



# arcvoice

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## Editorial

There are times when it is embarrassing to be a Catholic – never more so than today when the outrages of our so-called leaders lose all credibility and the rest of the world looks on bemused or scandalised by the shenanigans in Rome as they equate sexual abuse scandals with the criminality of women who dare to believe they have a vocation to the priesthood – and the bishops who officiate at their ordinations. Now we are told that ‘the exit of tens of millions of the adult baptised out of the pews across the Western world is a scandal more serious than the sex abuse crisis itself. Evidence suggests that the most disenchanted are drawn from the more educated sectors of society who are no longer prepared to tolerate Catholicism being reduced to some narrow ideological and dogmatic game of trying constantly to prove how we Catholics can read the mind of God better than anyone else on earth.’ (*Catholica* 4 September) The problem all started when women learnt to read!

Bill Gates recalls once being invited to speak in Saudi Arabia and finding himself facing a segregated audience. Four-fifths of the listeners were men, on the left. The remaining one-fifth were women, all covered in black cloaks and veils, on the right. A partition separated the two groups. Towards the end, in the question-and-answer session, a member of the audience noted that Saudi Arabia aimed to be one of the Top 10 countries in the world in technology by 2010 and asked if that was realistic. ‘Well, if you’re not fully utilizing half the talent in the country,’ Gates said, ‘you’re not going to get too close to the Top 10.’ The small group on the right erupted in wild cheering. A metaphor for our Church!

Tyrants – Hitler, Mao, Idi Amin to name just a few – always try to eliminate the intellectuals. What the hierarchy seems to forget is that, in this rapidly changing world, there are more educated people than at any time in history and, with the internet, more sharing of information, thoughts and opinions across the planet. Yet the Curia continues to behave as though none of this has happened and, like the last remnants of an army with its back to the wall, continues its onslaughts against anyone who does not fit with a pre-Vatican II mentality, with doctrines based on a culture formed two centuries ago.

So why do we stay? Perhaps one reason for clinging on was given by Fr Donald Cozzens at a lecture in Sydney hosted by the Aquinas Academy when speaking about how he sees these testing times in our Church. He says that when a ship is sailing in turbulent waters it is tempting to stay below in our cabin and pray for the storm to settle, but it is much better to get up on deck, breath the fresh air and do what one can to help. That appeals to me. I also admit that I stay for the feeling of belonging to a community and (selfishly) for the social life! But it is also a fact that once a truth is ‘known’ it cannot be ‘unknown’.

Margaret Knowlden  
 Editor

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# The Real Crime?

Scilla Stack

Professor Tina Beattie of Roehampton says 'By allowing the female body to play her part in the sacramental life of the Church, we might go beyond the violence generated by this resistance, to a new birthing of God for us and among us.' The resistance she speaks of is an intuitive resistance to 'the logic of God's maternal creative power and of the mutual capacity of man and woman to represent it' which 'leads to a violent struggle to block such possibilities.'<sup>[1]</sup>

Surely what all Catholics, including the Roman Curia, should carefully encourage is the communion of committed Catholics on the world stage, where male and female, adult and child, priest and people, old and young need to see the God who is becoming in us. It may well be time to take the gloves off and to offer deep criticism of a patriarchal hierarchy undeserving of support – for its blindness, for its erasure of women's and children's and any kind of contrary male voices – and theologians' voices directed towards the reconstruction of the Church we love. I feel as if I have lost innocence again, as one does, over and over.

For the first time in my life I am tempted to believe the answer is YES to Sr. Fran Ferder and Fr. John Heagle's closing question *'Is the attempted ordination of women a crime, or is the real crime the refusal to allow it?'* On mature reflection, however, premature proposals for ordination are not my real concern, let alone false enactments of ordinations of women. Much mediation is needed before female ordination can be envisaged and this is the traditional role of *the sensus fidelium*, those who work in the vineyard among the revised ideas of the humanities, sciences and especially our social sciences including well-trained female theologians and philosophers of religion.

I think the real crime is the Roman Curia's refusal to enter into a conversation over the participation of women in a reform agenda for the Church instead of maintaining, as it does, a wholly patriarchal hierarchy and a wholly male agenda. Why is it acceptable for members of the Roman Curia to marginalise, ridicule and misconstrue theologians who contribute to the Church's flourishing by revealing Jesus in inclusive language and carefully representing God in broad imagery that expresses the many facets of women reflecting God too in the incomprehensible mystery of our faith in all its richness? Why does the Roman Curia consider salvation lies in strategically placing attempted reform through women's ordination against paedophilia as a parallel issue? Such spite saddens me to new depths

of anguish because it implies we can no longer rely on the values represented in the false historical 'reality' in which Pope Benedict XVI and his advisers live. I believe change will come but does the Institutional Church *have* to implode first?

<sup>[1]</sup> Tina Beattie, *New Catholicism, Theology and Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, Taylor Francis, 2006. p.300.

