



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
December 2010 Issue No. 38

Editorial

The Catholic Church is usually very strong in making claims about what is good for its people generally and for the world as a whole. It is also very strong in making claims about what needs to be done to ensure that the Church will prosper and that the faith will be appropriately passed on to future generations. When other organisations or social entities make similar claims, their projections are usually backed up by research that is relevant, accompanied by well-argued reasoning that supports their predictions or optimism. Seldom if ever do we encounter a similar approach when the Church addresses concerns of high importance.

During the last week or so we have been given to understand that the new Bishop of Parramatta, Bishop Anthony Fisher, has an aim to get young people re-connected to the Church. He draws on the statistic that only one in six people in their teens and twenties have a connection to any church. We all know that the percentage of this cohort who have attended Catholic schools and yet do not have any real affiliation with the practice of their religion would be similar if not higher. But do we have any research conducted to help the uninformed hierarchy, of which Bishop Fisher is a part, to form a strategy to redress this? Not that I can see. His reported approach is to gather a group of 500 young people to join Pope Benedict XVI at World Youth Day in Spain in August 2011. To what end? Have we got any research to suggest that the World Youth Day in Sydney brought youth closer to the Church after that event? Without any convincing evidence, it is reasonable to ask what a contingent going to Spain will achieve when, seemingly, there was little of the desired result in our own country with larger numbers of Australian participants?

It is astounding that the hierarchy can come up with such glib pronouncements without any noticeable understanding about the reasons behind the statistics in front of them. Do they know why youth are disaffected with the Church when the majority believe in God? Have they done any research that would back up a strategy to send a group to Spain? What was the benefit to the Church of World Youth Day that would justify all the energy and money that was spent? I have not seen an ounce of evidence from any significant research.

One of the greatest follies of those seeking to achieve change is to keep doing the same things that you have done before without success and expect to get a different result. Time and again the institutional Church has attempted to draw the disaffected back without any thought about how it needs to change in order to do so. By now it should be abundantly clear that it is a pointless exercise when there is such little understanding of the issue being addressed.

John Buggy

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Letters

I have just read your wonderful editorial with great satisfaction and want to thank you sincerely. *Mutinuous rumblings among senior Australian Catholic Clergy* should be widely published. It gives me renewed hope that 250 of our best young priests were so prepared to support Geoffrey Robinson, who in my view is our only hope for our church's survival. More power to Noel DeBrien and others like him who are able to get these matters in the public domain. I am taking this to work tomorrow to show an old friend where I'm coming from. Keep up the good work.

Gloria McGrath

The Church hierarchy have ignored the scriptures, and Jesus' teaching of love and humility and equality. 'Never ever' will women be ordained – said Pell. They are second class citizens and have no place in the ministry; that's how they've been treated according to the hierarchy. The future of the church is with the laity.

Bridget Croft

I think many Catholics saw the irony of the Mary MacKillop celebrations in a church in which women are still excluded from full participation. As I said at Mass last Sunday: "Today we celebrate a woman's canonisation; hopefully it won't be too long before we celebrate a woman's ordination."

*Fr John Crothers PP
Penshurst
(Letter to Sydney Morning Herald)*

When the church's no didn't mean no

Some years ago I was with an ecumenical group visiting a Catholic AIDS centre in South Africa. The manager gave an introductory talk and the inevitable question came up: 'What do you do about condoms to help prevent HIV?' We were told that the Catholic Church forbade the use of condoms, full stop. Later, as we went round the AIDS centre, I noticed a large condom dispenser on a shelf. I asked discreetly about this apparent anomaly. 'Sometimes in practice', I was told, 'we have to choose life over death'. Perhaps the latest papal pronouncement will do away with the hypocrisy that many Catholics are forced to live with because of rules that defy commonsense and which, in the most part, are ignored. It is also encouraging for those who choose to remain in the Catholic Church yet continue to challenge some of its unjust rulings and those arbitrary decisions made without consultation with the laity. It seems that after years of lobbying for change in a certain ruling, suddenly the Vatican changes its position and says, "As we have always taught ..." hoping that lay folk have short memories.

*Rosemary Breen
Inverell
(Letter to Sydney Morning Herald)*

This edition (No. 37) of *ARCvoice* is right on the button of the quandary we are all in .. can we accept the sentence of excommunication for seeking the company of other baptised christians as more acceptable companions in the search?... which has been necessitated by the distortion of Jesus' message by the RC entertainments of power and glory (*cappa magna*, infallibility, medieval magnificence, feudal servility, intellectual arrogance, etc) ... antithetic, even blasphemous, and perpetrated by shameless careerists masquerading as authentic apostles of Jesus' messianic deliverance?... I think we are being called to a moment of truth of which we are both unworthy and lack the courage and commitment needed to fulfill! ... May we all thank God for ARC and its fellow prophets all over the world for the witness that is obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit *ad maiorem Dei gloriam ... Jesus vincat* (and here I prefer the English because it expands the mystery) 'in a world without end ... Amen'.

