



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
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Editorial

What can be done to revitalise the Catholic Church in Australia? What issues should we focus upon? How might the various organised groups seeking change help to take the Australian Church forward? These were some of the questions some forty-five keen Catholics addressed in Melbourne on 13th June, drawn together from several groups seeking change, the discussion being co-ordinated by “Catholics for Ministry”, the group established by Frank Purcell and Paul Collins.

Facilitated by Marilyn Hatton, Paul’s wife, the discussion moved through the topics of Church leadership and structure, the need to focus on the local Church, the irrelevance of so much of what is said and done in the eyes of younger people, the injustice done to many of society’s marginalised groups and the need to counteract the strong influence that conservative and fundamentalist groups have in preventing much needed change.

How can various energetic groups combine to deal with these issues? In this context, it is interesting to read Shane Reece’s letter to the Editor published in this issue. Naturally, in the period of a few hours it would be impossible to come up with a coherent plan of approach when the starting points in individual minds are so diverse. A summary of the day’s discussion has been prepared already and those who attended will embellish it by e-mail. Jim Taverne, Barbara Brannan and myself participated as your representatives and I presented some of the findings of the recent survey and the priorities expressed by ARC members. When the discussion material is in a more developed form we will share it with you.

The overwhelming sentiment expressed by this group of very committed people was the need to have accountability in the Church for decisions taken by the hierarchy, the highest priority also for those ARC members who participated in the survey. Many individuals were very disillusioned with hierarchical responses to sexual abuse, homosexuality, non-practising Catholics, leadership roles for women, etc. Although it was agreed that there was need for some form of summit or focus through the use of the Internet to highlight for supportive Australian bishops how much we desired change, no conclusion on this was reached at this stage.

It was very interesting to observe the anxiety expressed by the group about change. My feeling was that, in the main, most

individuals wanted to change something that was dear to them personally, yet gave indications they would resist change in many other areas that had become so much a part of what they identified as “Catholic”. Many were concerned about passing the faith on to the next generation without being able to articulate what they meant by this. The second highest priority for ARC survey respondents was “more relevant expressions of what we believe”. This issue did not even rate at the Melbourne meeting and, in fact, the suggestion that it not be a focus was given tacit consent. I don’t know what most thought the next generation is likely to believe as “the faith” is passed on to them, but unless serious thought is given to this, better Church structures and decision making will largely be relevant only for the diminishing numbers of elderly Catholics in the Australian Church.

John Buggy

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ARC Survey No.3

Creed Statements and Priorities for Change

Our representatives who attended the workshop in Melbourne hosted by “Catholics for Ministry” needed some indication of ARC members’ preferences about the topics to be addressed. Given the need for immediate response we sent this survey out to everyone who had previously given us an e-mail address. We have included the questionnaire with this issue and ask that you complete it and return it if you had not been previously contacted. We also wished to gauge members’ thoughts about credal statements as part of an ongoing discussion. We are very grateful for so many quick responses. Although members identified themselves, owing to their response through e-mail, no information will be recorded or published that associates any response with particular individuals.

Up to 12th June, at the time of this preliminary analysis, we had gained 52 responses and we will update the analysis as further responses are obtained. This is most helpful in enabling us to represent the thoughts and priorities of our members.

The results of the Priorities for Strategy were in order of preference:

1. Accountability of the Church for its decisions
2. Accountability for what is preached and taught
3. More relevant expressions of what we believe
4. Need for married priests/women priests
5. More relevant celebration of Sacraments
6. Accountability of the Church for its finances and spending

The first preference was strongly supported, 2 and 3 were similar in theme and combined gained similar support. Much less emphasis was placed on the need for married and women priests and the last two were given markedly least priority.

It would be important to gain more respondents to the survey and, if we could do so, then we will do the analysis again. We urge all members to do so.

Statements relating to what we believe

Fifty-two responses were received up to the time that this analysis was compiled. All respondents were ARC members and included some priests and religious. The analysis of the responses to each of the thirty-three credal statements brought out some interesting observations. Admittedly, they were “raw” statements allowing no opportunity for respondents to qualify “how” they believed or did not believe. But most statements are the words repeated every week at Mass or in other Catholic liturgy. The following is a summary of the main trends that are in evidence.

Almost all respondents saw their faith as being in things unseen as expressed by St Paul and not in what the Church tells them to believe. 98% do not believe that original sin came from first parents and 73% do not believe that original sin alienated humans from God. The notion of the need for blood sacrifice and Jesus dying on the cross to reconcile us is not supported by over 66% of the respondents. However, belief in the existence of sin is quite strong (83%).

Although the notion of God as the Creator and Spirit abiding with us is universally believed in, the notion of God as a revealed Trinity is only supported by 50% of respondents, with a definite preference for simply seeing God as the Holy Spirit. There is much less support for understanding Jesus as risen in a physical body (only 14%), but significant belief in his risen glorified body (66%). A similar support is expressed for life as everlasting.

