



# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.  
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## Editorial

In this 31<sup>st</sup> Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc. we find writings from capable Catholics on the subjects of the worrying lack of progress towards the Church of the Twenty-First Century. The authors write about the place of the laity and, in particular, the role of women. They do not just point out what they feel should be done better in to-day's Church but also what should be done, instead of what is being done now. To illustrate, the following is an extract of a recent email from Alan Clague, member of ARC's Secretariat in Brisbane.

*Jim Taverner:*

I have the feeling sometimes that some ARC members feel they belong to a fringe group of the Catholic Church. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are firmly in the mainstream of responsiveness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Catholic Church evolves in order to remain relevant to the present time and future. In a couple of generations at the most, the Church's current stance on contraception will be completely discredited as the world struggles with critical overpopulation. Recently I felt sorry for Cardinal Pell as he supported as best he could the Church's official position on banning the use of condoms for AIDS prophylaxis, even when one marriage partner was known to be infected. That will become as shameful for the Church as the burning of heretics, and we should be trying to protect our Church from those whose zeal for control by taboos overwhelms their Christian love and common sense.

I would like to add my list to our 'reforming' or 'area of change' agenda. Much of this has been mentioned already, although using more emotive language at times than what I am comfortable with. These are topics for review, not a *carte blanche* for change.

### Church Organizational and Functional Regulation

- Increased decentralisation of power to bishops
- Increased local input into appointment of bishops
- Removal of sexual discrimination in Church offices, including clergy
- Removal of discrimination against married persons in Church offices, including clergy
- Increased role of the whole Church community in parish and diocesan decision-making
- Increased freedom of discussion about religious matters
- Improved handling of misconduct by church officers
- Increased sensitivity to cultural mores
- Increased fiscal accountability
- Implementation of options for the sacrament of Penance

### Sexual Regulations

- Cohabitation and marriage
- Divorce and annulment
- Control of fertility
- Homosexual cohabitation
- Sexual sins

### Church Involvement in Secular Politics

- Liberation theology
- Guidance versus direction of voters by the Church on moral or religious political issues  
*eg in vitro fertilization.*

I think it is relevant to quote from another email from Bill and Elizabeth Flamsteed on June 11<sup>th</sup> 2005: '.... *We did not join to propagate the questioning of Catholic beliefs such as the Resurrection, the Incarnation, the Divinity of Jesus, the Real Presence in the Eucharist etc ...*'. I endorse this sentiment. There is enough to reform in our Church without moving into theology proper.

*Alan Clague*

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# Ponderings on Women and the Church on the Eve of International Women's Day 2009

Donella C. Johnston

It is International Women's Day 2009 this Friday 6 March. The first IWD was held in 1911 and grew out of the worker's rights movement (see <http://www.internationalwomensday.com>). There are several activities happening around Australia and internationally this week to celebrate this day. Here in Canberra, UNIFEM (the UN's Development Fund for Women) is hosting a lunch at the National Convention Centre on Thursday 5 March. The International Women's Day lunches and breakfasts always have inspirational guest speakers and are well attended by women and girls from all walks of life. UNIFEM (est. 1976) promotes women's human rights, political participation and economic security nationally and internationally. Women's human rights feature strongly in the UN's Millennium Development Goals which are also the goals of the work of this year's Caritas Australia's Project Compassion, the theme of which is 'An Environment to Grow In'. At the school I teach at we will promote and raise money for Project Compassion throughout Lent this year.

Today (1st March) UNIFEM Australia launched its first Essay Competition for secondary school students in order to encourage students to share their thoughts on how to empower women in Australia (see [www.unifem.org.au](http://www.unifem.org.au)). I will promote this competition with the children I teach. Sadly, my beloved Catholic Church still has a LONG way to go with empowering women to hold positions of significant decision-making authority especially in the upper echelons of the hierarchy.

Some interesting (if somewhat depressing) facts from the UNIFEM literature:

1. 1 in 3 women in the world will experience violence in their lifetime
2. Every minute at least one woman dies from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth
3. Women provide 70% of agricultural labour and produce 90% of the world's food (yet are still not represented in budget deliberations on wage levels)

Yesterday (Saturday) I went to a meeting of our Archdiocese's Commission for Women with our Vicar General. This Commission was established in our Archdiocese (Canberra and Goulburn) in September 2005 soon after the Diocesan Synod which was held to clarify the issues of women in the local church and set priorities in addressing these issues. Membership is open to all, women and men of various ages and backgrounds. Over the last 18 months or so, a number of the original Commission members have stepped down for various reasons and late last year the Commission put

the call out for new nominations and received several applications for nominations. We read this as a heartening sign of women and men of faith's desire to improve the participation of women in their local Church.