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## Mutinous rumblings among senior Australian Catholic clergy

Participants at the 2010 Australian National  
Council of Catholic priests

Noel Debien

ABC Religion and Ethics 16 July 2010

*Everyone in this room knows very well that George Pell was transferred from Melbourne so he could get the red hat so he would become an elector of the pope. And that was the sole reason ... Most bishops would be in favour of the bishops electing the cardinals ... What happens at the moment is the pope appoints the cardinals who then elect the pope who then appoints more cardinals and on and on it goes. So it's a vicious circle. And it is deliberately designed to ensure we do not have another Pope John XXIII.*

So said Australian bishop Geoffrey Robinson to 250 or so priests and bishops on Thursday this week. He was speaking to the Australian National Council of Catholic priests held in Parramatta. He was advocating some modest democracy in the Catholic church: namely the franchise for bishops. Sustained and loud applause from 250-odd priests followed the bishop's words.

Some of the audience were victims of sexual abuse themselves – including the very same Bishop Geoffrey Robinson who received a 5-minute long ovation from the priests when his arrival was noted. This same week saw a call for the resignation of the bishop of Broken Bay diocese over alleged mismanagement of sexual abuse went to air nationally through Australia on ABC TV and appeared in the Irish press.

Some priest delegates knew or had worked with colleagues gaoled for sexual abuse crimes. Some delegates were bishops responsible for responding to horrendous legal and pastoral situations beyond even their worst nightmares. There was frustration among them. At times there was white hot anger. There were also open tears – but there was genuine friendship and camaraderie between the many fellow priests there. They gave every appearance of being united in crisis.

There were many times during this week's conference when an emotional foment could be sensed: something that must have been like pre-revolutionary Paris of 1789. The 250 or so clergy and bishops had come from all over Australasia, and they were listening to speakers including American priest-author Donald Cozzens – who has been writing and speaking internationally on the roots of crisis in the Catholic church and priesthood for over a decade.

Cozzens has focussed directly on issues of clerical sexual abuse and institutional denial. Cozzens spoke about the church culture of 'discretion'. He spoke about bishops who don't tell the pope what the pope doesn't want to hear. He spoke of clergy who don't tell bishops what they don't want to hear. He pointed out the habitual way in which discretion is exercised within church circles, and so the truths of situations are not adequately confronted. He praised Australian Archbishop Mark Coleridge for having weighed into the problem of 'discretion' in church circles. Cozzens nevertheless politely poured fluoro-sulphuric acid onto the culture of feudal loyalty he says still operates in the Catholic church.

If there had been any pulling of punches early on in this week's conference, the gloves were well and truly off by the third day. Though I have heard much of what was said before in other places, I have never heard it all said in front of 250 Catholic clergy and five Australian bishops. I have never heard it said so strongly or clearly.

I heard calls for a third Vatican Council, married priests, discussion of women priests, warnings of church implosion, calls for cardinals to be elected by bishops, as well as public criticism of Cardinal Pell's appointment to Sydney. That was just for starters, and all coinciding with this week's strong condemnation of women's ordination by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. At one point I leant over to a bishop – not noted as a

progressive radical – and asked if I could check his pulse. He had the good grace to laugh, though I am not all that sure he was feeling all that jocular. It was pretty strong stuff.

Bishop Robinson didn't just outline his frustrations with the colossal failures of the church in addressing sexual abuse, he laid the responsibility for failure right at the top: 'Every bishop takes an oath of loyalty to the pope. And yet from the time it first came to our attention in the mid-80's right through to 2004 – twenty years – Pope John Paul said next to nothing. And the loyalty of bishops was to a silent pope and so they became defensive – whereas had the pope in 1985 come out and said 'this is a terrible blight on the church, we're going to confront it, obliterate it from the church', then the very loyalty of the bishops would have worked in favour of victims. Whereas in fact it worked against them: a culture of secrecy.'

Bishop Robinson and the other bishops and clergy then discussed a practical reform process for the clergy to begin. Robinson pointed out that the clergy could effect change only by convincing their bishops, and he even explained the (frankly) Byzantine approach needed to effect change. The bishop teased out the complex loyalty of bishops to the pope. He was backed up by Bishop Patrick Power who told his fellow priests that he saw the abuse crisis 'as a means of facing the structural issues that need to be challenged'.

Many of the issues raised by these priests would cause my more conservative Catholic friends to tear their clothes and strew ashes over their heads – immediately before delating the whole meeting to Rome via flaming email, of course. On the other hand, progressive Catholics would have been surprised and heartened. I am still ruminating over what I heard. The real test will be discerning whether this is all just steam being let off by grumpy clergy, or whether it is the enormous glacier of the Catholic church loudly cracking.

I finish with Robinson's most foreboding remark. 'In 1989, who could have possibly foreseen that by the end of the year Communism would have collapsed – yet it happened. A few years later, who could have foreseen that apartheid in South Africa would collapse – but yet it did ... the growth of discontent in seeing the dysfunction in the regime ... reached a critical mass. And when it did, things collapsed. It is my belief that change on the church is most likely to happen in that fashion.'

Noel Debien is the producer of  
ABC's Sunday Nights radio program

# A 'Eureka' Moment!

## Kerry Gonzales

Over the last year or so, I have been in a kind of limbo in regard to the Catholic Church. I have long been a fairly vocal critic of the current Church hierarchy and its method of operation. Writing has always been for me a way of mulling over what has been upsetting me and has helped me to formulate a way of thinking about it and responding that has allowed me to move forward.