Brian Nunn

Thanks to you for your informative and inspiring publication. It keeps my faith alive.

Judith Gauntlett

Thank you for the quality of articles and constant inspiration your apostolate provides. It is a good balance to what comes out of the Roman Curia.

Fr Paul Coleman, SJ

Thanks for your great *ARCvoice*. I read it from cover to cover.

Marylou McKeon



The Song Is Greater Than The Singers

Phoebe Basson

Advances in science and technology are transforming the world we live in. Discoveries in the field of medicine are prolonging our lives. Space exploration has given us a glimpse of the universe beyond our planet and the world of cyberspace reveals a wealth of information at the press of a button or a touch on a screen.

Yet the institutional church, not for the first time in its troubled and often lurid history, has its sights set on a return to the world of yesterday. And not just yesterday. It has embarked on a nostalgic journey to an age long past which renders it irrelevant to the needs and challenges of contemporary society. The Pope wants to return the liturgy to its historic past by restoring a dead language under the guise of vernacular translations so unacceptable that a return to the Latin might well be considered the lesser of two evils.

He has a vision, stated many times, of a 'smaller, purer church', a dream that has a good chance of succeeding given the diaspora of the disenchanting. This dream has less to do with protecting the interests of the Church than with preserving his position of power and authority. He sees as a threat the progressive element within the Church that questions, and often rejects, traditional doctrines such as original sin, the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Birth, the Assumption, the Ascension and infallibility. Scriptural references quoted in support of them are considered inconclusive. There are no references to papal infallibility. Unknown until 1870, it is arguably the most transparently, one might almost say blatantly, man-made teaching. On the strength of it the doctrine of the Assumption, for example, was proclaimed a tenet of faith as recently as 1950 by Pius XII, speaking *ex cathedra*. Infallibility is the pope's most powerful weapon, enabling him to define Catholic belief and practice and to determine the moral decisions of the faithful. It is part of the myth that the Church cannot err, a claim that history has disproved countless times. And because it is a moral power it confers on him greater control over the lives and consciences of men and women than any other world leader. No-one should be entitled to exercise such control. It usurps the basic right of every person to make decisions according to conscience and invades the God-given right of personal freedom in the quest for truth. Its misuse has enormous destructive potential.

The doubting and the questioning of the sophisticated

and the well-informed within the Church have eroded the faith of our fathers so that those who still regard themselves as Catholics, albeit sometimes only nominally, are left to wonder whether the cap still fits.

Yet for most of them the cap does still fit. The teachings that are questioned are for the most part peripheral to the essence of Catholic belief contained in our profession of faith, the Creed. They are long held and traditional but they are the proclamations of men. However, dissident voices in the Church pose a threat to uniformity and the pope's authority. I believe this is the force that drives him to turn back the clock and so consolidate his privileged position. He is unmoved by the growing number of those who have given up the unequal struggle and left. He feels more secure without them. He is untroubled by the shortage of priests and the lack of vocations: his smaller church will not need many priests. He is indifferent to the intolerable burden borne by those priests still in ministry today, many of them on the eve of retirement or still supplying after retirement, so he steadfastly refuses to consider solutions such as optional celibacy and the ordination of women to ease their burden. He resists any attempt at change and renewal for this could mean a more collegial method of governance which would erode his position of unchallenged authority. He and the phalanx of like-minded men with whom he has surrounded himself are without compassion for the victims of sexual abuse whose lives have been destroyed. They have lost sight of their pastoral mission. The pain of God's people leaves them unmoved. Power and privilege have turned their hearts to stone.

Why then do some of us still stay? I can of course answer only for myself. I stay because the institutional church, centred in the Vatican, is not the real church. It is the governing arm of the Church. The real church is the community of believers who share, in fellowship with one another, a sacramental life in Christ Jesus.

Geoffrey Robinson in his book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* offers an eloquent and moving description in the meditation at the end of Chapter 14. He calls it the song of Jesus.

And so the song of Jesus gradually spread out from Jerusalem to other lands. Parents sang it to their children and it began to be passed down through the generations and through the centuries.