Last November, our local Women's Commission held an Open Meeting at which Senator Ursula Stephens, the Federal Minister for Social Inclusion, a practising Catholic and a parishioner in our Archdiocese, spoke about women, political leadership and hope. Inspired by her words of hope and encouraged by our Vicar General and clergy representative, this year, our Women's Commission will focus on promoting, in particular, the following four of the thirty-one proposals put forward by the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference in the Social Justice Statement 2000 which responded to the 1999 Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*:

- # 1. A better balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity be included on existing councils, organisations and advisory bodies.
- # 2. A better balance of men and women be appointed to leadership roles in the Catholic Church.
- # 3. In parishes where pastoral councils are not established and where the Bishop judges their formation to be appropriate, they be formed, and include a balance of men and women, clergy, religious and laity so that women's participation in decision making and leadership may be increased.
- # 11. Dioceses, parishes and all Catholic organisations recognise and promote equality and inclusivity for Australia's indigenous peoples.

On Friday, I will attend an International Women's Day breakfast hosted by the Office for the Participation of Women in the Church at the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in Canberra. I'm looking forward to catching up with my Catholic women friends from across our Archdiocese and beyond.

This year, 2009, is a significant one for women and the Catholic Church in Australia because it is the 10th Anniversary of the release of the report the Australian bishops commissioned on women's participation in the Church 'Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus'. I've been re-reading this report which is apparently the biggest report ever commissioned by the Church in Australia. It shows that women are doing a LOT of the work of the Church at the flat end of the triangle but are still un(der)-represented in the area of meaningful, change-making leadership, that is the pointy end of the hierarchical triangle. It's still an old

boys' club. I've also been reading Joan D. Chittister's wonderfully inspiring book 'Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men' (1998) to try to counter-balance some of the frustration I'm feeling towards my Church and its leadership. I wonder how much longer the sin of sexism will masquerade in the flimsy emperor's clothes of theology. I know the young people I work with are already pointing and calling it for what it is.

I often wonder why I still choose to stay in a Church that denies women full participation. I've heard some people say that the Church is counter-cultural. I disagree. Jesus was counter-cultural. The Church is counter-intuitive. For some reason, I always return to the memories of my childhood and recall the wonderful Sisters of St Joseph and their Catechesis classes – their kindness, their quiet dignity and their toughness. I also remember our stern but wise parish priest, a Marist father, who one day after the homily asked if anyone was interested in serving on the altar to stay behind for training. He didn't say 'altar boys' – so with the blessing of our parents, my sister and I stayed back and became altar servers for our small rural Church in the early 1980's – a good 10 years before the Vatican approved girl altar servers.

I didn't realise the significance of this until, when I was a young teacher in the mid-1990's at an all-girls Catholic school, someone cut out and posted on the staff notice board a newspaper article about girl altar servers finally being allowed. I don't know if our priest did this all those years ago out of necessity or rebellion – I suspect necessity because no boys stayed back – but I'm sure it is an important reason why I still serve the Church today.

I've been pondering all of these things in my heart today. As we seem to be arriving at a watershed moment in history, I know we women have fought the good fight and have indeed come a long way in secular society. In my great-grandmother's lifetime, women were not admitted into some universities. In my grandmother's lifetime women could not vote. In my mother's lifetime, women did not have the same legal rights as men. In my lifetime, women do not earn equal pay for equal work compared with their male colleagues.

It saddens and frustrates me to realise that there's still a lot of work to do until our Church even begins to look like the reign of God as Jesus intended – as it is heaven. I remain hopeful.

## Women still suffering in Church

It is welcome news that Bishop Michael Malone, on behalf of the ACBC Office for the Participation of Women, has released a new parish kit on women's role in the Church for this year's International Women's Day. In his launching homily, Bishop Malone included these statements (by way of an apology?):

Deep injustice against women is still continuing in the Church ... women have suffered and do suffer in the Church ... Their place in the Church has not yet been sufficiently recognised, so a deep injustice is still being perpetrated against them ... Placing our trust in God in the fact of that injustice is one thing, but acknowledging our role in contributing to that injustice is even more important ... International Women's Day allows us to reflect honestly on how women are treated in both society and the Church. The first step in remedying any imbalance begins with me.

The kit also notes that 2009 marks the 10th anniversary of the report on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*. But a cynic would have to ask why such a kit (and apology) wasn't issued ten years ago! Whilst most women go about their work in all walks of life with a real sense of the feminine, the problem still lies with some men including clergy and the Vatican. Perhaps they are the ones who should receive the 'kit'!

Such kits have been produced by groups such as WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) for over twenty years. It would be interesting to hear what use (if any) will be made of these new kits within the parishes. From a combined parish where an article on women's ordination was censored from its newsletter on the grounds that 'it might upset some parishioners' – I won't hold my breath!

Margaret Knowlden  
Editor

## Letter to the Editor

As one who struggles very much with remaining a Catholic, or even a Christian come to that, I appreciate the work ARC is doing. It gives some hope. My concerns are with the traditional theistic theology and language of the church which also support and encourage an autonomous and powerful authoritarian approach to life as a Catholic. Matthew Fox, Richard Holloway, John Robinson and John Selby Spong put into words so much of what I think and feel (often outrage and loneliness). As Spong so rightly says, 'The heart can't worship what the mind rejects'. ARC and St Mary's, South Brisbane, are helping to change things, but there is such a long way to go. At 70, can I wait!?