While I have not 'put pen to paper' (I still love that expression even in this technological age) in quite some time, I have certainly tried to stay in touch with what has been happening within the Church – as depressing as that is. While I have been agitated by many of these events, I have not been moved to become actively involved in the debates.

Lately I have been reading *Peter Kennedy: The Man Who Threatened Rome* by Martin Flanagan and Michelle Gierck. While I have been an interested spectator in the events that encompassed St Mary's South Brisbane, I have not been all that interested in the media hype surrounding the issues. I certainly supported, in spirit at least, the community of St Mary's, but realised that what I was reading was not to be taken as 'gospel', especially if attached to Tony Abbott's name. The end result (St Mary's in exile), while in some ways predictable but none the less traumatic for those involved, strikes me as one of the most hopeful signs of a new sense of 'church' that I have encountered in a long time – well actually ever.

If you have not yet read *Peter Kennedy* I recommend that you give it a go. I feel that it is a very thoughtful and moderate look at the complex issues and it in no way glorifies or demonises the individuals or the situation. It presents a range of views from people both within and outside the firestorm.

Now to the 'eureka' moment. One of the contributors to the *Peter Kennedy* book is John Shelby Spong, a man I have long admired for the way he has been able to remain within a strong religious context and yet still challenge the structures and injustice within. I cherish the forlorn hope that one day our own church may have many strong and faithful, yet direct and thoughtful bishops such as Shelby Spong ([www.johnshelbyspong.com](http://www.johnshelbyspong.com)).

The title 'A Manifesto' has lots of loaded connotations, but according to the Merriam-Webster

Dictionary the word 'manifesto' means: a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer.

In the case of John Shelby Spong it is an apt, and I'm sure very deliberate, definition that from the first word leaves no doubt about the seriousness of the topic or the implacability of the author. The article is, in many ways, a call to arms, not in any violent context, but rather a calling to a course of action that diffuses the anger, rhetoric and aggression of the debate. Ultimately it is a stance that enables finding a more peaceful and fulfilling space in which to reside.

Shelby Spong does not mince his words. There is no doubt about those he has in his sights:

I will no longer engage the biblical ignorance that emanates from so many right-wing Christians about how the bible condemns homosexuality, as if that point of view still has some credibility.

Ultimately though, Shelby Spong's underlying message is that he will no longer enter into discussion about the indefensible, in this instance, the place of gay and lesbian people within the church and the state. Very clearly John Shelby Spong has spent a good deal of his life banging his head up against an immovable object. The result of course, is that he has always ended up with the headache.

This stand by Shelby Spong should not even be considered a radical stance, but I suspect many of us still believe that, by taking on the 'fundamentalist' attitude, we will somehow make a difference or that at the very least provide an alternative view. Shelby Spong however does not believe that an alternative view does or should exist:

I make these statements because it is time to move on. The victory has been won. There is no reasonable doubt as to what the final outcome of this struggle will be. Homosexual people will be accepted as equal, full human beings, who have a legitimate claim on every right that both church and society have to offer any of us.

Yet I suspect that the voices that cling to a solely biblical understanding and who are driven by fear of what they can't comprehend are a minority, vocal and influential yes, but nonetheless a minority to whom we should not pander and who probably need to be ignored rather than engaged. It would seem that in the case of St Mary's, it was these 'temple police' who were given such credence by the powers that be that a situation was created that really allowed no winners.

Shelby Spong asserts that just as issues around granting women the vote, slavery and segregation have long been settled, so too has the issue of homosexual people and to still debate it achieves nothing and perhaps even precludes real, positive action:

The world has moved on, leaving those elements of the Christian Church that cannot adjust to new knowledge or a new consciousness lost in a sea of their own irrelevance. They no longer talk to anyone but themselves. I will no longer seek to slow down the witness to inclusiveness by pretending there is some middle ground between prejudice and oppression. There isn't. Justice postponed is justice denied.

For me, this insight of Shelby Spong's is an eye-opener. There are many issues within the Catholic Church where this stance makes more sense than being bogged down in the endless debate that achieves nothing. There are no real signs that the Catholic hierarchy is making a move to meet the real world in meaningful and productive dialogue. Even using the word 'dialogue' is wrong, as the Church does not engage anyone who has a different point of view. Instead they dictate terms and expect compliance. They seem to be the only ones who fail to see that such an approach doesn't and probably never did work in ways that lead forward rather than backward.

So, like John Shelby Spong, I will no longer waste my time, energy and my actions on issues that should have been resolved decades ago. Instead I will assume victory and treat all people as I believe Jesus would have done, as cherished members of the community, be it church or state. In many ways I believe that this is the message that has come out of the trauma of St Mary's South Brisbane, for that community has moved away from the debate and shown that, in action, the work of Jesus can really be a more effective bearer of 'the Word'.

Hopefully more of us may find in John Shelby Spong's words a kernel of hope that, regardless of the active opposition within the Catholic Church, there are many more people out there who want to break free and be a part of the new era, so that we can really rejoice and celebrate as effective people of God:

This is my manifesto and my creed. I proclaim it today. I invite others to join me in this public declaration. I believe that such a public outpouring will help cleanse both the church and this nation of its own distorting past. It will restore integrity and honor to both church and state. It will signal that a new day has dawned and we are ready not just to embrace it, but also rejoice in it and celebrate it.