Sometimes, in the lives of great saints, it was sung with exquisite beauty. At other times and by other people it was sung very badly indeed, for the song was so beautiful that there was power in possessing it, and people used the power of the song to march to war and to oppress and dominate others. Despite this, the song was always greater than the singers and its ancient beauty could never be destroyed. (p305)

I will stay for the song that is greater than the singers. □

Together in Reform

Bernard Thorogood

Reading ARCvoice is a great encouragement to me as a minister of the Uniting Church, for your witness is a reminder that the Spirit is not silenced by any hierarchy, whether in state or church. As a child of the Reformation I am very much at home with the aims of collegiality and subsidiarity. Here, I think, we all stand on the same ground as the People of God, in the Vatican II theme, all sharing responsibility for the health of the body, all with valid experience to share and all called to some form of ministry. That is why we abide by wide discussion of all hard questions and representative decision making. We know this can be an untidy process; it does not deliver sharp, quick judgements. But I testify that it is worth it since the most creative insights often come from those who are not often heard.

I also testify to the vital decision to open the whole of church life to the majority of the membership, women. It is not long before the centenary of the first ordination of a woman in my own tradition (Congregational, England, 1917) and we have long forgotten the old arguments. The strength, devotion and wisdom of women in all the leadership roles in the church have been long demonstrated, so it becomes ever more baffling that the Catholic hierarchy sits tight on the throne of male

dominance. Could it be, do you think, a fear that women might do the job better?

But perhaps the area of reform that could be most energising for all of us is the difficult balance of diversity and unity. The children of the Reformation have specialised in diversity – in theology, order, liturgy, ministry, language – to the extent that the People of God have been split into a thousand disparate bundles. Yet there is only one church of Jesus Christ. Catholics have sustained the unity of the global church by the imperial pattern based on the emperor and his court. The unity is a great treasure, but the cost is high, for it means denying the diversity of our human search for God. All discovery, new ways of devotion, fresh social insights, scientific advances, sexual freedoms, fresh biblical understanding – all have to be viewed through the narrow mind-cast of a male, celibate, conservative priestly tradition.

Can we reach forward to reform in such a way that unity and diversity are held together both in the Spirit and in the Body? Can personal conscience be truly honoured within the one communion? Could we all seek the fullness of fellowship with a Bishop of Rome as presiding officer and universal pastor who has passed all legislative and appointment power to representative bodies? What kinds of discipline shall we need to maintain the freedom of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Can we trust the church?

To share in such thought of reform for all of us is a fruit of your stimulating paper. □

Women at the Altar

Caroline Goosen

After reading *ARCvoice* Issue No 37, I am prompted to get in touch to share a wonderful experience we had in Rome last May.

Being aware that there was to be an ordination of a woman belonging to the Old Catholic Church in an Anglican Church in Rome in May (2010), we went in search of the event on the anticipated date out of curiosity, as we were lucky enough to be in the Eternal City! To cut a long story short, we eventually discovered that the church was the church I had attended 40 years ago when living in Rome. The weekend happened to be that of Pentecost, so all celebrants were dressed in red and looked wonderful under the lights and sun. The woman was a married Italian woman, working in the Diocese of Milan assisted by her husband. She was to be the first Italian woman ordained, and the second woman ordained within the *Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht* (see internet for some interesting details.)

As you may imagine, the ceremony, accompanied by magnificent sacred song, was both very impressive and very moving, celebrated by important figures in the church, attended by a relatively small group of her parishioners from Milan and a good number of (out of control) photographers. The occasion will remain a highlight in treasured memories of our visit to Rome.

There was but short mention of this event in a Roman newspaper and nothing that we found in the Milan newspaper! □

Priests, Celibacy, and Sexuality and the Catholic Church

Richard Sipe

www.richardsipe.com

Dialogue about important questions is all I have ever advocated – I have worked hard and fought in every way I have known for discussion about every aspect of the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. One goal is to have that dialogue start in Catholic seminaries. Although I think that a married priesthood and the ordination of women are within the evolutionary future of the Church I have never been an activist in these movements. Even in being an expert witness and consultant in sexual abuse cases against church entities I have always looked for ways to review and bring significant issues into open discourse. My service focuses on the protection of children from the assault of disordered and perverted power. I am not alone.

Msgr. Charles Scicluna, the Vatican prosecutor in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, raised a credible candid voice in September 2010 when he admitted to the press that sex abuse by Catholic clergy was an age-old problem that needs to be rooted out. He stated,

I don't think it's a question of happening. It has always happened. It's important that people talk about it, because otherwise we cannot bring the healing which the church can offer to people who need it – both the victims and perpetrators.'