James Hurley

# The Diaconate

George Ripon

The news that many of the Australian Dioceses are reviewing the role of the Diaconate led me to consider how deacons might become a part of the renewal process currently underway in the church. I did wonder how a role founded on a clear need in the early church and later abandoned over many centuries could be relevant in the third millennium.

As a resident of Melbourne I had the benefit of a document, *A Restored Diaconate*, published by the Archdiocese a few years ago. A helpful list of resources is provided with, as expected today, reference to many useful sites on the internet. Before commenting on the Melbourne document I decided to look at the early history of the diaconate and the role as defined in the documents of Vatican II.

Historically we go to Acts 6. Greek-speaking converts living outside Palestine complained to the Apostles that the widows living in their midst were not getting community support in the matter of alms and food. In those times the loss of a husband often left widows destitute. The disciples, aware of the importance of preaching the 'Good News' as commanded by Jesus, also accepted the importance of charitable concern for the needy. So, after prayer and discernment, they appointed assistants – initially the seven named in the Acts – to provide physical help to the needy. These became known as deacons and they later became involved in preaching, baptising and other spiritual ministries.

For whatever reasons, the Diaconate as a ministry fell into disuse.

It appears that, as the Church grew and the priesthood became established, there were enough priestly vocations to serve the church needs. Anyhow it faded. So we get to Vatican II and the Documents of the Council which included the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, (Paul VI 1964). This Encyclical deals with the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church. Chapter 3 deals with the Hierarchical Structure of the Church. This concentrates on the role of bishops and to a lesser extent on priests. Finally section 29 gets to deacons and it starts as follows:

'At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons upon whom hands are imposed not unto the priesthood but unto a ministry of service.' Among the duties are:

- To administer baptism solemnly
- To be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist
- To assist and bless marriages
- To bring Viaticum to the dying
- To read the Scriptures to the faithful
- To instruct and exhort the people
- To preside at the worship and prayer of the faithful
- To administer sacramentals
- To officiate at funeral and burial services

So much for history and Vatican II. But where are we at today? A quick look at the Melbourne situation where we find the following:-

- Deacons will be male and celibate (unless already married)
- Studies – four years (similar to priestly formation, including theology and canon law)
- He will be under the direction of the Bishop [Tradition: 'The eyes and ears of the Bishop']
- He will not be allowed to minister in his home parish.

It has always been a matter of concern to me that in so many ways our Church looks to the past to find solutions to problems of to-day.

The failure of attempts in the seventies to resurrect the diaconate should, perhaps, encourage us to think again. While I believe that 'Ministry' in the Church at all levels is long overdue for a good shake-up I will concentrate for the moment on the Diaconate. The Melbourne documents and other sources stress that the deacon is not a substitute for either a priest or a pastoral associate. So, by inference, we have a new and independent role within the hierarchy. Is this what we need or are there not better ways of using available skills and talents? I think there are.

Working from the ground up, at the parish level I believe that work should continue on the role of the Pastoral Associate. As the shortage of priests started to bite (late seventies/early eighties?) lay parishioners came forward with offers to help in the presbytery. Initially this involved answering the door and the phone, counting and banking the cash, paying the bills and organising maintenance etc. tasks previously performed by the priest, his assistant or a resident housekeeper. As it became clear that lay parishioners had much to offer in service to the local church, the Catholic Research Office for Pastoral Planning (CROPP) undertook research and consultation in this area. This work was continued under the Pastoral Leadership Board (PLB). Both these bodies were set up by the late Archbishop Frank Little, a leader in the spirit of Vatican II and a strong believer in consultation and listening.

Sadly, following the resignation of Archbishop Little, the initiatives of CROPP and the PLB went into recess. So we lost the opportunity for further development of the skills and talents available in all our local parishes. Local group discussion on the themes of 'Tomorrow's Church' and 'Hope for the New Millennium' became a thing of the past. I cannot remember when we last had a parish discussion group. The loss of voluntary help led, I believe, to two new developments: the first being the need for full-time, paid pastoral associates; the other was at the top level, to restore the diaconate. In the Church where the windows opened by John XXIII were closing, the latter clearly had appeal to the

Magisterium. So what are my concerns about the diaconate.

Before dealing with these I wish to acknowledge the work done behind the scenes by the Archdiocese prior to the issue of the documents. However, nothing in the sources indicates any consultation at grassroots level, (*The People of God - Lumen Gentium* Ch.2). I have concern in the following areas:

- Implied control by the (Arch)bishop
- The exclusion of women
- The rule of celibacy
- Prohibition on working in his own parish

Reading between the lines deacons will be very much under the 'Eye' of the bishop even in a parish situation. With the emphasis on the distinction between priests, deacons and pastoral associates, this relationship will need sensitive development in the future.