## How ethical?

Eric Stevenson

Centre for Progressive Religious Thought

**I**t is encouraging to have the support of the Moderator and of an influential member of a Uniting Church congregation for the ethics project in schools.

In defence of the pilot program, Howard Packer sees no reason why children who are stimulated by this course would not want to explore the ethical understandings they have gained in a faith-based context.

It appears that many of those who oppose the introduction of a complementary alternative to the existing RE classes also need to gain a similar critical stance towards them.

The latest census figures indicating 'no religion' may only partly explain the increasing number of children opting out of scripture. Could it be that Christian parents are also withdrawing their children from SRE because they are dissatisfied with the morality that is being taught?

How ethical was it for David to cut off Goliath's head?

How ethical was it of God to wipe out Israel's enemies? How ethical is it to use the saying attributed to Jesus about divorce to guide the young of the present generation? And, if it is ethical for scripture teachers to leave out these gory stories in the Bible, is it ethical to pretend (and teach) that the entire Bible is the Word of God?

As an erstwhile scripture teacher, I have to confess that I used to be party to such a setup, the likes of which still persist in some schools today. This is not to mention the attempts being made in some SRE classes to seduce children into joining certain religious followings without consultation with their parents (for instance, kids coming home from school and telling their parents that they are going to hell). How ethical is that?

All power to our scripture teachers who are encouraging their classes to explore the ethical understandings of their own denominations. Ethics class will do nothing but good for the rest. □

# Catholic social teaching finds church leadership lacking

(Bishop) Kevin Dowling C.Ss.R

*National Catholic Reporter*, July 08, 2010

Cape Town, June 1, 2010

**T**he *Southern Cross* [South Africa's weekly Catholic newspaper] about 3 or 4 weeks ago published a picture of Bishop Slattery with his 'cappa magna'. For me, such a display of what amounts to triumphalism in a church, torn apart by the sexual abuse scandal, is most unfortunate. What happened there bore the marks of a mediaeval royal court, not the humble, servant leadership modelled by Jesus. But it seems to me that this is also a symbol of what has been happening in the church especially since Pope John Paul II became the Bishop of Rome and up till today – and that is 'restorationism', the carefully-planned dismantling of the theology, ecclesiology, pastoral vision, indeed the 'opening of the windows' of Vatican II – in order to 'restore' a previous, or more controllable model of church through an increasingly centralised power structure; a structure which now controls everything in the life of the church through a network of Vatican congregations led by cardinals who ensure strict compliance with what is deemed *by them* to be 'orthodox'. Those who do not comply face censure and punishment, e.g. theologians who are forbidden to teach in Catholic faculties.

Lest we do not highlight sufficiently this important fact, Vatican II was an ecumenical council, i.e., a solemn exercise of the *magisterium* of the church, i.e. the college of bishops gathered together with the bishop of Rome and exercising a teaching function for the whole church. In other words, its vision, its principles and the direction it gave are to be followed and implemented by all, from the pope to the peasant farmer in the fields of Honduras.

Since Vatican II there has been no such similar exercise of teaching authority by the *magisterium*. Instead, a series of decrees, pronouncements and decisions which have been given various 'labels' stating, for example, that they must be firmly held to with 'internal assent' by the Catholic faithful, but in reality are simply the theological or pastoral interpretations or opinions of those who have power at the centre of the church. They have not been solemnly defined as belonging to the 'deposit of the faith' to be believed and followed, therefore, by all Catholics, as with

other solemnly proclaimed dogmas. For example, the issues of celibacy for the priesthood and the ordination of women, withdrawn even from the realm of discussion. Therefore, such pronouncements are open to scrutiny – to discern whether they are in accord, for example, with the fundamental theological vision of Vatican II, or whether there is indeed a case to be made for a different interpretation or opinion.

When I worked internationally from my religious congregation's base in Rome from 1985 to 1990 [Dowling is a Redemptorist] before I came back here as bishop of Rustenburg, one of my responsibilities was the building up of young adult ministry with our communities in the countries of Europe where so many of the young people were alienated from the church. I developed relationships with many hundreds of sincere, searching Catholic young adults, very open to issues of injustice, poverty and misery in the world, aware of structural injustice in the political and economic systems which dominated the world, but who increasingly felt that the 'official' church was not only out of touch with reality, but a counter-witness to the aspirations of thinking and aware Catholics who sought a different experience of church. In other words, an experience which enabled them to believe that the church they belonged to had something relevant to say and to witness to in the very challenging world in which they lived. Many, many of these young adults have since left the church entirely.

On the other hand, it has to be recognized that for a significant number of young Catholics, adult Catholics, priests and religious around the world, the 'restorationist' model of church which has been implemented over the past 30-40 years is sought after and valued; it meets a need in them; it gives them a feeling of belonging to something with very clear parameters and guidelines for living, thus giving them a sense of security and clarity about what is truth and what is morally right or wrong, because there is a clear and strong authority structure which decides definitively on all such questions, and which they trust absolutely as being of divine origin.