The opportunity was given to respondents to abstain from answering any question and a particular pattern emerged with this. The highest number of abstentions was for the statements that could be considered “theological” in their expression. Jesus as “begotten not made”, the Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son”, Jesus “is seated at the right hand of the Father”, Mary “conceived without sin”, etc. were statements in this category. We cannot conclude as to why respondents abstained from indicating their belief or otherwise in relation to these, but, coupled with those who stated their disbelief, the result was that less than 33% of respondents felt able to state that they believed in them in this survey.

It is accepted that many of the respondents may want to qualify how they believe or refrain from belief in relation to the statements. That is why strong conclusions cannot be drawn. However, it does indicate that new forms of expression are very much needed in our prayers and liturgy that resonate with the developing spirituality of Catholics vitally interested in their faith. The survey also gives an indication as to why the same people placed the accountability for what is preached and taught so high on the priority list of topics to be considered when addressing the need for change.

John Buggy

Where I Stand

Paul Denny

Over approximately four years, in reaching a mature faith, I have changed (through a study of modern biblical evidence, and the writings of well-informed writers like Diarmuid O'Murchu and Michael Morwood) from being a daily Mass-attender to being close to retirement as a Catholic, investing in spirituality. For this reason I have nothing but compassion for those still following traditional beliefs. I express here mainly my views on the hierarchy's *doctrine* (not so much structure or practice).

I believe in the one God, and I hope I always will. The Trinity I see as the hierarchy's invention. My god is not the god of the Bible: an elsewhere god, demanding, bloodthirsty, cruel and conditionally forgiving. My god is an everywhere god, friendly, benevolent, compassionate, who forgives sins ('straying from the mark') spontaneously. My god is not a clockwork god, winding up the universe and letting it run. My god is Spirit-power, co-evolving with, and in intimate relationship with everyone and everything in the universe. This universe is alive, wise, collaborative and self-adjusting, although it may appear messy to us.

My god does not have favourites/chosen ones, and inspires (persuasively but not coercively) everyone (of every and of no religion) equally. This means that no religion or group or individual (including Jesus and Mary) is 'chosen' above others.

The hierarchy is fallible, as are all humans. With the collapse of Infallibility and Original Sin (to name just two doctrines), the main credibility I now see in the Bible is the wisdom of the Sapiential Books, and perhaps the parables attributed to the prophet (i.e. one who interprets contemporary events wisely) Jesus.

The hierarchy in the church is a self-appointed exclusive male club, saturated with patriarchy, dualism and clericalism. The symbolic and metaphorical language (especially midrash) of the Bible seems lost on the hierarchy, and we – mostly unwittingly – have been duped with face value interpretations purveyed by the hierarchy (not necessarily consciously or deliberately).

These doctrinal errors are being discovered by modern theologians, but most are too afraid to speak out: they would stand to lose their jobs, since most are employed by the church.

I would be keen to hear readers' views on any or all of the above

Paul is a former Christian Brother, married with two children. He has studied extensively the doctrine of the church and is now seriously engaged in spirituality.

Letter to the Editor

It concerns me that there are so many unaffiliated reform associations scattered throughout the world. I know of *Voice of the Faithful*, *We are Church*, *Future Church*, *Call to Action*, *Catholics for a Changing Church*, *Movement for Married Priests*, *Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, and no doubt there will be many others. I am a member of three of these bodies but as annual renewal comes up I intend to leave all but *ARCvoice*. It seems to me to speak clearly, strongly but in a quiet voice more likely to win over rather than seek to overcome which in my experience fails to extinguish but rather generates opposition; and at my age I just do not have the energy to help turn more than one wheel!

I would love to see all these separate national associations federated into one body. Their particular objectives may differ but they have in common the need to persuade the Bishops of the national churches to see that the way things are managed must change. They have the wit if not, as yet, the courage to take on Rome (which suffers from gigantism) and could use their latent power to force through such reforms as are necessary to restore to local churches and their leaders that measure of autonomy essential for them to survive let alone flourish.

What most saddens me about our Church is when I compare the beautiful thing it was in the early days with what it has become; largely, I believe, because of long years of malign papal influence. The problem, as in so many aspects of human life, is that too much power is held by too few people, and in our case those who possess that power appear to have abandoned belief in favour of certainty and whose consequential dogmatism in matters of government has led to our oppression.