My greatest concern, however, is the exclusion of women from the diaconate. A note in the Diocesan documents acknowledges that the majority of pastoral associates are women. This also applies to the routine roles such as altar preparation, reading, special ministers, music, singing, liturgy etc. etc. So why not, in the third millennium, admit women to the diaconate? In special circumstances women can now perform the duties proposed for deacons: they can baptise, be wedding celebrants, preside at funerals, take Communion to the sick and aged, be readers and special ministers. So a plea to our leaders: Take the big step in 2009 and open the diaconate to women.

Most remarkable I find is the prohibition of a deacon serving in his home parish. I have always had a concern that

in our church (unlike any other) the local parish has no say in the appointment of a PP. A priest is 'sent' by the bishop with no consultation. I suspect that this may also apply to the priest himself. Now it appears that a deacon, a complete stranger, may also be 'sent'?? Why should a committed catholic with the desire to serve and the support of the Pastoral Council and the Parish Priest be refused acceptance because he or she wants to serve in the home parish?

It does not make sense.

Much has been written about celibacy and it is clear that for many centuries the church has benefited spiritually, financially and logistically from the dedication of our priests. However, if we are not getting the vocations, we must think again. I do at times wonder whether our bishops on their visits to Rome have conveyed the seriousness of the problem. Celibacy is a church law dating from the 12th century. Prior to this, priests were allowed to marry. One reason sometimes given for change was to prevent confusion between the priest's family property and church property.

As already indicated, there are many areas where I see the need for reform. But here I have focussed on the diaconate. I am sure there is a growing number of good deacons in service. It would be great to see women in this role serving in their home parishes. My final question is: do we need a degree in theology and canon law to serve those in need of ministry in our parishes in 2009?

Note: I could find no references to Deaconess as a formal role in the early church. The term was sometimes used for the wife of a married deacon or a woman who assisted other women preparing for baptism.

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## Letter published in *The Tablet* (06.01.2007)

**C**oncerning the ordination of women to the priesthood. Pope John Paul II's letter dated 3 May 1994 to all the bishops is the key document. Despite efforts to have this statement treated as infallible it lacks that extraordinary quality, and its subject matter therefore remains open to discussion within the Catholic community. The main reasons given by the Pope for continuing the current practice of not ordaining women might not be too unfairly summarized as: **'We will not because we cannot; we cannot because Our Lord did not, and because the Church following his example has never done so throughout the ages.'**

This reasoning being based on tradition is not lightly to be dismissed, but it may not take sufficiently into account how changing societal needs have allowed women to demonstrate their aptitude and skills in all walks of life. The disadvantages and disabilities from which they suffered in a more primitive society have gone. Other than in physical strength they are today in all respects at least the equal of men. They comprise half the Catholic population of the world, and more sedulously practise all the virtues, theological and cardinal, than do most men. At their best they are kind, strong, gentle, patient, humble and just downright good. They are the mothers who have nurtured their sons' vocation to the priesthood, and in the Anglican Church have shown that they themselves make excellent priests. We would also greatly benefit from having them in our Church".

*Shane Rees*

# Set In Stone – Is Big Sacred?

Ted Lambert

**M**y short answer is ‘No’ and so I am disappointed that we humans, in our pursuit of the Sacred, seem to be obsessed by size. My recent guided tour over the ubiquitous cobblestones from Rome through Florence to Venice set me to thinking.

The magnitude, the multitude, the magnificence of the erections into the sky of sacred stone edifices is overwhelming. Yet, without seeking to diminish the artistry, the colossal human endeavour, the strength of religious fervour, that entire array of stone thrusting skywards could now seem to be a clear message of mis-direction. The whole massive signal points to where God is NOT. God is not up there, at least no more than anywhere else. All that genius! All those centuries of effort! All that stone! All that waste?

Am I daring to belittle my species? As if war and genocide, substance abuse, nationhood hauteur and race, pride, etc. do not provide enough evidence of something seriously wrong with it and cry out for salvation? I acknowledge my own need for God in Christ. I am querying whether male authority over 2000 years has delivered the authentic means – or orchestrated mis-direction – set in stone.

I accept that what is done in ignorance can be done in good grace. Although there are a thousand stories from Rome to Venice to suggest otherwise in certain instances. Like the ruling family in one town who set out to build a cathedral larger than St Peter’s in Rome. Over 107 years in power they constructed a huge nave and were just about to construct commensurate transepts when they fell from power. The Pope made sure the project could not continue and other secular buildings soon occupied the ground where the transepts were to be. This story is not fictional. I inspected the length and height of the nave and worried at the missing transepts. Also, I am sure that the architects, artisans, masons and labourers all lived satisfactory Christian lives in their time.

I suppose we could seek to find other symbolism in these excrescences of stone that cover not only Italy but also Europe, and edge out into the New World. They join local Christian communities into one global community, don’t they? Good try. All that mass of stone looking up, all that soaring devotion is still mis-direction. God is not there. Millions of the faithful have sussed this and are living elsewhere. Only the male clerical caretakers and their fearful followers inhabit the cold, if beautiful, stone.