The rise of conservative groups and organisations in the church over the past 40 years and more, which attract significant numbers of adherents, has led to a phenomenon which I find difficult to deal with, viz. an inward-looking church, fearful of, if not antagonistic towards a secularist world, with its concomitant danger of relativism, especially in terms of truth and morality – frequently referred to by Pope Benedict XVI; a church which gives an impression of 'retreating behind the wagons,' and relying on a strong central authority to ensure unity through uniformity in belief and praxis in the face of such dangers. The fear is that without such supervision

and control, and that if any freedom in decision-making is allowed, even in less important matters, this will open the door to division, and a breakdown in the unity of the church.

This is all about a fundamentally different 'vision' *in* the church and 'vision' *of* the church. Where today can we find the great theological leaders and thinkers of the past, like Cardinal [Joseph] Frings of Cologne, Germany] and [Bernard Jan] Alfrink [Utrecht, Netherlands] in Europe, and the great prophetic bishops whose voice and witness was a clarion call to justice, human rights and a global community of equitable sharing – the witness of Archbishop [Oscar] Romero of El Salvador, the voices of Cardinals [Paulo Evaristo] Arns and [Aloísio Leo Arlindo] Lorscheider, and Bishops [Dom] Helder Camara and [Pedro] Casadalinga of Brazil? Again, who in today's world 'out there' even listens to, much less appreciate and allow themselves to be challenged by the leadership of the church at the present time? I think the moral authority of the church's leadership today has never been weaker. It is, therefore, important in my view that church leadership, instead of giving an impression of its power, privilege and prestige, should rather be experienced as a humble, searching ministry together with its people in order to discern the most appropriate or viable responses which can be made to complex ethical and moral questions – a leadership, therefore, which does not presume to have all the answers all the time.

But to change focus a bit. One of the truly significant contributions of the church to the building up of a world in which people and communities can live in peace and dignity, with a quality of life which befits those made in God's image, has been the body of what has been called 'Catholic Social Teaching', a compendium of which has been released during the past few years. These social teaching principles are: The Common Good, Solidarity, The Option for the Poor, Subsidiarity, The Common Destiny of Goods, The Integrity of Creation, and People-Centredness – all based on and flowing out of the values of the Gospel. Here we have very relevant principles and guidelines to engage with complex social, economic, cultural and political realities, especially as these affect the poorest and most vulnerable members of societies everywhere. These principles should enable us, as church, to critique constructively all socio-political-economic systems and policies - and especially from that viewpoint, viz. their effect on the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

However, if church leadership anywhere presumes to criticise or critique socio-political-economic policies and policy makers, or governments, it must also allow itself to be critiqued in the same way in terms of its policies, its

internal life, and especially its *modus operandi*. A democratic culture and *praxis*, with its focus on the participation of citizens and holding accountable those who are elected to govern, is increasingly appreciated in spite of inevitable human shortcomings. When thinking people of all persuasions look at church leadership, they raise questions about, for example, real participation of the membership in its governance and how in fact church leadership is to be held accountable, and to whom. If the church, and its leadership, professes to follow the values of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, then its internal life, its methods of governing and its use of authority will be scrutinized on the basis of what we profess. Let us take one social teaching principle, vitally important for ensuring participative democracy in the socio-political domain, viz. subsidiarity.

'The principle of subsidiarity protects the rights of individuals and groups in the face of the powerful, especially the state. It holds that those things which can be done or decided at a lower level of society should not be taken over by a higher level. As such, it reaffirms our right and our capacity to decide for ourselves how to organise our relationships and how to enter into agreements with others. ... We can and should take steps to encourage decision-making at lower levels of the economy, and to empower the greatest number of people to participate as fully as possible in economic life.' (*Economic Justice in South Africa*, page 14).

Applied to the church, the principle of subsidiarity requires of its leadership actively to promote and encourage participation, personal responsibility and effective engagement by everyone in terms of their particular calling and ministry in the church and world according to their opportunities and gifts.

However, I think that today we have a leadership in the church which actually undermines the very notion of subsidiarity; where the minutiae of church life and *praxis* 'at the lower level' are subject to examination and authentication being given by the 'higher level,' in fact the highest level, e.g., the approval of liturgical language and texts; where one of the key Vatican II principles, collegiality in decision-making, is virtually non-existent. The eminent emeritus Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König, wrote the following in 1999 – almost 35 years after Vatican II: 'In fact, however, *de facto* and not *de jure*, intentionally or unintentionally, the curial authorities working in conjunction with the pope have appropriated the tasks of the episcopal college. It is they who now carry out almost all of them' ('My Vision of the church of the Future', *The Tablet*, March 27, 1999, p. 434).

The rest of this very important article is available from the editor: [knowlden@optusnet.com.au](mailto:knowlden@optusnet.com.au)

# If it can't be said in the pulpit, it shouldn't be sung in the pew

The following extract from Gretta Vosper's book *With or Without God* (whilst written for North America/Canada) would equally well apply to Australia

If I thought the church was long past the gender-inclusive language debate that was at its height in the years of my theological training, *More Voices* proved me wrong. More than 10 per cent of the songs in it are copyrighted with exclusive male imagery language. Usually the male-dominated language takes the form of the word *Lord* for which the editors gently suggest the substitution of a non-gender-specific alternative, usually 'God'. The 'feminine wound,' poignantly described by so many able women writers, continues to be incised into the souls of girls and women who are required to rise in Christian denominations around the world and sing words that reinforce a 'God-given' male privilege. My compassion – for the young who do not yet feel the pain of that wound and for the old who know it intimately – wells up as I read the words to these songs and lament the insensitivity that allowed the editors to include them. In the area of inclusive language, as with the whole feminist experiment, the achievements we thought we had secured are at constant risk and, without diligent attention, will be steadily eroded.