Shane Reese

Hope Too Survives

S.A.E. Reese

Common parlance has borrowed from the architect's vocabulary the useful phrase, 'form follows function', but that is not an immutable rule, and our Church's history demonstrates how a changing form can precede and modify function. What Our Lord founded here on earth started as a fellowship of small communities with locally chosen leaders and their ardent followers unified in love and truth under the headship of Peter's early successors. But over the millennia its form of government has degenerated into what can fairly be described as a heavily centralised oligarchy with a pronounced autocratic tendency. Subsequent to that change, what is now a huge global organisation has for many of its members ceased to be a real home with a family atmosphere, and become more like a barracks; a place where they have nothing much, if anything, to do with the way things are run, lose any real sense of identity with the totality of their Church, fall victims to *ennui* and begin to drift away; a trend which it is hoped can be reversed by re-shaping, or re-forming, the Church so as to revitalise them and encourage others to join our Church. The ways and means now being considered, whereby it is hoped that reform will be achieved, have to do with discipline not doctrine, and not the sacraments but with form and function at the more mundane level. Reform will call for the concerted and sustained efforts of the laity: helped and encouraged by, and under the *aegis* of, our local leaders without whose involvement nothing will change other than an accelerated decline in numbers, lay and clerical.

In a previous issue an article entitled 'The Sole Survivor' considered what organisational changes were believed to be necessary for our Church to flourish in to-day's world. They were that Rome should intervene less in matters properly pertaining to local dioceses, the local electoral system for elevation to the episcopacy be reinstated, the full powers proper to that high office be restored, and the laity are allowed and encouraged to participate more widely in the non-doctrinal affairs of our Church. There were no great expectations that any of these reforms would be introduced very rapidly but it was posited that, since our Bishops retain sufficient authority to be able to make effective representations to Rome, they might soon be willing to do so. Although often reluctant to move forward, all the more so if, as was proposed, it would be required to accept something of a self-denying ordinance, Rome will at least listen to the Bishops. They are the ones, the only ones, able to present a case for change that can be both irresistibly persuasive in content and command that respectful hearing due to the apostolic office held by its advocates. They will see it as their duty to make representations if themselves convinced that such changes are essential for the well-being of the Church to which we all belong. What can we do to help that happen?

It is believed that further good may yet come from the paedophile scandal which so rocked, and continues to reverberate throughout the Church. It dispelled any remnants of the dangerous myth that every priest and religious is as pure as nearly all of them actually are, and, far more importantly, by demonstrating how ecclesial power had been misused so as to conceal facts and protect wrong-doers from justice, and might persuade the hierarchy that it was time to take corrective action. To their credit, to a degree, they have. Following diligent enquiry, new procedures have been widely set up that are designed to strengthen in every way possible defences against child abuse. That is highly commendable but, no matter how well constructed and carefully monitored those systems may be, they do not tackle the major problem. This is not the comparative rarity of deviant priests (albeit recompensing their victims has proved ruinously expensive) but the continuing existence of a self-regarding, self-policing bureaucracy largely closed to the laity and never scrutinised by independent inspectors reporting to others than those who run the system; a function all the more important where, as here, that system is characterised by an undue measure of secrecy.

It must be emphasised that these covert procedures and operations were neither introduced nor developed so that those using them might indulge in forms of non-feasance, misfeasance or even malfeasance, but solely lest any matters intended to be kept in-house should, if made public, be used by its enemies to expose our Church to criticism. This undue sensitivity to criticism is a comparatively modern weakness. Archbishop Quinlan in his 'The Reform of the Papacy' (p.47), ascribes it to the Reformation. '*Because of the strident rejection by the Reformers of substantive elements of Church life and teaching, discomfort with use of the word 'reform' and grim resistance to criticism developed within the Catholic Church.*' It is time to revert to those sturdier days prior to the sixteenth century when criticism '*was robust and forthright. Yet it was done within the framework of love for the Church and respect for the papal and priestly office.*' (*loc.cit.* P. 46). The poet Dryden tells us somewhere that, '*... secrets are edged tools, And must be kept from children and from fools.*' To-day's laity are neither of these. They resent their Church hiding information from them. They see how such a practice lends itself to being used as a control mechanism to funnel power into the centre and to conceal what, in an open environment, would more easily be perceived to be various levels of wrong-doing, from the trivial to the most grievous.

Lay members of our Church recognise and totally accept the special position occupied by the clergy and hierarchy, but today there is little support for the old notion that ours is essentially an unequal society in which the one duty of the laity is to allow themselves to be led, and like a docile flock to follow the Pastors. The laity can no longer be treated

as though they were docile sheep, but one of our Church's problems is the continuing general passivity of so many of them. They do not complain openly, often enough, although they can be heard grumbling, frequently enough, under their breath about things in the Church that upset or annoy them. This reticence may in part stem from a mistaken belief that the hierarchy would take umbrage at any fault-finding or condemn it as disloyalty. In truth most of the clergy and the hierarchy welcome such feedback and it is unjust to accuse them of inaction or resistance to change if they have not had brought to their attention often enough, for long enough and with sufficient clarity any matters that are of significant concern to a significant number of the laity. It does not necessarily follow that they will accept all such complaints or, even when they do, that they will take whatever action is necessary to implement our desires. They may have a different point of view based on their experience but, when any differences of opinion between 'leaders' and 'led' become the subject of regular dialogue and reasoned debate, our Church will have taken an immense step towards freeing itself from the chains of its anachronistic procedures.

