affirmative, whether he is particularly suited for appointment to a residential See, or as an Auxiliary Bishop. Or for work in an urban, rural, industrial or in other social context.
 13. **CONSULTATION**: Please suggest the names of persons (ecclesiastic, religious, or lay) who can provide pertinent and useful information about the candidate. Please give names and addresses.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1.
 - a. Full name of the candidate.
 - b. Date and place of birth.
 - c. Names of parents.
 - d. Was he born in lawful wedlock?
2. Condition of his family: religious, moral, civil, economic; bodily and mental health.
3.
 - a. In what Seminaries and other Institutes has he studied?
 - b. What were the results?
 - c. What academic grades did he achieve?
4.
 - a. Is he the author of any publications?
 - b. If possible, indicate titles and editions.
5. Does he speak, or in any way know, foreign languages?
6.
 - a. Date and place of priestly ordination.
 - b. Diocese or Religious Institute for which he was ordained.
 - c. Diocese in which he was born.
 - d. Diocese to which he now belongs.
 - e. Diocese of actual residence.
 - f. If a Religious, indicate the province for which he was professed and the date of profession.

Further Comments on the Vatican Questionnaire

It is almost beyond belief that the Vatican uses a document of this slant in the selection of bishops around the world. From other versions that have been leaked in other countries and languages it is clear that the Australian document is a slightly modified version of the document used elsewhere. Do the men who compose such documents ever stop and think of the accountability they might one day face from Almighty God for the abysmal state Catholicism has descended into throughout the Western world over the last 200 years? That is a serious question. One presumes in their conservatism they continue to believe in some form of final judgment. Do they, even for a moment, ever stop to consider the accountability they might eventually be called to for this constant pandering to this dwindling rump of the insecure and what Pope Benedict calls 'the little people' while the rest of the baptised Catholic population are effectively told 'go to Hell. We do not care about you at all'?

The sort of leadership this document calls for is what drives most intelligent people out of the Catholic Church. It is time for these kindergarten-level games of 'playing Church' and 'playing priests and bishops' to stop. We urgently need in the Church men and women as spiritual leaders who can lead — not men who are forever running around trying to prove to their often long-dead mothers what 'good citizens' they turned out to be, what nice little social conformists they are, or what bullies or how tough they are.

Jesus Christ did not go through what he went through to teach us social conformism and how to be 'nice' to one another. He did not come into the world to teach us how to be bullies. He came to teach us how to love one another and how to discern the moral truths that lead us to wholeness, holiness and eventually to salvation. He came to teach us, in the words of St Gregory of Nyssa, how "to become like God". That is not some kindergarten-level game of social conformism and running around trying to prove to the rest of the world that 'we (Catholics) are the only ones with ALL the answers and everyone else in Creation are heretics, pagans and damned'.

This document betrays the reality that the men who control the Catholic Church today have 'lost touch with reality. They are pandering to an unrepresentative, miniscule proportion of the population who crave certitude and security at the expense of everything else in Creation, including Truth itself. That game has to stop. We need a Church, and ecclesial leaders, who will take us back to the core focus of what Jesus Christ came into the world to teach the human family, and each one of us.

Brian Coyne
Editor & publisher
Catholica
www.catholica.com.au

Canon 377 §1 of The Code of Canon Law 1983 reads: The Supreme Pontiff freely appoints Bishops or confirms those lawfully elected. §3 of that canon deals with the *ternus* (shortlist to be presented to the Holy See). The Papal Legate plays an important role in getting a list of Episcopal candidates together. Canon 378 §1 describes the personality and qualifications of suitable Episcopal Candidates. §2 declares that the definite judgement on the suitability of the person to be promoted rests with the Apostolic See. Bishops and Papal Nuncios would be expected to use The Code of Canon Law when formulating the steps to be taken in the determination of the suitability of candidate-bishops.

In 2001 Narratio in Gorinchem, the Netherlands, published a book *Don't thrust a bishop upon a diocesan community*, quoting a decree from Burchard of Worms, around 1010 AD. The sub-title is 'About the appointment of bishops'. The four authors point out that the custom of bishops 'freely appointed by the Supreme Pontiff' is not an old but a rather new policy which has set aside consulting and even informing civil authorities. The Australian Government is not informed.