But it's not just the gender exclusivity that has crept into the refrains and songs of the newest hymn compilation in mainline Christianity. Under the guise of 'world' music, of Latin liturgical elements, of scripture verses set to music, continues a theological perspective that can no longer be justified in post-modern Christianity. It was one thing to be shocked when we opened up our old hymn collections and carefully explored their words, recognising within them the deeply divisive theology we so blithely sang and which so many naively internalised. It is quite another thing, and that much more challenging for us, to read the words of songs set to music in the past decade that implore a heavenly God (Lord, actually) to pour power out on us or sing the catchy predestination song about Jesus choosing those who will believe in him. Does the liberal church still believe in a heaven that spills power out upon the faithful to be used as they see fit or that Jesus opens or stops up our ears at whim so that some may and others may not hear his message, as some lyrics would suggest? For a long time, the answer to that question has been no, yet we are happily bringing it back through what is offered as the best, most up-to-date music.

To include such theological propositions in the liturgical resources of a mainline denomination that

teaches contemporary scholarship and postmodern critical interpretation at its seminaries can be explained only by the misapplication of postmodern thought. If none of it matters and nothing means anything, then it is fine to sing whatever we want. Well, it's not fine. Not by a long shot. If it can't be said in the pulpit, it shouldn't be sung in the pew.

Gretta Gosper

## Editor's comment:

Even a perfunctory glance through the popular Australian Catholic hymnal *As One Voice* reveals a 'Pie-in-the-Sky' image of our faith – one in which the faithful chant pious certainties about the healing power of God who sets the world aright – heals the sick, forgives the sinners, sets prisoners free and brings the ultimate assurance of salvation with Christ coming in a victorious blaze of glory – for select groups of chosen middle-class believers. The words are trite, the rhymes contrived, and they are urgently in need of a reality check against the backdrop of the real world where the other half struggles daily against violence, poverty, disease, illiteracy, natural disasters etc. Mark Raue creations do just that. Here is one example:

## The Dream

Once a wise man shared a dream (for all the world).  
That we all should live as one (in harmony).  
But the world could not agree (they killed the man).  
So his dream would not run free.  
In this dream where all are one (where justice reigns).  
There's no place for privilege (or bigotry).  
Woman, man, gentile or Jew (one and the same).  
All are welcome in the dream.

**A dream. A dream for everyone.  
Where colour, creed or gender matter none.  
A dream. A dream of freedom.  
Where outcasts, slaves and sinners all can be  
Free to dream.**

Borders, guns, exclusion zones (all hurt the dream).  
But they're not the only way (to stop the dream).  
Hearts so cold and made of stone (ignore the dream).  
They're so hard to turn around.  
Narrow minds dream not of love (they live in fear).  
That their world will fall apart (and disappear).  
Difference threatens paradise (and nightmares reign).  
Who do we want in our dream?  
Once a wise man shared a dream (for all the world).  
That we all should live as one (in harmony).  
Many people still agree (and live in hope).  
Will you help us live the dream?

© Mark Raue, 2001

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# Paradox

## Jan Edmonds

Thank you for the June issue of ARC containing interesting articles albeit a bit depressing when one reads *“Australian parishes face a bleak future with declining numbers, combined parishes, imported clergy and a hierarchy out of touch with the aspirations of their parishioners”* (p.5) – a truism no doubt in some areas.

What caught my attention mostly, though, was the article ‘A Paradox for Reforming Catholics’ by Alan Clague which led me to think of the ‘paradox’ within which we live our lives across several fronts – what is the ‘prescription’ by which we lead our lives, for example: *‘Does money make the world go round; or is money the root of all evil?’* (a rhetorical question). What do we choose?

Based on this adage and to personalise the context, I ask: *‘Whilst still loving and holding on to Jesus yet by entering a new thinking space, can I still call myself a Christian?’* and *‘In having to unlearn some past teachings in order to learn new ones, can I still call myself a Catholic and lovingly continue to attend Mass?’* Such is the paradox of my being a Catholic which runs parallel to what Alan Clague’s article on Vatican II discusses, e.g. if the changes were suddenly implemented by the Vatican would that be *all* that I needed to enhance and evolve my spiritual life.

Such thinking led me to revisit what we mean when we say ‘I am a member of the Australian Reforming Catholics’. To ‘reform’ means to: *make – or become – better by removal or abandonment of imperfection, faults or errors’* (Oxford Dictionary) which is what we are asking of Rome, and to ‘re-form’ simply means to form again – an obvious comment I hear you say. But there is a difference. For me it is to identify what I am doing in pursuing some changes to my own spiritual life that does not entirely rely on Vatican resolutions whilst at the same time is nurtured by my Catholic practice.