The parish is the very base of the Church's structure and to meet all its needs is the first, indeed essential, step in any reform. Its greatest need is to be allowed to remain in existence. As there are now fewer priests and smaller congregations than formerly, some dioceses are considering or have already implemented proposals to close down some churches, sell off the land and amalgamate the former parishes. Such actions call for the most serious thought by those who make them. For even if there have to be fewer centres where Mass is available, to order or, from a position of authority, acquiesce in the extinction of even one small Eucharist community must indeed be a dreadful and repugnant decision, justified only by irresistible pressure. The priority for all surviving parishes has to be the introduction and regular use of a tri-partite system of communication linking together (1) the lay members of every parish with one another, (2) every parish priest with his parishioners and (3) every parish with its diocese. Not all that common, but likely to be of benefit, is the general parish meeting, not necessarily attended by the parish priest, where members of Sunday's different congregations interested enough to do so can come together of an occasional weekday evening at their volition to discuss matters of concern to them and pass on any suggestions to members of the canonically-approved pastoral council or finance committee. Some parishes know nothing of any such bodies and lack any suitable place in which they might meet. Everywhere, all these things should be brought into being forthwith so that the parochial voice can be assembled, practised in debate towards attaining consensus, and able to express its views both courteously and with convincing clarity.

Since our Bishops are the linchpins in all of this, and the only real nexus between people and Pope, and since the parish is where the Church exists in its millions, celebrates the Eucharist, lives out the Faith in loving, self-helping communities, raises the Catholic families of the future and

has nurtured the leaders of today, there is need for them to be in touch: formally, firmly and frequently. It is imperative that there be an easy-tread, solidly constructed staircase directly connecting parishioners at their level with their Bishop at his so that the two can meet and communicate directly as often as is considered desirable. If Rome has on occasion revealed a fallibility in matters non-doctrinal it might expect to be highly rated for its steady, richly varied output of exhortations, commands, demands, strictures and admonitions: all no doubt intended to guide the Faithful heavenwards – even if they are too often couched in terms so turgid as to discourage all but the most zealous. Concerning its response to complaints, objections or suggestions from the lower echelons, Rome's rating has to be a disappointing 'could do better'; much, much better. The episcopacy, however, has generally demonstrated a real willingness to listen and where possible to act upon what their people say to them. If they in turn can persuade Rome to budge, so that they themselves regain their full apostolic authority and the laity are allowed to take up a more prominent role in the Church's administrative processes, that would indeed be a result well worth all the time and effort required to achieve it. The laity's enthusiasm and grateful response for such enhancement which would enable them to become more fully committed, useful – and happier – members of their Church. This would almost certainly reflect not only in higher attendance at its services but also in providing much greater financial and other support.

If then we all pray constantly and work tirelessly, there is the distinct possibility that in the lives of some of us there will be:

1. a less interventionist Rome whose most responsible task will be, as it originally was, to keep the Church unified by acting as court of last resort in settling disputes – not in creating new ones;
2. every diocese led by the one chosen by that diocese, with Rome's approval only to be withheld for grave cause shown and not because, for whatever reason, it might prefer another;
3. all Catholics of good standing in their parish having some say in the choice of their next Bishop to be elected from a short list of candidates compiled by, and ideally from, the local clergy;
4. proper consideration being given to ordaining women to the priesthood and not barring them because it has not been done before. Times change; people change; needs change. Disciplinary rules need to be changed.
5. married priests additional to those who were formerly married Anglican clergy as well as those who were laicised because they married;
6. an end to all those closed channels, hidden agenda and secret instructions, and with them the maladministration which has caused such damage to our Church's reputation; and continues so to do. □

The Journey

Kerry Gonzales

For the last little while my journey has involved moving house, with downsizing thrown in for good measure – not something I would recommend! So I have been out of the loop with current happenings and to be honest I am not a big fan of ‘You Tube’. However a friend got me to watch the clip of Susan Boyle singing on “Britain’s Got Talent 2009”. Now, I had a fair idea of what was coming but it was still fascinating watching, both Susan and the crowd and judges. I now have it on my desktop and have watched it quite a few times. Without fail, I am both elated and shamed. I am elated by the contestant and her performance, as much by its beauty as its surprise. Yet, I am also shamed by the initial reactions of the crowd to the outward appearance of Susan and their preconceived notion of her talent or lack thereof. But I am also shamed because in my heart of hearts I suspect that I too would have been one of the jeering crowd. It is easy to applaud once we have had a demonstration of the talent within, but much harder to suspend judgment and wait in anticipation that whatever talent is manifest will be a mark of the person within, rather than evidence of the packaging. I suspect that the crucifixion was perhaps the ancient world’s precursor to modern day reality television!