In the year 374 AD Ambrose, the Governor of Upper Italy, was elected bishop of Milan 'on a show of hands, instigated by a young boy'. Ambrose had to be baptised and receive other sacraments, which was done forthwith. His was the most democratic appointment ever and it was an outstanding success. He was probably not yet 35 years old as Canon 278 §1 prescribes.

Because of the power of the Pope to ignore recommendations from anyone, the existence of agreements and concordats with civil governments are of little or no significance. An attempt in 1968-1970 to engage the whole diocesan community in the preparation for the election (appointment?) of a new bishop in Rotterdam had many good points in the direction towards lay participation in the search for and assessment of Episcopal Candidates. BUT here the following motto is still applicable:

If you want to know how things really are, try to change them!

Jim Taverne

Book Reviews

Collins, Paul *Believers: Does Australian Catholicism Have a Future?*

UNSW Press, Sydney, Australia, 2008

Reviewed by John Hiller

Collins' *Believers* looks at the Australian Catholic scene in today's terms. He weaves recent studies such as the report on *Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass* with figures from the Census, interviews and comments from the literature. This is done without the reader doing battle with tables or engaging in complex argument. The writing is masterly and a first read is effortless. But a reader who looks at the chapters a second time will find many reasons to pause and reflect.

Believers has an Introduction and six chapters, excellent endnotes and an index; it is 190 pages in length.

The Introduction starts with issues for youth – a recurring focus – and sketches contentious matters including celibacy and infallibility.

Chapter 1 shows what Catholicism contributes to Australian society. Support for the homeless, the aborigines, Catholic hospitals and schools, retreat houses, get a mention. This is rounded out in Chapter 2 with views of Australia by the Pope and politicians, and limits on religious reporting being mentioned. These reviews conclude optimistically noting increased interest in spirituality and an existing structural foundation on which to build.

Chapters 3-5 present the 'meat' of the book. They are about Catholics who are 'adrift', why they leave, and how the Church should now respond. Some who have left give their reasons; statements from bishops who have spoken out are recounted; official reactions to murmurs of disquiet are presented. Comparisons are drawn between the actions of Jesus and today's judgementalism. The scenes will ring true to many who can extrapolate from their own experience. The numbers and percentages show differences between the generations, today's challenges and what looms.

Collins argues the focus should be on the local church. He calls for leadership from the Australian bishops. He writes as though much is within their gift. This does not ring true to me – the oath of loyalty to the magisterium taken at their consecration limits ability to do other than 'follow Rome'. The manner of their choice (*ARCvoice*, No. 30, p8-9) suggests little will change soon.

Chapter 6 asks if 'Australian Catholicism has a Future'. The list of things needing attention cannot be argued with but most apply to the Church as a whole. How can the Australian Catholic community prompt an initiative from Rome? I was prompted to reflect on the success of the liberals at *Vatican II*[#] but I doubt the conservatives could be outmanoeuvred so effectively a second time!

Believers gives us much to think about.

Footnote

Melissa Wilde, *Vatican II – A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*, Princeton University Press, 2007, 224p.

Cardinal Mahony – A Novel

Robert Blair Kaiser

Humble-bee Press, Phoenix, Arizona 2008

This book should be compulsory reading for every Catholic – lay and cleric alike – and is particularly relevant to *arcvoice* readers as many of our articles deal with personal struggles to break through the intractable mindset and procrastination of the hierarchy. The subtitle 'A Novel' is somewhat misleading – it is in fact a new kind of 'reality fiction... that uses the names of real persons, living and dead, to tell an entertaining tale and to make a point'. Its profound message and real-life situations provide just the answers many of us have been searching for in our hopes of a democratic church for the people – unfettered by canon laws and papal dominance; the sort of church that Jesus would have recognised. Your Editor, for one, could not put it down!

By allowing his imagination to soar, the author opens the way to endless possibilities for change and growth. We, in Australia, can also dream and should take up his challenge.

From the back cover

North American bishop gets kidnapped outside his cabin in the High Sierras one snowy morning in November 2008 by three liberation theologians who look like terrorists. They take him off to southern Mexico in his own helicopter and put him on trial for his sins in front of an international television audience.

A jury of his peers, six retired Latin American bishops, find him guilty, and give him a surprising sentence. The bishop falls in love with his kidnapers and leads the American Catholic Church into a radical new way of being, still Catholic but aggressively accountable to the people, which is to say, aggressively American.