Last month a new clerical hero burst onto center stage in the midst of our Catholic sexual crisis. Robert Zollitsch, archbishop of Freiburg and Chairman of the German Episcopal Conference went beyond simple apologies for clergy sexual malfeasance and advocated for:

taking the initiative toward dialogue...that includes ways to talk about awkward subjects in the area of sexuality, the vow of celibacy or the receiving of the sacrament by divorcees. [20Sep2010]

He is on target, neither defensive nor apologetic when he focused on the need to review the *'personal, spiritual and sacramental life of our clergy [that] has long been pressing.'* He also admitted, *'We know that we failed,'* adding that the widespread problem of molestation by pedophile priests had been *'recognized too late.'*

The larger challenges of the current crisis in the Roman Catholic Church are not limited to behaviors, but impinge on the structure of ministry – dangerous questions about power.

Why is priestly ministry limited to men? Why can't women be lawfully ordained? Does the all-male-power-structure generate and perpetuate misogyny and homosexuality? Is mandatory celibacy necessary, or even desirable for diocesan clergy? Should clerical celibacy be perpetual? Is blind obedience to the pope moral? Is the idea of infallibility wrong – destructive and not in keeping with Christian life and mission?

The Roman Catholic Church is in a crisis mode because these unsolved issues are vibrant and prominent in the minds of many thoughtful Catholics and crucial to the continued membership of some.

Sexual abuse of minors by bishops and priests is the symptom behavior that brings the whole of the sexual/celibate agenda into unavoidable attention.

Pope John Paul II called clergy abuse an 'American problem'. He and Benedict XVI both warned that *'secular'* values and culture influenced errant priests. Nonetheless, irrefutable evidence indicates otherwise. Facts are mounting. The pattern, practice and record of abuse of minors by Catholic clergy and the church response now shouts for itself. Although the fight to expose the phenomenon has gone on for 25 years, 2010 appears to be the tipping point in the worldwide awareness of Catholic clergy abuse.

A.W. Richard Sipe is devoted full time to research into the sexual and celibate practices of Roman Catholic bishops and priests.

Volunteer help urgently needed

Until recently, Jim Taverne has been responsible for all ARC's finances. He has done a wonderful job over many years, but finds it now beyond him and we urgently need someone to take on these tasks:

- maintain the ARC membership list
- record subscriptions and donations
- send out receipts and thank-you letters
- banking

Familiarity with Excel, mail-merge and email are essential.

Members often ask how they can help the Secretariat. This may be just the challenge you are looking for!

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Documentation on the Abuse of Authority by the Catholic Church

John Wijngaards

www.womenpriests.org

At an international meeting on the 16th of October this year in Utrecht in the Netherlands, we discussed the need of setting up a central documentation on the abuse of authority in the Roman Catholic Church. COR, Corpus and the Federation of Christian Ministries were represented from the USA.

The abuse of authority lies at the root of the official Church's unwillingness and inability to move forward from its antiquated positions on issue such as: obligatory celibacy, homosexuality, the use of contraceptives in marriage, the ordination of women, eradication of child abuse, adaptation of the liturgy, etc. etc.

This abuse of authority cuts off the normal avenues through which reform could come about.

Reform movements all over the world have been protesting against the abuse of authority. However, at our meeting we decided it would be helpful to compile a central documentation on the abuse of authority. It will serve as:

1. a resource for the reform movements in their own campaigns;
2. inspiration to many concerned Catholics and others who are browsing the internet;
3. a source of information for the media: press, radio and television;
4. a research tool for high school and college students (we estimate that 30% of our visitors are students!)

Our website: www.womenpriests.org is prepared to host this central documentation. We welcome cooperation from other reform movements in the Church. Our website attracts 1,400,000+ visitors a year (20 million hits). We operate six major language sections (English, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Italian) and offer introductions in 20 other languages. We carry a huge archive of searchable material.

I have now created a start-up menu at

<http://www.womenpriests.org/authority/index.asp>

As you will see, the documentation is provisionally presented under five headings:

1. the suppression of lay authority in the Church
2. the suppression of free speech for theologians and experts
3. the suppression of the rights of Bishops' Conferences
4. the appointment of 'party-line' bishops
5. the Pope and his Vatican staff indiscriminately usurp all power in the Church

As we invite the other contributing reform movements to do, we also invite Australian Reforming Catholics to:

1. send us relevant documents or references to documents (our webmanager's email: Jos Rickman, jos@womenpriests.org). We are aware of the fact that your *ARCvoice* and other publications contain valuable documents relevant to the abuse of church authority topic. If we would receive these documents in electronic format, we could enter them in our central documentation (obviously with a credit to their source);
2. send us your suggestions as to how we can make this documentation more effective;
3. let us know whether you also want to be credited on our 'abuse of authority' opening page as a partner in building up this documentation (we can print your logo & link to your URL).