I have a vision, which I would like some entrepreneur to pick up, making me rich and famous in the process, of our very own “The Catholic Church’s Got Talent 2009”. The mind boggles at the sort of talent that could be found! The Pope could be the judge who is often a bit bemused by the young talent, unsure whether they are good or not, or perhaps even what they are on about. Our own Cardinal could be the hard-to-please judge whose acerbic wit is an audience pleaser. Of course we would not have any women judges, so the third spot could perhaps go to a politician or some other luminary who has the correct credentials. It goes without saying that there would of course be no dissenters on the judging panel as this would lead to confusion and the chance of voting for someone who does not have the acceptable talent. It may be that a few doubtfuls might get through the audition process, but rest assured the committed and powerful judges would soon put paid to those unwelcome individuals. The big prize might be a week’s holiday in the Vatican, a private lunch with the man himself (no not God!) and a few indulgences thrown in for good measure.

Then of course, there is the audience. No shortage of contenders there. First call could go out to all those new “bums on seats” generated by World Youth Day. Next, anyone able secretly to operate a cassette player or camera

phone would be most welcome. Knowing the address of the Papal Nuncio would also be a favourable attribute. Gay and lesbians would indeed be vetted at the stage door, as would a multitude of others. Still that leaves a cast of thousands who are very adept at following such cues as “clap now” and “booooo”. Hang on, I think those same people are also the contestants!

Seriously though the Catholic Church in this day and age does share some disturbing qualities with the worst aspects of reality television and perhaps humanity’s own baser instincts. Like the audience, our Church leaders are content to judge the faithful on a very superficial level. As far as the Church is concerned, we are what we are perceived to be i.e. woman = no place in the decision-making processes, gay = damned for all eternity. Obviously the Church’s position on such things is not as clear-cut and there are many examples, I feel a growing number of examples, of clergy and faithful prepared to work outside the box of rules delivered from above. But, the face of the Church, be it Papal or local, seems intent of proving that the rules are the rules, are the rules...

How surprised and how enriched the Catholic Church could be if it looked to the sacredness and fidelity within. Instead of rushing to label, expel and crush the voices that rise from within, the Church would have much to gain from exploring the depth of talent available at hand – talent that is yearning to be used in the service of a Catholic Church that is willing and able to suspend the rule of law and develop the law of loving acceptance. Why is it so hard?

The lives of baptised Catholics, in fact all people, are sacred. How can we be a church that vigorously defends the foetus, staunchly stands against euthanasia, yet seems to have forgotten the journey in between. For all of us, that journey is a rich tapestry of experiences, both minor and catastrophic, yet mostly life-giving and life-altering, in both positive and negative ways. We as individuals and as Catholics are the sum of all our actions and relationships, and these ebb and flow throughout our lives, gaining and losing importance in response to our current life situation and understandings. Yet, the Catholic Church, which is made up of such individuals, is still a church set in stone – if only it were set in the stone of the ten commandments! There is no sense of ebb and flow within the church, unless you consider the flow of people away from the church in the west. For me, relationship with God is easy. It is the relationships within the church that are difficult, especially when I find myself constantly in

disagreement with the dogmatic positions taken by the church on such issues as condoms and AIDS. How can the Catholic Church grow and reach out as a strong and credible leader within the world when its own house is in such disarray?

The Church, of course, would not agree that it is in disarray, but that for me is just another example of burying its head in the sand until the problems (i.e. dissenters) go away. In most cases they do, as it is such a joyless activity trying to find some semblance of hope within the current structures. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary a "sacrament" is "a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality". So, through our baptism, Catholics evidence this sign or symbol and nurture within themselves the actual spiritual reality. The evidence of this spiritual reality can easily be seen by those who look beyond the label, who see the love and commitment typical of a marriage in the relationships of gay people, or the depth of spirituality lurking behind the body piercing and dress of young and socially aware people. Our church needs to take the time to really look at who they condemn and why. Then perhaps the talent inherent in all marginalised Catholics will be seen, respected and encompassed.

So life is a journey and we should not judge its entirety by a few specific actions and events along the way. Catholic Church history itself is rich, complex and often less than God-like – yet that does not negate the vibrant and robust Church that can be such a force for good in this troubled world. So, ultimately our current church leaders need to let St Peter do his job and leave our chances at the afterlife to the full picture that we bring to the Pearly Gates. For:

Birth is a beginning
and death a destination
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
and youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
and ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to desecration
and then perhaps to wisdom.
From weakness to strength or
from strength to weakness
and often back again;
From health to sickness
and we pray to health again.
From offence to forgiveness
from loneliness to love
from joy to gratitude
from pain to compassion
from grief to understanding
from fear to faith.
From defeat to defeat to defeat
until looking backwards or ahead
We see that victory lies not
at some high point along the way
but in having made the journey
step by step
a sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning
and death a destination
And life is a journey;
A sacred journey to life everlasting

Rabbi Alvin I. Fine

Catholic Prayers of the Faithful – for the deceased, sick or troubled – are generally along the lines of asking for special favours and telling God what to do. It seems that there is a need for greater reflection on the meaning of what is actually being said. Here a Jewish Rabbi suggests a new direction for prayer.