Perhaps because humans perceive themselves as puny they are fascinated by the big. Farmers who buy out neighbouring properties to plant more crops. Corporate takeovers abound. Economic systems crave growth.

Governments centralise power. Buildings, bridges, aircraft, ships and everything else grow in size. Big is better. Churches also have the bug for big: numbers of adherents, WYD, Papal influence in the world, numbers of ‘vocations’ to the priesthood and religious life, etc. Big tells a good story, but is it a story of the truly sacred? Or is it simply mis-direction?

Would Jesus have taken my journey? Perhaps not. In his own age he had something to say about Temples, their misuse and their destiny of destruction. Today Jesus might just travel to warn that big can be mis-direction. Anyway, with punished feet from all the cobblestones I walked, that is my observation. For God and the Sacred we must seek otherwise than big.

## Small and Sacred

**I**suggested above that devotion to the big has been/could be a waste of genius, inspiration and effort, yes, even of stone! Someone might call my bluff and ask ‘What, then?’

Perhaps small? Does God, can God live in small? Is the Incarnation an indication of God’s natural preference? St Paul more than hints so in Phil.6,2ff. What we consider an impossibly, outrageously big thing God thinks little of. Can small direct us to the sacred?

If you are a member of the Catholic Church this is almost impossible to imagine. The culture, the practice, the teaching breed faith and hope in the large machine continuing to produce loyal corporate members. Witness how very quickly Vatican II’s even slight bias towards the individual has been wobbled back into line. Shedding members in droves has not been too high a price to pay to restore ‘sacred’ order.

Meanwhile, those who hope for better things have been trying other ways. Small communities, small group and family masses, small prayer groups have offered millions a closer link to God and each other, another way of immersing in the sacred, a more personal basis for the good works that charity advises. Am I correct to intuit that these initiatives are waning? Perhaps *ARCvoice* could be advised of any such groups, for the encouragement of us all. ARC itself encourages local and regional groupings.

How can small groups communicate across distances and boundaries? Is it too much to expect that the Holy Spirit who lives in us all could achieve this, particularly in this time of mobile phones, wireless and satellite, internet and blog? Vatican Radio, after all, is now archaic and has no monopoly, either of the airwaves or of information. A central mouth-piece for big is no longer required and the ‘divine’ male

mandate for this is now tenuous. I have long thought that the dinning emphasis on central authority shows little belief and no trust in the Holy Spirit. Vatican II seemed to be heeding John XXIII's expressed wish for windows to be opened. Alas!

In my view another movement which inhibits growth in the Spirit began late in the seventeenth century and its influence continues. Prayer may be broadly categorised as vocal, meditative, contemplative and mystical. After an (artificial) scare – google 'Bossuet and Fenelon' for more – the Church in practice discouraged contemplative prayer as dangerous. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola (a four-week contemplative experience in essence) were used as a series of meditations in Retreat format. Millions of Catholics sat thinking on Bible and Gospel themes.

In my perception contemplative prayer is the birthright of every adult person. Meditation is an educational tool

rather than a prayer. Sitting listening to a lecturer, even a biblical one, is qualitatively different from sitting with Michelangelo's 'David' or Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa' or people on a street or a sunset, an ocean, a mountain view or even a thunderstorm. Art Galleries demonstrate my point. Some visitors sit on the central forms placed for their convenience. They are immersed in the sculpture or painting. Others with pencils and pads are copying, drawing. The experience of each group is qualitatively different.

What sort of experience do Catholic liturgies invite? Our Sunday Masses are performed in buildings that can seat hundreds and are considered more successful if they are filled to overflowing. What was the experience offered by WYD? I am all in favour of celebrations, they bring humans together and cheer them up. But I have a feeling that we need to change to small to find the focus, the openness to the Sacred, to God.



# The Sole Survivor

S.A.E. Reese

Over the years our Church's leaders have fashioned a defensive framework linked to an internal command structure potent to detect, expose and expel dissenters from within and repel attack from without. This process of expulsion and extirpation of other, possibly less harmful ones, has resulted in the only surviving internal heresy being the belief that our present heavily centralized control system is essential for the well-being of the Church; which it is not, but very much the contrary. The reason why this system was introduced, survived, flourished and now dominates Church affairs is due in part to extinct historical pressures, in part to having the support of those who enjoy the element of control that comes from exercising power, and in part to its tacit acceptance by those subject to it. In the past, more of them preferred to be told what they should do, were content to acquiesce in instructions rather than be guided by the promptings of their informed consciences and accept responsibility for their actions. Also they may have either lacked the confidence to be charitably critical of any ill-considered action by their leaders or mistakenly believed such criticism to be disrespectful.