Dipping into Robinson

John Hiller

I was moved by Bishop Robinson's *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* and I ordered a copy of his 2010 book without any knowledge of its content, let alone its title. *Love's Urgent Longings*¹ was a surprise. This short book – some 100 pages – is organised in three chapters:

Longing for Something Deeper
Longing for Perfect Love
Longing for Community.

Clearly 'longing' is important and so too are the relationships where the longing occurs. I was struck by these two aspects and my comments look at the way the longing becomes love and its dependence on those involved.

The book can be read in several ways. The philosophy and relationship of feelings, belief and reasoning are interesting; so too is the connection with the 2007 volume. Either may be the focus – but for me it is the relationship perspective.

This is not a book review but a perspective. I quote extensively and fashion many sentences from Bishop Robinson's phrases. These fragments let him speak.

A starting point for relationships is the self. Who am I? Who do I wish to become? Underneath such questions there are deep yearnings. Robinson has a yearning for love at the centre of his being. At one level experiencing love for anything at all gives a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of meaning to life, but there has to be something deeper and fuller. It is the very depth, the almost infinity, of the longing for love that leads to the belief that something always will be missing at the centre of life unless there is a love so great as to need the word *divine* attached to it. This profound desire for love led Robinson to his god.

He asks about the type of being that can provide such love. A god of anger, or a 'theistic god' who demands high standards of conduct, cannot be the god he seeks – their essence is not love. He asks questions about the form of god and sees issues of belief as a subsequent stage.

How to describe god: analogies are limited, and analogy is the only language we have. Nothing in our universe is remotely like our god. Robinson asks how I can have a loving relationship with someone whom I cannot imagine, see or hear, let alone reach out and touch. And one who never seems to answer me when I speak. Also, could I ever believe in a god whom humans can possess or explain? Life is not an intellectual problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.

Suffering is mentioned several times. It must speak directly to the victims and not be simply a defence of our own ideas about the divine. If god exists, it is intended we should live in a world of randomness, uncertainty and suffering ... we should bring to this random world all the

order and certainty we can, and overcome all the suffering we can.

Growing is important – love gives the freedom to grow. It will not suffocate, manipulate or seek only one's own good. Robinson's god wants growth first, and obedience as a means to that end. Correspondingly, free will is the greatest possession. If we lose this, we lose our ability to grow. Respect for human dignity and for others follows. Community is important; the balance between individual good and the common good is one of the problems facing any society.

The association of feelings, belief and reasoning is noted. People do not come to the question of god out of philosophical conviction. They react with their feelings before they react with their minds, and it is only when they get their emotional experience right that they can give an adequate intellectual response. Robinson sees his reasoning as coming from desires within, rather than arguments based on facts from outside. The choice of belief or unbelief depends on personal experience and on what one is seeking.

Any worthwhile goal has to reach out to others. As I reach out I need to ask myself *what is the most loving thing I can do*. In the real world I may do this reaching out from within one of the religious traditions people have formed. A group sharing my ideals can help me to deal with others. But that group is made up of human beings who try to deal with the deepest of human desires amid their own fears and longings.

Choice of the tradition is a major decision. Any tradition comes with myriad additions that may obscure and distort. Abstracting the basic story out of this messiness is a challenge. Either the basic story is to be abandoned or that story is to be lived in the midst of the human community. The member may face a relationship with an organisation like that of a son to a mother who has been too controlling. To do the most loving thing when at odds with the church and seeking change, involves much thinking, some difficult loving, and many hard decisions.

Bishop Robinson has provided an interesting read. The first sentence in his *Introduction* speaks of the book as the story of his personal spiritual journey. This has taken most of his adult life. Experiences since his 2007 book have filled out his view.