We Cannot Merely Pray to You O God

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war:
for we know that You have made the world in a way
that we must find our own paths to peace
within ourselves and with our neighbours.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation:
for You have already given us the resources
with which to feed the entire world
if we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice:
for you have already given us eyes
with which to see the good in all people
if we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair:
for You have already given us the power
to clear away slums and to give hope
if we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease:
for you have already given us great minds
with which to search out cures and healing
if we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray to You instead, O God:
for strength, determination, and willpower,
to do instead of just to pray,
to become instead of merely to wish.

Jack Riemer, Likrat Shabbat, from:
When Bad Things Happen to Good People
Harold S Kushner NY: Avon Books, 1983, P118.

Off-Roading at Leichhardt

Alan Holroyd

History records the lives and events of people over time that can be seen as a series of threads that can be fashioned into a fabric of life story. Storytellers have used this weaving technique forever, where garments become metaphors – such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Technicolour Dream Coat*, the old Hollywood epic, *The Robe*, and in *Man of La Mancha* Don Quixote insisted that a shaving basin was the shining helmet of Mambrino! The art house movie *The Mission*, featured the hero scrambling for his life up the sides of an enormous waterfall and to succeed, to reach his destination, to save his life and his soul, he had to shed his armour – reluctantly, piece by piece, so that ultimately, reaching the top exhausted, he was almost naked but had found his true self and his real God. Writers, poets and artists all use the metaphor to exercise the mind of their audience. In art, the Italians have the expression, *trompe l'oeil*, that is, a painting meant to deceive the eye. Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel is a case in point where some real gems are hard to find, intended to be worked for – and then found.

Ted Lambert's article in the March 2009 *ARCvoice* reflected his visit to Italy and the big stones of the Vatican City and questioned our vision of church. My travels in Italy left me spellbound and like Ted, apprehensive at the enormity and grandiosity of the religious buildings. In the December 08 issue of *ARCvoice* I wrote about the amazing artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini who, like Michelangelo, strove to express the immensity of the Catholic God they believed in. Both men were architects as well as artists and so at the behest of the popes who, even then, had to battle with thousands of visitors coming to the already overcrowded city of Rome and the Vatican. To accommodate the people of the church, the gigantic building of St Peter's was commissioned and built. Michelangelo's dome is a masterpiece of architecture and later, Gian Bernini's grand spiralling marquee that covers

the main altar – the Baldacchino followed by his dazzling Cathedra Petri, the highly decorated window frame that features the only stained glass in St Peter's – whose splendour celebrates the distant roots of the Catholic faith. Huge masterworks by two men striving to express the immeasurability of the immortal Creator they believed in.

Well before going to Rome I visited the Jenolan Caves in the mountains beyond Sydney and in a small group at night was led down into one of the least visited caves where the lights were turned out and we stood there in total darkness and almost complete silence in a place perhaps millions of years old. I've also visited the Nullarbor Plain in South Australia where we drove 50

kms on a narrow dirt road. Standing on the roadside, the scrubby ground cover was up to my knees, nothing else – apart from the road that disappeared into a vanishing point on the horizon. Absolutely nothing and no one. 360 degrees of flat earth. I admit to feeling minute, scared and rather overawed by these experiences. And I did think of God, of creation, of evolution

and our small place on this planet, in this universe. As an artist, therefore, I can understand the urge to push into bigness when trying to visualise the mystery of a creative being far beyond all of this.

In 1601 and later in 1606, the famous Italian Baroque artist Caravaggio painted two works called Supper at Emmaus. The first is a remarkable painting showing Jesus and three men at a table with a simple spread of food ready for a meal. Mark's Gospel (16:12) writes that Jesus is said to have appeared to them 'in a different form', which may be why he is depicted young and beardless. The second work shows a woman at the table and is a much darker, sombre scene. Caravaggio's works were and remain controversial and there is still conjecture as to the



meanings and intent of the artist. However, informed commentary is that these paintings try to convey the sublime interrupting the daily routine, that Jesus could enter our daily lives. The first portrays a glorious, dynamic Jesus and '...the play of light refracted through glass and wine and water...' We all know that this was foundation stone, a 'big' episode in the revelation of Jesus, the Christ, yet portrayed in a way ordinary people could relate to. Well, that was the hope of Caravaggio, in contrast to the lofty mysticism of Michelangelo and Bernini.

