



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
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Editorial

Having our discussion panel at the AGM was an attempt to explore the possibilities for identifying as Catholic at a time when so many are abandoning the practice of religion. Many structured organisations are challenged today and struggle to be meaningful and the Catholic Church is just one of them. The dogmas that sustained past generations and the practices that attempted to control behaviour under pain of mortal sin are now constantly being brought into question, not just by those who want to be free of all this, but also by those who are attempting to develop a deeper personal spirituality.

The underlying question of the discussion related to the extent to which one might participate in the challenge and still identify as Catholic. There were some interesting insights into the way the large majority of Catholics do identify as Catholic. Census figures show a continuing trend for people to state their religion as Catholic even though there has been a steep decline in Mass attendance. It appears that the increase in those who state that they have no religion has partly come from those who previously identified as Anglican. It appears the Catholics are less likely to dispense with the 'tag' even if belief and practice have become less important to them.

But for those of us who are seeking answers as to how we might identify in a committed way while questioning so much of what we may have been previously taught, simply observing practices and saying the said things is probably not sufficient for the way we wish to identify.

Did we achieve the objective on the day? Perhaps not. It is probably a bit disappointing for many of us if serious questions about dogma are met with answers that the notions of God are mysteries in an attempt to overcome what is difficult to understand or explain or to avoid controversy. The mysteries have been enshrined in dogmas by the institutional Church and, since dogma is not faith but an aid to enlightening faith, it is reasonable to expect that there can

be other ways that enable the believer to relate more satisfactorily to these mysteries.

Perhaps it is asking too much to reach any satisfactory conclusions within a few hours of discussion about how much a Catholic needs to believe or do in order to really remain within the fold of the Church. Perhaps it is only on reflection after a morning spent in the manner that we did that the more insightful questions emerge. Or it could be, as several members expressed, that we need to meet a bit more often in a less formal way to share where our spirituality is leading us.

John Buggy

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I object to the 'new translation' of the Mass, because of the way it was adopted by Benedict XVI and the Curia for promulgation and compulsory use in parishes of national churches throughout the English-speaking world.

Robert Mickens (*The Tablet* 2 July 2011 – 'A war of words') mentions the 2002 meeting of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) with the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences and Cardinal Arinze in which 'they acquiesced in the Congregation for Divine Worship's claim that the Holy See (the Roman Church) alone had the right to adjudicate in the matter'.

Emeritus Archbishop Carroll of Canberra Goulburn, in a letter to *The Tablet* 16th July 2011, describes how, arriving at the meeting with the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences from South Africa & New Zealand for discussion of *Liturgiam Authenticam* according to agenda papers already sent ahead, he and his SA and NZ colleagues found that the agenda item had been deleted, the Pope having signed off on the statutes.

A canon lawyer was brought in to address their concerns, but they were not convinced. Nonetheless, *Vox Clara*, headed by Cardinal Pell, triumphed. Now we have the 'new translation'.

It is naïve to think that this will revive the disaffected Catholics who have left or are apathetic. The cost of the whole project in pounds and euros must have been considerable. By what methodology would the Congregation for Divine Worship be able to demonstrate that the new translation had a beneficial effect on church practice and attendance?

That Benedict and the Curia were prepared to devote energy and power to this while the universal church drifts slowly into decline is bewildering. Surely not a case of heart talking to heart!

I look forward to hearing more about Peter Wilkinson.

*Harding Burns
Rose Bay NSW*

The questions you raised in your editorial were spot on. In response may I suggest the following: 'No; very little; who knows; absolutely; obviously not; definitely not; doubt if anyone knows'. In fact as you alluded to, I suspect some priests are somewhat exasperated and frustrated with the whole process. No doubt the church will be rolling out, or have commenced already the usual spin doctors (aka bishops) to justify the changes. Rather than 'window dressing' the church again has missed the opportunity for real reform and overdue *meaningful* changes!

Thank you for your insightful commentary, and keep up the great work

*Drew Porter
Wagga Wagga NSW*

As an elder (now 80) I find the new translation of the Missal very irritating. Not only is the print on the cue cards too small for me as I now have fairly advanced macular degeneration), but some of the words eg: 'consubstantial', 'chalice' rather than 'cup', 'under my roof' and 'for us men'. The list is endless. As for beating of breasts – Ugh.