Which is the bridge: to work towards a ‘reform’ of the historical Catholicism that I know I won’t see in my life time – or is it to ‘re-form’ and start anew (a sort of Peter Kennedy Parish)? Are they interchangeable or what comes first as we continue to foster a spiritual life?

This is the Paradox.

JAN EDMONDS is a retired Sociologist living south of Perth and very involved, as a catechist and several other ‘hats’, in the ‘building’ of a new Catholic Parish community and their almost completed new Church. They are blessed to have leadership from an energetic and inspiring priest and wonderfully dedicated people.

# Male and Female God

John Chuchman

If the United Nations treated the Vatican,  
the way the Vatican treats Women,  
church leadership might learn  
what it’s like to be a Catholic Woman.

I risk my standing in church  
as I have become publicly active  
in reform efforts to treat women in church justly.

The church can penalise Catholics  
who lobby for change  
through excommunication,  
which rejects a person as Catholic  
unless that person formally admits  
and atones for the transgression.

People are excommunicated,  
not for sins of morality,  
but for sins of heresy.

The New Testament Greek word for heresy,  
*hairetikos*,  
translated by church  
as a belief opposed to orthodox doctrine,  
in fact, literally means ‘able to choose’,  
a capacity unwelcome in institutional religion.

There seems to come a point  
in a person's life  
when a bishop's threat of excommunication  
cannot muffle God's call.

All Christians are Christ-bearers.

In a culture which made no legal provision for  
female witnesses,  
Jesus chose Mary Magdalene to  
go and share the good news  
with the other Apostles.

That is significant!

Jesus opened the banquet to the underclass.

He did not say,  
Do this in remembrance of me  
only if you belong to the right denomination  
according to rules of  
exclusive membership.

It is increasingly hard to remain silent  
while seeing less and less of Jesus  
in the upper echelon of  
Church hierarchy.

Excommunicated from what?

# Still too little, too late

Thomas Patrick Doyle

The Tablet – 24 July 2010

Last week the Vatican issued its revised norms for dealing with cases of clerical sex abuse. It says they are an important and progressive step towards justice. However a canon lawyer who has campaigned for many years on behalf of abuse survivors is not convinced.

The Vatican's latest attempt at damage control regarding clerical sex abuse has been lavished with praise from church officials – and well-deserved criticism from abuse survivors' groups. Unveiling the new rules, which are a revision of the 2001 procedural norms on dealing with clerical abuse, the Vatican's press spokesman, Fr Federico Lombardi, said they showed a determination to respond to complaints with 'rigour and transparency'. But the Vatican has never shown the slightest evidence of 'rigour and transparency' in its response to the worldwide phenomenon of sex abuse by clergy.

The revisions are essentially the codification of several changes already introduced into the 2001 procedures. As the saying goes, however, 'the devil is in the detail'. On the positive side the Pope has given the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) authority to judge members of the ruling class: cardinals, patriarchs, papal legates and bishops. A number of bishops worldwide have been accused of sexually abusing minors but none have been subjected to trial or penal sanctions. This change is no doubt a response to the overwhelming anger at the gross inequity of pursuing accused priests with a vengeance while allowing accused bishops to slip into quiet but comfortable retirement. The fact is that popes could have disciplined errant bishops all along but chose not to, hiding behind the myth that they are some sort of sacred nobility.

Other significant changes help speed up the process. The rule that judicial personnel on the diocesan level be priests with a doctorate in canon law may be dispensed with to allow lay-persons without canon law degrees to serve as judges and advocates. The English text simply says that the requirement for priesthood may be waived; furthermore it does not specify that the tribunal personnel must be male.

The norms extend to local bishops the possibility of dispensing with the full judicial trial process and proceeding instead with a much shorter and simpler administrative process. This dispensation is to be given on a case-by-case basis and will depend on the facts of the case and the urgency for a decision. This norm holds the potential for significant change from current procedure. Church trials start and then submerge into the murky depths of the clerical world where they remain *incommunicado* for years, not months. The canonical judicial process is cumbersome, complex, and prone to endless delays.

One change, which is probably lost on those unfamiliar with the language of canon law, is number four – the faculty to *sanare* the acts in cases with procedural errors from lower tribunals. This means that when a case from a diocesan tribunal undergoes the mandatory review at the CDF, procedural errors that did not violate the right of defence will be retroactively corrected. This is important because it potentially eliminates the practice of vacating cases or calling for new trials because of procedural errors.

The statute of limitations is raised to 20 years after the complainant reaches the age of 18. This is a slight improvement but still falls a long way short of what should have been done. Most child victims hold back for decades before finding the courage to disclose their abuse. They are paralysed by guilt, shame, fear and an unwillingness to reopen the deep wounds left by the abuse. These are often referred to derisively as 'old cases'. This is a meaningless categorisation and, worse still, it is a cruel and insensitive label for those who were molested and abused years ago. The constant emotional and spiritual pain does not disappear over time. It remains, and in most cases gets worse.

Clergy victims suffer from an added layer of fear imposed by the Church itself through its heretical teaching that clerics are somehow superior to lay people and so sacred that they are entitled to exemption from accountability. The better revision would have been to extend the period to 40 years past majority, but the best revision would have been total elimination of the statute. The whining of the lawyers and others that this makes trying cases difficult is nonsense. The statute is actually a presumption in favour of the criminal abuser. The statute of limitations should not evaluate evidence. That is the tribunal's job.