Café Bones is in a leash-free area for dogs at Leichhardt in Sydney where one side has a canal and the other an unused railway siding where a winding path lined by shade trees emerges from under a walk-way tunnel. My wife, little grandson and our young dog were setting off for a run-around and a coffee. It was our first visit. Because of the distance from the car park, I needed my wheelchair. As we loaded up for the walk, Charlie insisted on sitting on Grandpa's lap while Millie the dog suddenly took off! Chaos ensued until Lorraine came to the rescue and we

made our way to the railway tunnel. Emerging from there we found a fork in the trail; the right turn wended into the trees while the left crossed the curved bridge over the canal. I waited in my chair while Lorraine crossed the bridge and turned left. Meanwhile, two cyclists whizzed past and disappeared. A minute later, one returned, a pretty young woman who stopped and asked if I needed a push over the bridge. I expressed my appreciation for her kindness and explained that we were looking for the café and my wife was searching over the bridge. The young woman promptly rode after Lorraine, caught up with her and gave directions: turn back, turn right before the bridge and Café Bones was a short way beyond the trees. She turned her cycle, rode on back past me and waved as she went. My companions returned a minute or so later, we took the right pathway and, thanks to this young lady, we enjoyed our stay at Café Bones.

I think that this incident confirms that the identity of Jesus appears in varying forms, in Rome, Emmaus, the Nullarbor and Leichhardt. □

Does God Create Religion, or Religion Create God?

This is the theme for a full day gathering with Dr. Val Webb, the author of *Like Catching Water in a Net*. As well as having written several other publications, Dr. Webb is a teacher, artist, scientist and theologian. In the course of her address, she will revisit a question asked for centuries. It is still alive and well in contemporary religious debates with various conclusions having been reached by such writers as Dawkins, Cupitt, Spong and the Process Theologians. She will outline some of the history of the above subject. She will also focus on the shape of the question for today's progressive religious thinkers and ask whether with our various re-interpretations of God, we virtually re-interpret God out of the picture altogether!

PLACE AND TIME
SYDNEY ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 2009
9.30 am till 4.30 pm

At the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, four minutes walk from Milsons Point Station. Limited parking only is available in surrounding streets. Participants will gather in the courtyard at the rear of the premises and proceed to The Gallery at 10 am.

REGISTRATION \$50, Early Bird \$40.00

Early Bird registrations must be received before July 1. Applications close on Saturday, August 15. Cost includes morning and afternoon tea and sandwich lunch. Registrations may be sent to:

The Secretary, Centre for Progressive Religious Thought, Sydney,
 22 Badajoz Road, Ryde, NSW, 2112
 Enquiries: 0405758116 CPRT Website: <www.progressivereligion.org.au>

Why can't we have a say in the election of our bishops and priests?

George Ripon

In March 2006, an article of mine was published on this subject in OnlineCatholics and later published in *ARCvoice* (June 2006 – pdf version). However, sad to say, the Church has not responded so I feel the need to have another go, me the eternal optimist! Since then, however, the situation has if anything got worse. See the recent attempt by Rome to promote Fr Gerhard Wagner as Auxiliary Bishop of Linz. The names submitted by the usual mysterious process were ignored in favour of a personal friend of Benedict XVI. The outcry from all over Austria led Wagner to withdraw. Worse still, the lifting of excommunication against four SSPX bishops bodes ill for the future. Why is there such appeasement of the ultra-right? If Rome gets away with this will we see these bishops rewarded with plum diocesan appointments, watch this space!! There is a saying about 'bad things happening when good people don't speak out'. So is it time to speak out? I think it is. [Luke 19, 39]

Before returning to my pet theme on the 'Election of Bishops' I asked myself two questions, the first being, do we need bishops at all? Three major local churches – the Uniting, Baptists and the Churches of Christ – survive well without bishops. However, we and others still have them, for the moment! So we will proceed accordingly. My second question and a more difficult one is what is the role of a bishop in the third millennium? What should we, the people, expect of them? Is it good enough to go round confirming, with occasional parish visitations and relaying Vatican inspired pronouncements? In all honesty I think we deserve better. For a start, as a side issue I would get rid of the Mitre, the big stick, Crozier and the Cappa Magna (The great Cloak). I see no place for these ancient symbols of triumphalism in this day and age. Many of our bishops have settled into routines with up-market accommodation (but no longer palaces as in times past). A bishop needs to be a man of the people, moving among them and hearing their concerns first hand. Time for the 'silence of the lambs' to come to an end...

One of the weaknesses in our present system lies in the appointment of bishops. While we have many good bishops, many others are weak and conscious of their direct appointment by Rome and afraid to rock the boat. We deserve better and an open process giving the faithful

a say could achieve this. Peter was given the job of feeding the sheep and the lambs. I think it is time for the 'silence of the lambs' to come to an end. After all the church is founded on the people of God in the pews whose financial contributions fund the 'Ad Limina' visits of our bishops to Rome. So we deserve a voice in appointing them. Imagine a Pastoral letter from the local bishop saying: 'In three months time I will be going to Rome. Between now and then I will be visiting every parish in the Diocese to hear from the people and the parish clergy on your problems and hopes. These I will take to Rome on your behalf.'