I feel sorry for the elderly priests who have to read endless phrases in really bad English which sound like a St Paul's epistle in bad translation.

*Ann Ryan
Kingston TAS*

I have no problem with change, just so long as the change is for the better and helps me to grow and develop. I was a young mother at the time of Vatican II and I remember the joy we felt that our Church was becoming more relevant to our lives and, hopefully, to the lives of our children. I wanted my children to understand and question what they were being taught and embrace my faith not because I told them to, but because it was what they wanted.

I didn't want them to just parrot the green catechism as my generation and my parents before me had done, nor did I want them to sing hymns they didn't understand. I clearly remember as a small child, fresh from the far west of NSW and new to school, singing with great gusto, 'I am a little Catholic, I love my holy faith', only in my innocence I substituted 'face' for 'faith'. I was sure my face was holy and, if Sister told me to love it, I would.

I do not mean to treat this subject lightly, my anger is too great. Yes, I am angry that the Church I love is going backward and that we have had forced on us a liturgy that is repressive rather than comforting. I am no longer that joyful young woman I was in the sixties and as I looked around the church at Mass last Sunday I saw so many people like me, grey-haired. I also saw the children, bright-eyed, innocent, and young parents doing their best to love and care for their children. Are any of these people grievous sinners? I doubt it.

And if we have sinned, surely Our Lord's own prayer with its gentle words covers the need to ask for forgiveness.

No, I am not going back to always feeling guilty, I am not going to do the new (old) responses. I will instead give thanks to Our Lord for the love, kindness, friendship and generosity I experience every day.

Thank you for speaking out,

*Noelene Uren
Beacon Hill NSW*

Letter to Cardinal Pell from a group of concerned Catholics

I am writing on behalf of a number of concerned, Mass-going Catholics active in parish life, who wish to express our disappointment at the new liturgy translation. This view was expressed at a recent meeting held to discuss the subject.

The following are some of the comments resulting from the meeting:

- The new Liturgy translation uses outdated words such as ‘dewfall’, lacks harmony, and contrasts with the superseded liturgy which was clear, direct and consistent with modern English usage and convention and was in the vernacular of the people. In some cases the new translation still uses gender-exclusive language which is not acceptable in most English-speaking countries.
- The new translation is wordy and contains pompous jargon. It uses words such as ‘consubstantial’ which are not words in ordinary usage and which will be incomprehensible especially to young people who are the future Church. It is unnecessarily authoritative, expressing the preferences of an elitist minority and has too little regard for either clergy or laity. The outdated language of the new translation is unlikely to appeal to many lapsed Catholics especially modern youth, which appeal should be of greater concern to the Church.
- The new translation uses awkward and obscure phrases. It has incomplete sentences, heavy sentences, and some sentences over eighty words long and sentences which begin with conjunctions. The translation, in slavishly using the Latin of the Tridentine Mass, uses Latin syntax instead of English syntax. When St Jerome translated the scriptures from their original languages into Latin he used the vernacular Latin of his era. It is acknowledged that in many cases, his translation did not properly reflect the original language.
- Regarding the quality of the English in the translation it needs to be understandable by the faithful. It needs to be in the vernacular of the present day as specified in the instruction on Vernacular Translations (*Liturgiam Authenticam*). It needs to have the syntax, sentence structure and

idiom of present day English in the country which uses it.

- Many members of the modern laity now have excellent education and competence and know from modern secular politics that they have a right to think for themselves and therefore might expect to be consulted before such changes are made. Most importantly, we ‘the church’ were not consulted nor did we have any input into the translation.
- The new translation represents a denial of the intentions and progress arising from Vatican II which were to translate the Latin in the pre-Vatican II liturgy into the language of the people. The manner in which this translation has been imposed on the church bypasses the collegiality of the bishops of the church promoted in Vatican II, denying them the input they should have. Some reported aspects of the revision, especially at the treatment of the ICEL Committee, were surprising, and might have been resolved by discussion and conciliation.
- Some changes seem trivial, unnecessary and costly when so many other projects which the church could undertake are crying out for funds.