When I got to page 103 I was satisfied and grateful for the associations I had been shown. I intended to put the book in my bookcase. But that would have been a mistake. This is not a book to read once. It needs to be left about, to be picked up to read 3 or 4 pages at random and then to reflect, probably for quite a while. Robinson's pen pictures do not tell all; they give starting points for our own thoughts and experiences to fill out. This is a meditative book. Savouring it a few pages at a time can take us far. *Love's Urgent Longings* is a book to read initially, and thereafter to *Dip into Robinson!*

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¹ *Love's Urgent Longings*, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, johngarrettpublishing, 2010

Vatican justice: Do what I say not what I do

Author: **The Editorial Group**

New Catholic Times 8.11.10

Pope Benedict has spoken of the ‘urgent need’ to educate laypeople in Catholic social teaching. He said: ‘It is necessary to prepare lay people capable of dedicating themselves to the common good, especially in complex environments such as the world of politics.’ He concludes his message by expressing the hope that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace may continue ‘to prepare fresh *aggiornamenti* of Church social doctrine’. In order to globalise this doctrine, he writes, ‘it may be appropriate to create centres and institutions for its study, dissemination and implementation throughout the world’. ‘In collaboration with others, seek more effective ways to transmit the contents of social doctrine ... in the great centres where world thought is forged – such as the organs of the lay press, universities and economic and social study centres.

First we would like to thank Pope Benedict for his reminder about what has often been called ‘the best kept secret of the church’, her teaching on justice and the expressed hope for an updating of that teaching. But TO WHOM DOES THIS MESSAGE NEED BE ADDRESSED? Aquinas taught ‘*nemo dat quod non habet*’ (no one gives what (s)he does not have’. John XIII invited people to ‘*read the signs of the times*’. Now Benedict XVI feels there is ‘an urgent need’ to educate laypeople in Catholic social teaching.

Children are abused by priests and those pedophile priests are protected and enabled by bishops who put the ‘bella figura’ of the institution above justice for both the abused and abuser. It is **Voice of the Faithful**, a lay initiated and led movement that moved heaven and earth to move Cardinal Law out of Boston.

Laypeople are forbidden by papal edict to even think about, let alone discuss, the ordination of women despite the findings of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that there is nothing in Scripture that forbids such ordination, and despite archeological discoveries that point to women functioning as priests and bishops in the early church. **Call To Action, Future Church, Women’s Ordination Movement, Canadian Network for Women’s Equality** are but a few of the lay-led Catholic organizations that continue to fight this justice issue. Roman Catholic WomenPriests and those who support them are excommunicated *latae sententiae*, that is by letter, the due process of Vatican justice.

The best educated *non-ordained faithful* (the term used instead of laity by canon lawyer and theologian Ladislav Orsy) are ‘advised’ by the Archbishop of Detroit ‘against participating in the American Catholic Council local

listening sessions and national gathering in June 2011’. **The American Catholic Council** is a movement bringing together a network of individuals, organizations and communities to consider the state and future of our Church. It takes its lead from Blessed John XXIII who stated:

It is not that the Gospel has changed: it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have were faced with new tasks in the social order at the start of the century; those who, like me, were twenty years in the East and eight in France, were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions, and know that the moment has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to look far ahead.

The Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church seeks to put into practice the statement of the 1971 Synod of Bishops:

While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life-style found within the Church itself. Within the Church, rights must be preserved.

Homosexuals, like everyone held in existence and relationship by God, are made in the image and likeness of God. At the same time a few verses in scripture are used to justify an abhorrent teaching that homosexuals are objectively disordered and intrinsically evil. Verses of scripture written more than 2,000 years ago were once used to justify slavery, a god who slaughtered, men’s hairstyles and women’s sanitary habits. **Dignity** is Canada’s organization of Roman Catholics who are concerned about our church’s sexual theology, particularly as it pertains to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. Dignity’s members are informed and faithful Catholics who are urging church leaders to consider modern scientific and political understandings of sexual orientation and gender equality.

Pope Benedict, with his suggestion that laypersons need to be better educated in the social teachings of the church, is engaged in what in philosophy is known as ‘special pleading’, perhaps more commonly known as ‘do what I say, not what I do.’ The laity are to be educated in the social teachings of the church but focus those teachings away from the injustices found inside the church. That might have worked once upon a time but John XXIII and Vatican II changed all that, at least for the non-ordained faithful.

Popes, curial cardinals, bishops and priests, in other words those in the church who are ontologically different from the laypersons to whom Benedict refers, are in urgent need of education in Catholic social teaching but perhaps even more in urgent need of the praxis of Catholic social teaching. □

Geoffrey Robertson QC

The Case of the Pope

Vatican Accountability for Human Rights Abuse

This book delivers a devastating indictment of the way the Vatican has run a secret legal system that shields paedophile priests from criminal trial around the world.

Is the Pope morally or legally responsible for the negligence that has allowed so many terrible crimes to go unpunished? Should he and his seat of power, the Holy See, continue to enjoy an immunity that places them above the law?