Our Church is holy in its founder Jesus Christ, its sacraments, the central truths it preaches, the important moral virtues it upholds and in the lives of its saintly men and women. In its services there do occur those numinous moments when all heads bow in reverential silence aware of the presence of God amongst His people. Elsewhere, however, and far more frequently, irritation is created by what is manifestly the work of man, which being imperfect can properly be the subject of close and sometime justifiably critical consideration. These irritants include, above all others, the exclusion of the laity from the management and administration of the Church's affairs in which they have a legitimate and, where they will have to fund any concomitant expenditure, a particular interest. Presently, decisions reached in such matters lacking as they too often do any meaningful input from the laity cannot be said to represent the mind and will of the Church at large, and in this day and age may for that reason, if not ignored, be unlikely to receive anything other than a lukewarm reception followed by mere lip-service.

The rules and practices which in combination tend to bar the laity from participating effectively in the Church's administration have been developed and restated over the years. They now chiefly find formal expression in Canons 129 and 274 (1) which state that although the laity can cooperate in its exercise, only clerics can obtain offices the exercise of which requires the power of order or the power of ecclesiastical governance. All its members believe that our Church is based on divine revelation, but it is also a human institution, and as such of course it needs and has rules. The problem is that some of these rules have been

formulated not so much for the benefit of all in the furtherance of the Church's primary objectives of spreading God's word and saving souls, but for the convenience of those who make and thereafter seek to enforce them.

What is under consideration here is the science and practice of ecclesial government which as Bishop Geoffrey Robinson so rightly observed, "... is not always where the greatest beauty in the church is to be found". [*Confronting Power .... in the Catholic Church*, p.105]. Here no case is sought to be made for the laity to be allowed intervene in matters of faith, doctrine or morals, albeit there are cogent reasons why they should be consulted when newly framed dogmatic statements are under consideration. What *is* being advocated is that those of the laity who wish to involve themselves in the financial and other administrative affairs of the Church, particularly at parochial level, and have the necessary personal qualities, skills or experience to be helpful should be encouraged and exhorted to do so. Such is not always the case. Too many of our clergy are reluctant to invite their parishioners to participate fully in parochial administration, particularly when it comes to the allocation and expenditure of money. This despite the mandatory requirement of canon law [Can. 532] that: "... in each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish." Some of our priests give the impression that they still see the function of the laity as being principally or even solely, to pray, pay and obey.

It is not only the laity who have cause to complain of autocracy. No one impugns the Petrine primacy, even if a few look askance at that cosily symbiotic relationship between Pope and Cardinals where the former appoints the latter who from their number elect the former, but far too much is allowed to hinge on their decisions; severally or in unison they run the Vatican from where, it sometimes seems, they would wish to run the whole Church. Meanwhile the world's Bishops, successors to the Apostles, are treated by Peter's successor as if they were franchise holders in some global enterprise licensed to conduct their local operations as they see fit subject only to their doing so in strict accordance with the detailed instructions emanating from Head Office. To a degree the Bishops may themselves be responsible for their unduly subservient position; they should remember that the Holy Spirit came down individually on to every one of the Apostles who began to speak in different languages -and none sought Petrine permission so to do. The lesson there taught by the Holy Spirit is as relevant today as all those years ago; that there is always the one, divine unchanging message but to be universally understood it must be expressed in different words and ways for different people. Perhaps the Bishops should stand up more robustly to Rome, as Paul did to Peter in Jerusalem, and not allow the impression be given that in return for permission to

exercise some delegated power, they acquiesce in the great bulk of its being retained at and exercised solely from the centre by the Pope, or more commonly, in his name.

Over the millennia there has been an accelerating concentration of power in Rome achieved at the expense of diminishing the authority of local churches and the bishops who govern the dioceses within them. Those Bishops knowing from past experience of Rome's intransigent resistance to change are naturally enough reluctant to suggest alterations to the status quo that are unlikely to generate other than resentment. Bishops who used to be chosen from within and elected by their dioceses, are now subject to approval from the Vatican and the Pope freely appoints bishops as he thinks fit. General advice and even specific recommendations from the Curia in the choice of local Bishops can be beneficial, and therefore welcome if tending to strengthen unity, but not when they are conditioned more by church politics than Gospel virtues and without sufficient regard for the needs of a particular diocese. When a new Bishop is to be consecrated the final choice should, as in the past, reflect not Roman but local preference. Persistent knocking on the door is commended by Our Lord as the best way to persuade your friend to give you what you need, but the loudest knocking is useless if the one within is deaf: and there is none so deaf as those that will not hear. Until our local Bishops feel an irresistible pressure to claim a proper measure of freedom both in terms of how they are chosen and how they govern their dioceses which equals the pressure from above for stasis, 'no change' may continue to be the order of the day.