We realise that the changes are a *fait accompli* but ‘Christ’s faithful have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the church’ (Canon 212, par 2). We consider that many of the changes are not good for the church.

However, it was decided at our meeting to cooperate fully with the changes as they are introduced into parish liturgies, to observe how our community responds to the changes, and review our concerns in twelve months time.

We would appreciate your reply and comments to this letter.

Don Humphrey, Convenor and contact person
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Also signed by 25 names
(printed with their permission)

NOTE: Cardinal Pell’s reply is available from the *ARCVoice* editor. Its content is as one would expect and includes the following statement: ‘We have been using the new translation for months in the Cathedral – not one complaint. And most/all of the WYD pilgrims are enthusiastic with the new translations.’

New translation muddies waters

Revised version of Missal in English has more than its share of linguistic oddities

Mike MacLachlan

London, United Kingdom
September 6, 2011

Thousands across Asia attend an English-language Mass, particularly in the Philippines and the increasingly polyglot larger cities.

If you are one of those thousands you may already be using the ‘new’ translation. The timing is left to individual bishops’ conferences but by Advent it will be in use worldwide. After much heated controversy it started in the UK last Sunday.

I was at first surprised at the controversy and also by the use of the word ‘new’ since to someone of my generation it seemed mostly a return to the old, pre-Vatican II form, which, though archaic, had a certain poetry. For instance, I welcome the return of the reply to the priest’s greeting ‘*The Lord be with you*’.

The reply ‘*And with your spirit*’ has much more resonance than the post-Vatican II ‘*And also with you*’, which sounds more like something you would say to a friend in the street. But there are plenty of other places where a return to the older phrasing is literally a step backward.

In the Creed, for instance, is ‘*consubstantial with the Father*’ any better than ‘*one in being*’? It’s just less understandable. And ‘*incarnate of the Virgin Mary*’. Why not ‘*born of*’? It means exactly the same and means more to most people. Similarly, in the Sanctus, the phrase ‘*Lord God of hosts*’ became ‘*God of power and might*’ – a loose translation of the Hebrew ‘*sabaoth*’ maybe, but it conveyed the meaning beautifully.

Now ‘*hosts*’ is back. But who understands the meaning of ‘*hosts*’ in the sense of armies? And does it not invite confusion with the communion host? And in the Preface, I much preferred ‘*It is right and fitting*’ to ‘*It is right and just*’. The Latin ‘*justum*’ can mean fair, just or fitting.

Journalists like me are taught to avoid wasted words and to keep the meaning absolutely clear. But look at response after the Agnus Dei (and, by the way, why ‘*behold*’ twice in that prayer?). ‘*Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof*’ is a phrase taken from the Gospel story of the centurion with the sick child. Post-Vatican II it became ‘*Lord I am not worthy to receive you*’. A sensible change, since I remember the nuns at my primary school tying themselves in knots trying to explain that it meant the roof of your mouth, not the roof of your house, as in the centurion story. But, would you believe, it’s back.

Finally, at the very end, ‘*Go, the Mass is ended*’, becomes ‘*Go forth, the Mass is ended*’. Why? Where else would you go?

And the poor priest has it even worse. He has to negotiate such jawbreakers as: ‘*Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you ...*’ Why ‘*for*’? Why ‘*received*’? Why ‘*we offer you*’? Isn’t it all obvious from the context?

Even worse: ‘*... we may merit to be co-heirs to eternal life ...*’ What exactly is a co-heir? There are constant unnecessary ‘*therefores*’ and ‘*indeeds*’ and so on.

And of course there is the phrase that caused the real controversy – in the Consecration itself: ‘*The blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out for you and for many*’. For many? Who are the lucky many? Why not ‘*for all*’? Of course, this is a faithful translation of the Latin ‘*pro multis*’. But that Latin dates from a time when the Church was somewhat less inclusive than it is today.

In fact a cynic might conclude that the whole ‘new’ Mass is less inclusive than the old.

□

Michael MacLachlan is a
London-based Catholic and journalist

The *Catacomb* *Pact* against pomp and ceremony in the Church

On November 16, 1965, close to the end of Vatican II, around 40 conciliar Bishops met at the Catacombs of St. Domitila to sign a semi-secret pact intended to do away with the richness, pomp, and ceremony in the Catholic Church. The names of the Bishops present are not known.