Geoffrey Robertson QC, a distinguished human rights lawyer and judge, evinces a deep respect for the good works of Catholics and their church. But, he argues, unless Pope Benedict XVI can divest himself of the beguilements of statehood and devotion to obsolescent Canon Law, the Vatican will remain a serious enemy to the advance of human rights.

- ... the Pope's claim to impunity because he was head of a state, namely the Holy See – a claim recently made on his behalf by the Bush administration in US courts – was open to serious question: it relied on a squalid deal with Mussolini back in 1929 which bore no comparison to the grant of sovereignty to independent people. The UN had been wrong to accord to the Catholic Church a portentous status that is denied to all other religions and NGOs. (p.vii)
- His legal responsibility is complicated by his claim to sovereign immunity, but it is surely worth asking, at a time when Benedict XVI has set his face against essential reform, whether the Pope should be the one man left in the world who is above the law. (p.viii-ix)

Book Review

Gideon Goosen

Kasper, Walter (2009). *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*

London: Continuum. pb., pp.207, \$23.95

Here is a book to get you thinking. If there is so much we have in common with Christian churches, why are we still apart? Do we need more changes, more reforms to bring us closer together? When you read this book you are amazed at how much we have in common when it comes to the big issues like believing in a Triune God, in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in salvation through Jesus. Surely we must all be on the same side?

Well, we are, sort of. The book speaks of the unity we share in a common baptism and common faith in Jesus Christ. But then there are all kinds of detail where we can say: well we don't agree on this or that. For example, we agree on what the nature of priesthood is, but not on who may be ordained.

This book by Cardinal Kasper, who was president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity until last year, is a look backwards at what has been achieved on the ecumenical journey over the last forty years. It refers to a number of international dialogues and draws on them to show points of agreement and sometimes where the churches still disagree, or, as it says ever so politely, "more work is needed". We might be well aware of the ARCIC (Anglican-Roman Catholic) and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues but less familiar with the fruits of the dialogue of the Roman Catholics with the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). This book will close that gap.

The book concentrates on the basics: the Trinity, Jesus Christ, Justification, the Church, and the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Each chapter on these topics brings together what has been agreed upon by the dialogues. The last chapter is a concise, useful and readable summary of Kasper's own conclusions. Given that it has taken over four hundred years to get over the Reformation and start talking, the progress over the last forty years is truly astonishing.

Some of the classic disputes have been settled, we have moved beyond polemical stances and in some cases we are now able to 'exchange gifts'. Thankfully the issue of scripture or tradition has been surpassed by seeing scripture as within, and arising from, the early tradition. Many hermeneutical questions remain. How are we to interpret scripture? Who decides on the binding interpretation of our common apostolic heritage? How is teaching authority of the leaders to be balanced with the *sensus fidei*. Then there is the delicate matter of the Petrine Ministry. There is much room for reform for everyone here.

Reading this book one is strengthened in the essentials of one's Christian faith and encouraged to see that members of churches other than our own are our sisters and brothers in Christ. We need to treat them as such.

The publisher, Continuum, has done a splendid job in producing a book that is a handy size to hold when reading. We may have harvested some ecumenical fruit but there is more to come. □

When Will the Roman Empire Fall?

John Buggy

In September I had a wonderful holiday in Europe that included a week in Rome. Having not been there before, I wondered what impact the experience of being at the centre of the Church's administration would have on me. Staying in a unit just outside the wall of Vatican City gave me the opportunity to make several visits to St Peter's and consider it in the context of other historical Roman sites.

The first thing that struck me was the extent to which traditional understanding of the Catholic faith is embedded in art and icons in every church and Catholic building. If one were preaching in these environments it would be very difficult to present a different way of understanding history and the faith itself when the senses are bombarded with such concrete imagery no matter where you look. We might like to accommodate the assumption of Mary, for example, by simply honouring her as Jesus' mother, but in so many places throughout Italy you cannot escape the many and most fanciful images of a body rising through the clouds. No wonder that this and other understandings like it made their way into dogma.

The physical structures of the many grand altars in these churches militate against change just by themselves. Placing modern altars that face the people in front of them would detract from their grandeur and not be good for tourism. As I walked around the many altars in St Peter's Basilica early one morning, the majority of the Masses were being said there with the priest having his back to the small congregations and many were conducted in the old Tridentine rite. I amazed myself at how much of the Latin I remembered, my responses in the Mass coming quite easily.

As I took in the other sites of ancient Rome, Palatine Hill, the Forum, the Colosseum, etc, it came across to me

very starkly the extent to which the Church took on the style and physical properties of that culture. The power of a central administration is obvious where any dissent from it was quickly crushed. Large basilicas (the word means "meeting places") lie in ruins in the Forum, Pompeii and other locations, many of which became Christian churches, the word "basilica" synonymous with the way we refer to our cathedrals today. The Christian Church in this part of the world built up an empire of lands, buildings and countless treasures both acquired and stolen as the Roman Empire crumbled.