This work pushes the envelope. It is both 'fiction' and 'non-fiction,' set in the reality of the current priest-sex-abuse scandal, and projecting ahead in time to tell the story of a colourful crew – and a new Cardinal Mahony – working to give Catholics a voice, a vote, and citizenship in their Church. Utopian? Yes! Why not dream?

Ever since his coverage of Vatican II for Time magazine, Robert Blair Kaiser's journalism has illuminated the darkest corners of the Church. Now his cunning, mischievous first novel cuts behind the scenes in a different way, with a cast of characters drawn from real life, who turn all of their old assumptions about the Church (and ours) upside down. A mesmerizing work. Eugene Kennedy □

Who are Catholics for Ministry?

Frank Purcell, Paul Collins

We are a group of Catholics who are profoundly concerned about the future of the church in Australia and about the challenge of handing on the faith to coming generations. We believe that part of the essence of being a Catholic lies in the ability to participate in the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments, and we are deeply concerned because there are ALREADY many parishes in Australia – especially in rural Australia – being deprived of the liturgy and the kind of worshipping community which is basic to being a Catholic. They are replaced by scripture reading and a communion service.

CfM is committed to expressing the concern of Catholics about this failure to provide the Eucharist and Sacraments to both the Australian bishops and to the Pope and the Vatican. Last year we ran a PETITION TO THE BISHOPS OF AUSTRALIA in about 120 parishes and on the net which eventually was signed by almost 17,000 Mass-going Catholics, including 167 priests. It focused on:

- * **the increasingly acute shortage of suitable priests** to maintain our Mass-centred, Eucharistic spirituality and the celebration of the other sacraments;
- * **the increasing drift of young people from the Church** because of the difficulties we face in our ministry to them;
- * **the lack of full leadership roles for women;**

Specifically we asked the bishops to...

1. **acknowledge that there is a major crisis in ministry** within the Australian Catholic Church;
2. **acknowledge that there is no doctrinal or theological barrier to the ordination of married men.** The Australian Church has already ordained married former Anglican priests;
3. **take practical steps toward ordaining** suitably qualified married men;
4. **encourage a wide-ranging discussion of the role of women** in ministry and in the authority structures of the Church, including the question of women's ordination;
5. **establish appropriate scriptural, theological and pastoral training programs** to prepare suitable women and men for ministry;
6. **Invite priests who have left the ministry** to return to active priesthood, subject to negotiation with the local bishop.

The Petition ran in parishes, schools and other ministries from July to October 2007 and, after discussions with Archbishop Philip Wilson of Adelaide, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, it was presented at the bi-annual conference of the bishops in Sydney in late-

November 2007. According to reports there was a lengthy discussion of the Petition and in the end the bishops felt that the issues were too complex and difficult to be decided there and then. So the issue was handed back to the central (or executive) committee of the Bishops' Conference for action. Archbishop Wilson wrote a letter to CfM on 30 November 2007 on behalf of the Conference in which he said in part:

...we [the bishops] intend to pursue discussions at future Plenary Meetings of those aspects of Church life which are within our competence as a Conference of Bishops in the Universal Church.

We understand that the bishops did discuss some of the matters raised in the Petition and then handed it over to the central committee of the Bishops' Conference for further deliberation. We heard nothing definitive until we received a letter dated 9 May 2008 from Archbishop Philip Wilson, President of the Australian Bishops' Conference, which stated:

The matters ... in the petition are of quite diverse doctrinal and disciplinary import. They are largely beyond our competence as a national conference of Bishops within the universal Church.... It would not, therefore, be appropriate in the circumstances for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to engage in ongoing correspondence with you on these issues. The Bishops will, however, continue in other ways to address the current challenges.

Needless to say, we are disappointed with this response. We are preparing a more detailed reaction which will be available on our website at:

www.catholicsforministry.com.au

In the meantime, we are anxious to inform those who signed the Petition – as well as other interested Catholics – of the Bishops' response. We would be grateful if you could pass this information on to your parishioners, perhaps by making copies of this letter available in the notice sheet or at the door after Mass.

We are keen to keep contact with those who signed the petition or who are interested in supporting the renewal of ministry. Would they please write to us with postal address, email and telephone number at:

Catholics for Ministry

PO Box 4053

Manuka, ACT 2603

or by email via our website at:

www.catholicsforministry.com.au

With renewed thanks for your support.

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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