References to this pact were made here and there in works on the conciliar "Poor Church", under the suggestive title of the *Pact of the Catacombs*. The only place we have found its complete text transcribed is in the *Chronicle of Vatican II* by Bonaventura Kloppenburg, OFM. He titled the document *Pact of the Servant and Poor Church*. We present our translation:

We, Bishops meeting at Vatican Council II, being aware of the deficiencies of our life of poverty according to the Gospel, encouraged by one another in this initiative in which each one wants to avoid singularity and presumption [that is to say, each one wants to be anonymous], commit ourselves to the following:

1. Regarding housing, food and means of transportation and everything concerning these things, we will seek to live in accordance with the common average level of our people.
2. We renounce forever wealth and its appearance, especially in clothing (expensive materials and brilliant colours), and insignia of precious metals (such things should, in effect, be evangelical).
3. We will not possess either movable or immovable properties, or bank accounts in our names. If it is necessary to possess some property we will place it under the name of our diocese or other social or charitable works.
4. Whenever it is possible we will confide the financial and material administration of our diocese to a commission of competent laymen conscious of their apostolic role, given that we should be pastors and apostles rather than administrators.
5. We refuse to be called in speech or writing by names or titles that signify grandeur and power (Your Eminence, Your Excellency, Monsignor ...). We prefer to be called by the evangelical name of 'Father'.
6. In our comportment and social relations, we will avoid everything that can appear to confer privileges, priorities, or even a preference whatsoever to the rich and powerful (for example: banquets given or received, special places in religious services)
7. Conscious of the demands of justice and charity and their mutual relations, we will seek to transform the works of "beneficence" into social works based on charity and justice to assist all [that is, not just Catholics] in all their exigencies, as a humble servant of the proper public facilities

(Boaventura Kloppenburg, "Pact of the Servant and Poor Church" in *Concilio Vaticano II*, Petropolis: Vozes, 1966 pp. 526-527).

http://www.traditioninaction.org/ProgressivistDoc/A_036_CatacombPact.htm



Panel Discussion at the ARC Annual General Meeting
Saturday 29 October 2011

Our Church – Quo Vadis?

Phoebe Basson

Can we still say that we, God's people, are the Church? Is it a reality or is it no more than a pious if cherished myth? If we still go to Mass, regularly or only sometimes, do we feel part of the gathered community or, in a wider sense, part of the community of believers, or is there a growing suspicion that the institutional church is the cold reality, that we are bound less by a common faith than by a required submission to its laws?

The Vatican, the seat of power of the institutional church, legislates for us all. Its power is limitless and unassailable. The Pope, like a feudal monarch, governs without consultation, enjoys diplomatic immunity and is above the law. There is no freedom of speech in the institutional church. There are topics we may not discuss – the ordination of women, a married clergy, optional priestly celibacy. Those who dare to ignore these prohibitions are severely dealt with. Examples abound – Hans Küng and Roy Bourgeois spring to mind and, nearer home, Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba. Even the rubrics and the text of the Mass are prescribed in minute detail, imposed without consultation. The way we live our daily lives is directed from Rome. We may not practice contraception or IVF. We may not allow abortion under any circumstances. If divorced we may not remarry under pain of being denied reception of the Eucharist. Our sexual orientation is not something beyond our control like the colour of our eyes. Homosexuality, as much an accident of birth as heterosexuality, is considered a grave disorder and must be 'overcome'. There is more, but is this not sufficient evidence that we are in fact subjects of an oppressive bureaucratic regime which can choose to ignore and conceal crimes against humanity such as paedophilia; a regime which can and does issue instructions designed to prevent the reporting of such crimes to the authorities and which acts to protect, not the victims of abuse, but the perpetrators. From time to time the Pope issues public apologies and promises of redress. How much evidence of redress have we seen? True, millions of dollars in compensation have been paid to victims of sexual abuse but is this sufficient? Can it heal broken lives? Can it substitute for the prevention of future

abuse? How does it serve to justify Benedict's proclaimed goal of protecting the Church's image, already so irreparably tarnished?