Is such pressure to be found? In the recent past the laity have been dismayed by the sinful criminality of a comparatively small number of paedophile priests and religious, dazed at the cost of recompensing their victims, and deeply disturbed at the way ecclesial power was used to conceal what had been going on and to protect the offenders from justice. Because no one, not even prelates, priests and religious, is perfect, all power mechanisms controlled by them need to be open to inspection by other than the operators and their superiors. Juvenal's rhetorical question about who is to keep an eye on those in charge awaits a reply from our Church. Recognition of that question as one requiring an answer, and having regard to how ecclesial power has been demonstrated to be capable of gross misuse justifies and requires our leaders to work towards:

- (1) having Rome release control over those matters that properly pertain to the local dioceses;
- (2) restoring the ancient, local electoral system for elevation to the episcopacy;
- (3) retrieving for every Bishop the full power and jurisdiction proper to that high office;
- (4) allowing the laity freedom, other than by way of their financial support, to contribute to a significant degree in the way the Church is run; thereby also would be provided a measure of invigilation that has been shown to be desirable.

If resistance to this movement for reform is successful the consequence will be a further drifting away in ever increasing numbers of those members of the laity who find their Church's control system engenders nothing but apathy, despair and anger. The old patristic phrase about there being no salvation outside the Church is no longer a shibboleth that will constrain the departure of those disaffected by their having been disregarded. Those that thus drift away into indifferentism, or worse, may well be saddened by what they have done; those whose attitude contributed to their departure most certainly should be.

To-day in Western Europe and generally throughout the English-speaking world the majority of Catholics have limited regard for other than democratic government. If the Church there is to flourish as it might, it needs to have regard for that fact and ensure as far as is consistent with its primary objectives, that its administrative functions are so organized as to welcome, not inhibit let alone prohibit, lay participation in them. To engage the laity to a greater degree in helping run church affairs is not only good by way of enriching their lives and invigorating the Church at large, but is becoming urgent. Mass attendance figures continue to slump year on year, congregations fall in numbers as their average age rises, and a decreasing number of ageing priests struggle to provide an acceptable level of service. The prognosis is not good: fewer Masses, by fewer priests, for fewer people in fewer churches, all this with a shortage of money becoming of ever greater concern. With a much increased lay involvement in the many administrative and financial responsibilities which presently weigh them down, the existing priesthood would have more time and energy to devote to pastoral duties. Such a regime might well encourage more young people than are currently coming forward, to try their vocations in the more sacerdotal role that would then be open to them. If the practising laity began to have such an increasingly pro-active function to perform in and for the Church there can be every expectation that this would of itself generate amongst their slacker brethren a greater enthusiasm for attending religious services and participating more fully in the Church's work of salvation.

SHANE REESE is a financial member of ARC in the U.K. He is a retired government lawyer with a special interest in Constitutional and Administrative Law. Although based on his experience in that country, much of what he says will resonate with those of us here in Australia, as elsewhere, who are struggling to bring our Church forward to meet the challenges of to-day. He welcomes comments on this article:

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## Book Review

## Why Go to Church? The Drama of the Eucharist

Timothy Radcliffe

Source: *The Tablet* 17 December 2008.

Review by Eamon Duffy (abridged version)

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book is an influential annual focus for devotional reading by thousands of Anglicans, used by both individuals and parish study groups. Rowan Williams' open-hearted invitation to Timothy Radcliffe to write the Lent book for 2009 is a sign that the ecumenical landscape is by no means so barren as we sometimes fear. And this Anglican hospitality has elicited a beautiful and often piercing meditation on the meaning of the Mass for human living.

Despite his subject matter, however, Radcliffe disclaims any intention of writing a work of eucharistic theology or a liturgical commentary. Instead, he uses the successive stages of the Sunday Mass as the basis for an extended meditation on the Christian life. The Liturgy of the Word becomes the basis for an examination of what it is to have faith, the offertory and eucharistic prayer for a meditation on hope, and the communion rite from the Our Father onwards to explore our encounter with God and one another in love.

The Mass for him is a drama into which we enter in order to discern the shape and meaning of human life itself, which otherwise might seem no more than "a punctual succession of joys and sorrows" - just one damn thing after another. We go to Mass not primarily to recall an event in the past, but to learn to live hopefully together towards the future. We encounter God there, in St Thomas Aquinas' words, not as a noun, but as verb, and Christ not merely risen but rising, homo resurgens. The worshipping community is a school of Christ-like living, an entry into Jesus' own costly self-giving. To recognise the Real Presence exposes our real absences to each other, in a society where even relationship is not gift, but commodified and priced. The task of the preacher is to proclaim the peace of God, but it is a peace which opens us to solidarity with the suffering of our afflicted brothers and sisters. To go to church, therefore, is not a comforting routine for the secure and incurious, but a place of expectation, challenge and growth: the appropriate headgear is not posh hats, but crash helmets.