The question arose in my mind as to how much the Church in Rome, in sharing so much with the administration that it followed, might also eventually share in something of its fate. The Roman Empire became disunited with so many inside it gradually becoming opposed to its rule and this contributed significantly to its decline. Empires by their nature are authoritarian. The increasing centralisation of power at the Vatican seen in recent decades, the selection of conservatives to fill the ranks of cardinals, and the bans on even the discussion of certain issues illustrates this similarity with an empire protecting itself.

In wandering through St Peter's, the Vatican museum, the Sistine Chapel, and even the passages under St Peter's itself, I was not filled with any special awe at being in a place central to my faith, but rather of being in a large extended museum, fascinating and historically interesting, but not emotionally moving. There was a time in my life when being at the centre of Catholicism would have impressed me greatly, but here now the impact was more of the sheer size and splendour of what has been materially acquired. For me, faith and spiritual understanding are in another space. □



Fellows of THE JESUS SEMINAR to visit Sydney in 2011

“Jesus – Better Known and Bible – Better Read” Revealing a Jesus We Hardly Knew and a Bible We Have Hardly Understood

Rev. Professor Sir Lloyd Geering and Rev. Dr. Greg Jenks will be the keynote speakers on Saturday March 19th 2011 at the next Regional Conference hosted in the Beecroft Community Hall (Sydney) by the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought.

What they have to say will help progressives to make sensible use of the Bible and to adopt a positive non-theistic attitude to the Jesus of history. Both guest speakers are Fellows of the Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar, but exercise their ministries from almost opposite sides of the progressive religious network.

Lloyd Geering has been a champion of progressive religious thought outside the traditional institutions and is a member of The Sea of Faith. He was tried for heresy (and exonerated!!) by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in the 1960's. He is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University in Wellington, and will give illustrated talks on 'Jesus Rediscovered'.

Greg Jenks, on the other hand, is interested in the application of progressive scholarship to the practice of local Christian faith communities. He is an Anglican priest and Academic Dean at St Francis Theological College in Brisbane. Greg is a religion scholar whose special research interests focus on ancient Israel and Christian origins. He will address the subject, 'Taking the Bible Seriously but not Literally'.

Early Bird bookings are now being received.

Registration (including lunch, morning/afternoon tea):

Adult (after 1 Feb. 2011)	\$60
Pensioner, Student, CPRT & ARC Member:	\$55
Early Bird (before 1 Feb 2011)	\$50

Please direct enquiries for application forms to:
CPRTFreedomtoExplore@yahoo.com.au

or call 0405 758 116

Extracts from *Honest to God* by Robert Funk the Founder of the Jesus Seminar and Author of *The Five Gospels*

Jesus is a topic of wide public interest, and the ancient gospels are the subject of a profound public ignorance. In addition, in recent years there has been an awakening in scholarly circles to new ways of viewing the Jesus tradition preserved in the gospels.

Rule One: Human knowledge is finite. It is fallible, limited, subject to correction. If it were not, study and learning would be unnecessary. This rule applies, willy-nilly, to the Bible, to the pope, to ecclesiastical bureaucrats and contemporary preachers alike. And to scholars.

Rule Two: The frame of reference for our questions should be as large as the world and all that's in it; it should not be confined to the Bible and religion. We should place our questions in the broadest possible context. Narrowing the frame of reference limits the perspectives we can bring to bear on our deepest queries.

Rule Three: Our questions and their answers should be informed by all the information we can gather. And the facts depend on what we can observe. ... there are presently no fragments of any of the books of the New Testament older than about 125 C.E., and no copies of any substantial portions of any Christian writings that can be dated to a time before 200 C.E. And these are copies of copies made long after the originals.

Rule Four: Those to whom we go for information and evaluation must be those who qualify as scholars and experts.

Rule Five: In spite of the sciences, impressive methodological advances, and the knowledge explosion, we still cannot be certain that we can tell the difference between illusion and reality.

Rule Six: Our investigations, our quest for truth, should be sprinkled with humour. We must not take ourselves too seriously.

Rule Seven: No matter how many illusions we dispel, no matter how firm the conclusions we reach this time around, we will turn out to be wrong in some way, perhaps in many ways, down the road. Someone, somewhere, some-time will have to come along and correct our mistakes while adding their own. This brings us back to Rule One: Human knowledge is finite.

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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