Hans Küng, who has first-hand experience of the workings of this oppressive regime, has just published a new book, *Ist die Kirche noch zu retten?* (Can the Church still be saved?) It is a question that many of us ask ourselves. So the book, which is almost certain to be translated, should make interesting – perhaps even disturbing – reading.

There are those who are convinced that the Church as we know it today will shrink to become a small, ultra-conservative sect in which there will be no room for enlightened progressive thinking or contemporary relevance. The signs are certainly there, especially in the Vatican, where official appointments reflect this. As many of you will be aware, the Papal Nuncio in Australia issued a questionnaire for episcopal candidates in 2008, a secret document circulated to selected recipients but which was unaccountably leaked to the press and can now even be found on the Internet. It contained a comprehensive list of requirements for appointment designed to assure suitability in terms of a traditional background and strict conformance to orthodox thinking and practice. Anyone who has seen this questionnaire cannot fail to realise that men of the stature and integrity of Geoffrey Robinson and Pat Power would have had difficulty in qualifying. From this pool of conformist bishops are chosen those who will eventually constitute the College of Cardinals, the 'yes men' who elect a papal successor from within their ranks. What hope then is there for reform and renewal? Realistically speaking, *does* the Church have a future? An ageing priesthood and an increasing shortage of vocations will eventually see the end of regular celebration of the Eucharist as a part of our lives. The ongoing exodus of the young, the church of the future, is disquieting. One would have to be wilfully blind not to recognise that the euphoria of World Youth Day lasts only until the last pilgrim arrives home. It has never produced any visible results in terms of stemming the tide of that exodus.

Why then are some of us still stubbornly clinging to the sinking ship? Why not join those who have jumped overboard? How do we answer that question? Perhaps we need to look closely at the irrationality of hope in the face of such odds. Maybe it would seem less irrational if Vatican II had never happened. Prior to the Council the Church towards which Benedict is steering us displayed many of the features, which we accepted then, but which now, post-Vatican II, we

question or resist. Foremost among these is the revival of the essentially spectator Latin Mass; a return to Communion on the tongue and under one kind only which it is rumoured is under consideration; the emphasis on the old distinction between priest and people evidenced in the new Mass with the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice as 'my sacrifice and yours' instead of 'our sacrifice'; creeping infallibility (the ban on discussion of the ordination of women is in this category) and the insistence on absolute and unquestioning conformity to rules made in Rome and enforced worldwide. But John XXIII showed us a new kind of church, inclusive and collegial, in which clergy and people were one with one another in Christ Jesus. We long for a return to that kind of church that flourished so briefly, where there was room for us all to worship in community with a new kind of freedom. Is it that longing that keeps us lingering in the inhospitable environment of today's church, that nostalgia that fuels our hope? But lingering passively is no more than wishful thinking. For as long as we acquiesce, however reluctantly, nothing will change. There is no victory in acquiescence: it will not result in Vatican III.

There are many who do not wish to be numbered among Benedict's 'simple little people who must be protected from the power of intellectuals', who have no desire to be part of the 'small pure church' he is fashioning. There are groups worldwide who are opposed to the Vatican's regressive policies; but unless they make their voices heard collectively they will

continue to be ignored. There is an urgent need to join forces rather than to operate separately, to act in unison to bring about change. Much discussion of the issues that threaten the contemporary church takes place, but discussion of itself cannot bring about change. While action will not achieve success in the short term and will require courage and perseverance, I believe that reform and renewal within the Church can be achieved in no other way. Should we pray for this to happen? Certainly we should pray, but the old cliché that God helps those who help themselves still has merit. We need to create an organised protest movement globally, with suitable and effective leadership to orchestrate it. Is this possible? I don't know. But it seems to me there is no other way to save the ship – and without her we are adrift.

So is there still room for hope, a possibility for effective action, or is it already too late? Will the ship go down and be lost? But then to what end the Incarnation and Jesus' mission and His promise to His church that 'the gates of Hell will not prevail against it'? Is that not sufficient reason to hope and to work towards realising that hope? Surely there can be no better reason. □

Phoebe is a librarian, living and working in Sydney. Born in South Africa, she now calls both Australia and the Catholic Church home. While she readily admits to holding strong and sometimes critical views she insists that her love for her adopted country and her Church are constants.