Throughout the book, Radcliffe lightens and enriches his writing with insights drawn from remarkably wide and eclectic reading. Some of the absences seem as notable as the presences: plenty of St Thomas, of course, plenty of

Herbert McCabe, more surprisingly perhaps, plenty of Benedict XVI: but no Rahner, no von Balthasar, no John Paul II. The list of those drawn on includes of course minds encountered in the course of his Dominican theological formation, from St Thomas to Cornelius Ernst. Radcliffe's much-loved teacher, Geoffrey Preston, little known outside the Dominican order, provides a remarkable passage on the meaning of the eucharistic elements of bread and wine. They are both nourishment and the stuff of celebration - holidays and weddings and romantic dinners for two. But they are also the focus of "the organised selfishness of tariffs and price rings ... the breadline ... the bottle ... drunkenness, broken homes, sensuality, debt": and this too we lay upon the altar of the crucified.

This is a challenging but never puritanical book. Radcliffe underlines the cost of the eucharistic living, the often painful but always life-giving opening out to others involved in the attempt to be, like Jesus, truly human. But he never harps on about sins, since the Mass proclaims their forgiveness. Human imperfection is accepted as well as absolved at the table of the one who dined, by preference, with sinners: "God accepts our limited, fragile, forgetful loves if that is all we have to offer him now". So Radcliffe persuasively (and piquantly) uses Pope Benedict's exegesis of Peter's confession after the fish breakfast in Galilee to highlight the incongruity of refusing Communion to men and women in irregular marriages or in gay relationships: "if there is a place for Peter ... then there is a place for us all".

This is a serious but never a solemn book: not the least of its joys is the gallery of Dominican eccentrics who punctuate its pages. They include the learned but famously irritable Père Regemay, whom Radcliffe overheard in a Paris common room shouting angrily at one of his brethren, "Since I began to practise yoga I am CALM, I am CALM". Best of all is the ancient Oxford lay brother who, when Radcliffe offered him Communion with the usual words, "The Body of Christ", replied, simply, witheringly and with the accumulated wisdom of a long life lived eucharistically: "I know".

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## Book Review

Roy Williams: *God, Actually*

Why God probably exists  
 Why Jesus was probably divine  
 and

*Why the 'rational' objections to religion are unconvincing*

ABC Books, 2008 RRP: \$35.00

Many books about religion are written by practising religious who, lets face it, have a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* – their careers depend on it! There are of course exceptions (Paul Collins, Michael Morwood and Geoffrey Robinson) who have found to their cost what it means to criticise the Church.

So it is refreshing to find a book about religion whose author who is not only an Australian lay-person (with no interest in clerical advancement) but for most of his life was a self-proclaimed sceptic about Christianity. His faith conversion in his mid-thirties came via parenthood, prodigious reading and a life-changing illness. The back-cover blurb puts it concisely:

In this wide-ranging and provocative defence of Christianity, former lawyer Roy Williams contends that belief should be based on logical deductions from known facts; it is not a matter of blind faith. Using many examples drawn from science, politics, history, sociology and the arts, he tackles all the biggest questions by appealing to evidence and to reason. In doing so, he explains why the Bible remains profoundly relevant to life in the twenty-first century.

A recurring theme of the book is the vital place of doubt and uncertainty in God's creation. Rebutting the arguments of atheists such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, Williams explores the role of faith, which he considers a much-misunderstood concept.

I am sure that I am not alone amongst those Catholics reared on the old green Catechism in finding that in the post-Vatican II era my faith has received many severe batterings. Today there is an upsurge in public discussion of the 'religion question' and even atheists and agnostics are becoming more vocal. However, according to Williams, in the 2006 Census only 18.7 per cent of people classified themselves as having 'no religion'. He explains:

A good many Australians realise at some level that they do not know enough about Christianity, or any religion, to dismiss the notion of a deity out of hand, and they are reluctant to profess atheism ... That circumstance

gives rise to a big practical problem: ignorance, even among those who are otherwise well-educated.

It occurred to Williams 'that people with similar backgrounds ... might relate to a discussion about Christianity by someone like them'. The result is a very well-researched, readable and compelling explanation of the key elements of Christianity, including: The Physical Universe, The Human Mind (cognition and conscience), Love, Arguments against a Designing God, Jesus, The Resurrection, Suffering, Christianity and Politics, Other Religions, Heaven and Hell.

Passages which particularly appealed to me include:

- Dogmatism, a manifestation of pride, is a sin perpetrated all too often by religious advocates of every faith. In general, it is counter-productive. (p.14)
- Three remarkable features of the world strongly suggest to me that God must exist: the ordered complexity of the physical Universe; the unique faculties of the human mind; and love. There are solid grounds for thinking that these glorious phenomena are not accidental by-products of mindless natural forces, but were designed. (p.127)
- I am convinced that one thing that God does *not* especially admire or care about is ritual adherence to the formalities of religious observance – whatever the religion in question. (p.305)

The author draws on his own legal, analytic and partisan training to convincingly prove his argument, whilst still allowing sceptics to draw their own conclusions. His references include not only the Bible, but also numerous works of art, especially novels, poetry and films, as well as contemporary Australian events and personalities which make this a refreshing change from other books on religion.

I can only recommend that you do yourself a favour and buy or borrow this book – your Faith will indeed be the richer for it!

*Margaret Knowlden*



## Have your say!

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

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

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

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