The cloak of secrecy hasn't been removed. Fr Lombardi claims that secrecy is necessary 'to safeguard the dignity of all the people involved'. This is a poor excuse for the Vatican's obsession with image and its irrational fear of letting secrets out. Historically, totalitarian regimes dispense their peculiar version of justice behind closed doors. In the Church's case, some closed hearings, such as those involving the victims, would be acceptable but as it stands now, tribunal cases are generally buried so deep that even the victims are stonewalled about the progress of the case and the outcome. If Fr Lombardi's rationale reflects official policy then it seems that everybody's dignity is respected except that of the victims.

The Vatican has been inundated with criticism for including the ordination of women among the 'grave' crimes listed. This is nothing new. The CDF decreed in December 2007 that the person ordaining a woman and the woman ordained would both be automatically excommunicated.

In response to criticism last week a Vatican spokesman defended the action by saying that ordination of women and sex abuse 'were on different levels'. This of course is meaningless. The inclusion was not only a public relations blunder but more tellingly, an indication of the grossly discriminatory attitude toward women.

The glaring omissions reveal that the Vatican still resists any real accountability. The greatest outrage worldwide is not directed towards those who have perpetrated the sexual abuse, but towards the bishops (and archbishops and cardinals) who have engineered the cover-ups, lied to victims and their families and, most egregious of all, enabled the continued violation of children and vulnerable adults by shifting the abusers from one place to another. The papal hand-wringing and lament is empty without concrete recognition of the bishops' key role in the scandal.

No requirement exists that bishops report sexual abuse to civil authorities. When questioned on this, Vatican spokesmen offered several excuses, all of which were not only inadequate but irrelevant. In April the CDF issued a memo about the 2001 norms which included the controversial sentence: 'Civil law concerning reporting of crimes to the appropriate authorities should always be followed.' This has led to the erroneous belief that the Vatican has historically encouraged bishops to report suspected cleric-perpetrators to the police. In fact the historical attitude has been the exact opposite and the failure to insist on reporting in the revised norms confirms the persistence of the arrogant attitude that the institutional Church and its clergy are somehow above accountability to civil society.

Potentially, the eighth revision is a disaster. This gives the local bishops the power to proceed judicially against people whom they suspect of heresy, apostasy or schism.

This is significantly different from the automatic excommunication incurred by those who perform a public act that 'announces' their official departure from the Church, such as joining the clergy of, or making an official act of allegiance to a non-Catholic denomination. The danger is obvious. Too many bishops act like Grand Inquisitors as they strive to force acquiescence in what often amounts to their personal, and incorrect, interpretation of church doctrine or law.

In spite of Fr Lombardi's claims, there is no rigour or transparency in this latest attempt by the Church's highest authority to stem the rising tide of anger and demand for concrete action. These revisions, a continuation of the official Vatican response, go beyond being a problem. They are tragic evidence that the hierarchical governing body of the Church is no longer capable of leading the People of God. This latest move confirms that the Vatican still denies the fundamental issue: what is it about the clerical sub-culture and the monarchical government it supports that has not only allowed but promoted the narcissistic attitude that its image and power are more important than the welfare of the victims of the Church's own criminality?

Thomas Patrick Doyle is a canon lawyer and co-author of *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: the Catholic Church's 2,000-year paper trail of sexual abuse*.

## Ancient and personal wisdom for modern and community challenges

John Shervington

"There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven: ... a time for loving, and a time for hating." Ecclesiastes 3:1; 8

**B**efore I can truly love another, I must love myself. For me, love meant giving myself for another. Gradually I learnt to separate the wholesome virtue of self-ness from the self-seeking vice of selfishness. I needed to do unto myself before I did unto others. Yet if I loved myself all the time, then I wouldn't have time for another. So I had to learn a healthy love of myself, before I could love another to the full.

To hate is to dislike another intensely. Hate was a word I felt uncomfortable using. As with love, I needed to hate unwholesome behaviour in myself before I could be true to myself and declare my hatred of the same behaviour in others. Again I slowly learnt to accept the intense dislike

of some behaviour in me before I could move on from that same behaviour. To do this I must again know myself: what behaviour was pleasing to me and what was abhorrent to me. With such self-awareness, I was then capable of pleasing or avoiding harm to another.

To strike a balance between a love of myself, a love of others, a hatred of my own offensive behaviour, and a hatred of others' offensive behaviour, I chose to learn how to act in moderation at all times. Again with self-awareness I learnt to look at all the available options, before choosing what suited me and still respected others' choices. This is the task of a lifetime! Such a balance usually allows me to live in harmony with myself and with others.

For me, two major challenges for the Catholic Church in our modern world are training our youth and eradicating sexual abuse. Ancient and personal wisdom combined with spiritual and formative writings are pointing the way. The somewhat dated writings of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, were collected under the title *Laymen into Action* (1964) and contain his "see, judge, and act" method for producing today's leaders of youth. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's pertinent book, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, (2007) is an examination of conscience for our dearly loved church! □

## 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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