So how could we be involved in the process? It would not be easy but anything would be better than the present mysterious system. We could work on a regional basis. In Melbourne (the largest Australian Archdiocese) we have three regional bishops for the 312 parishes listed on the Archdiocesan website. In the event of a vacancy, all the parishioners in the region would be entitled to vote subject to an age limit. We would need to set up a Catholic electoral roll with privacy protection. A selection group with adequate lay and local working clergy would take soundings of priests willing to serve and prepare a short list of candidates. Profiles would be published and voting would be postal and supervised by a reputable accounting firm. Rome would be advised of the result but neither it nor the local hierarchy would have any right of frustration. The process would need work and fine-tuning but the principle is important that the long sidelined People of God should have input into the selection of our bishops. I cannot but wonder how many of our present bishops would have succeeded in an election. For an Archbishop all the registered voters in the Archdiocese would be eligible to vote and existing bishops could apply.

As for prospective candidates I would like to see priests active in parish ministry with grass-roots experience come forward. Local, would I think be an advantage but others could apply. The initial selection panel should have at least 50% lay people, male and female, and good parish clergy representation. For the benefit of aspirants we need a broader picture of the role of the future bishop. As an elected representative of the people he would be encouraged to speak out more so than at present. There

are important matters bubbling under the surface where an independent episcopal voice would be advantageous.

A potpourri of concerns...

One of these is the new English translation of the liturgy. Having appointed a scholarly group on the International Committee for English in the Liturgy (ICEL) the Vatican later changed course in favour of going back to the past, pre-Vatican II language. The clear favouritism now being given to the Society of Pius X is already a cause for concern. The return to the Tridentine Mass in a language unknown to perhaps 98% of people seems odd. The primacy of conscience must be honoured and *Humanae Vitae* was clearly subject to 'Non-Reception' by the faithful and will need attention. Another area in need of change is the appointment of parish clergy. I think we are the only church where the local parishioners are denied any say in the appointment of a parish priest. With the failure of the church to deal with the shortage, this for the present must remain a pipe dream. The more I think of the possibilities for 'people-elected' bishops the more optimistic I feel for our church.

In spite of its concern about the democratic process I believe that Rome would come to accept the reality of elected bishops coming to speak on behalf of the faithful. We need priestly ministry. It has been clear for the last thirty years that vocations are diminishing at an alarming rate. Yet Rome sits on its hands doing nothing. Why not at least an open discussion on married male priests, accepting that the ordination of women is off the agenda, for the moment? Do we need Bachelors of Theology, Philosophy, Canon Law and Liturgy in our presbyteries? Does a priest need seven years academic training? Elected bishops regularly confronted with the unpleasant task of ringing a priest to impose a second parish on him would be in a stronger position to seek and expect a meaningful response from Rome.

In being critical of the process under which they are appointed I am not without a lot of sympathy for our bishops. They are put in pastoral charge of priests and people who had no say in their appointments. On the other hand once appointed, Rome expects unquestioning acceptance of all church teaching and regular reports that the faithful are continuing to 'Pay, Pray and Obey'. Bishops are almost the meat in the sandwich. Where is the 'Collegiality' promised by Vatican II?

Here I got out the Documents of the Council specifically 'Lumen Gentium' (Nov 1964) on the Constitution of the Church. I found the headings as follows significant:

- Paul, Bishop
- Servant of the Servants of God
- Together with the Fathers of the Sacred Council For Everlasting Memory

Chapter three deals with: *The Hierarchical Structure of the Church With Special Reference to the Episcopate*. It is a lengthy chapter not easy to follow but Section 22 begins as follows:

Just as by the Lord's will Peter and the other apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter and the bishops as the successors of the apostles are joined together. The collegial nature and meaning of the episcopal order found expression in the very ancient practice by which bishops appointed the world over were linked with one another and with the Bishop of Rome by the bonds of unity, charity and peace.

This reminds me of Robert Menzies' *Primus inter Pares* – first among equals, or as above 'The Servant of the Servants of God'. So how about collegiality, positively proclaimed by Vatican II, with the Pope surrounded by a Council of elected bishops.

Also on the Council, recent reports of a call by European theologians for full implementation of Vatican II is significant at a time when the opponents of the many great reforms, the SSPX, are being encouraged to return to communion with Rome. Experience shows that putting the clock back rarely achieves anything. Yes, we do need reform in our church but going back to the past won't achieve it. More than ever we need the initiatives and programs of Vatican II, the brainchild of John XXIII not to be lost, so lets re-open the Vatican windows starting with a new breed of elected bishops.

I have proclaimed my optimism but admit that it is hard at times to maintain it in a system so reluctant to consider change. However, in spite of our love and concern for our church, even in support of it, we must continue the push for much-needed reform. So let's take a good look at a new breed of elected bishops. □

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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