Listening to the disenchanted and those who have left the Church...

Amanda McKenna

Joint Publisher: *Catholica*
6 September 2011

Some months ago an article by William J. Byron titled "On Their Way Out" appeared in the online journal *America magazine's* January 3rd edition. (www.americamagazine.org) What I read came as no surprise to me or to any of us who are paying attention to the trends in the Catholic Church today. In fact, I felt very strongly that we should be doing a lot more listening to discover why people are making the decision to leave the practice of their faith. For this reason I put out a call through the pages of *Catholica* and other websites I frequent to learn more not just from those who had already left, but also from those still practising their faith, albeit uncomfortably.

What I didn't expect was the sheer volume of replies I was to receive over the next few months. For many, it was the first time anyone had ever bothered to ask the question. So many of these people noted that they had left communities in which they had played an active role with no one even noticing they were gone, let alone asking if everything was all right. This apathy only served to confirm them in their decisions.

We have heard over and over again from the Vatican how things such as 'consumerism' and 'secularism' are drawing people out of the church, and while for some that may be true, it certainly wasn't reflected in the many heart-wrenching stories shared by the respondents. By and large the people who responded to my request for their stories are people who have been the heart and soul of their communities; often cradle Catholics who have been educated in the Catholic system and are theologically literate, who have become so disillusioned by the current state of a church in which they can barely, or no longer, in good conscience participate.

Rather than being apathetic, these people were highly involved in their parish and faith communities. They served as pastoral councillors, RCIA facilitators, liturgists, teachers, music ministers, catechists and youth leaders, as well as priests and religious of all stripes. Many of those who remain practising Catholics say that if not for the life they find in their own local parish communities, they would be long gone.

A wide range of reasons...

There was a wide range of reasons people gave for leaving (or having one foot out the door), but one reason above all others appeared in almost every letter I received: sexual abuse and its cover-up in the church.

The extent of anger and disillusionment of the people continues to grow as more and more stories come to light of instances where pedophile and abusing priests and religious were moved on to unsuspecting parishes, schools, hospitals and other institutions to continue their nefarious activities. The argument that 'we didn't know any better back then' no longer holds sway in light of the fact that canon law has forbidden it for many hundreds of years with promises of dire consequences for the offending persons, as well as the fact that it continues to this very day. People are frankly disgusted with the hierarchy's adversarial response to victims in an effort to shore up both their finances and their reputations, rather than pastorally caring for the victims and their families.

Another of the main reasons people gave for leaving was the misogyny inherent in both the teachings and the organisation of the church. The lack of equality between women and men in the church is as unpalatable to modern western society as it was to Jesus and his followers. And given that among those who remain in the pews, women far outnumber men, it is a dire forecast for the future of Catholicism, particularly in the western world of the 21st century.

In fact, most of the objections about the church were centred around, or related to, sex. *Humanae Vitae* was a stillborn teaching if ever there was one. It has been largely ignored by women and men since its promulgation in 1968 and therefore not 'received' by the body of the faithful. And if, as many stated, the Vatican could get that so wrong, what else did they get wrong and what does that say about the teaching of 'infallibility'?

Personal experiences of hurt and injustice...

Many people spoke of their own experiences of hurt and injustice suffered at the hands of the church. Numerous stories of sexual abuse were told, as well as of situations where new priests came to already established and thriving parishes and literally emptied the pews in very short order by the insensitive imposition of their own brand of so-called 'traditional' liturgies, lack of respect for the laity (women in particular) and inability to pastorally care in any meaningful way for their communities.

The majority of the respondents also cited their dislike of the way the church is currently governed; the increasing centralisation of the church paying lip-service to notions of 'collegiality', the lack of transparency at all levels, the treatment of theologians who dare to question 'the party line' ... and the list goes on.

The glossy PR might look good but the reality is that throughout the Western world nearly 90% of the baptised have ceased participating and listening. That's why the bishops try and mount these campaigns to get people back. But do they work? What are the results of all the evangelisation and re-evangelisation efforts of the past half century?

How can the 'sensus fidelium' be understood when there is no one to listen? I have said before that Vatican II woke up the People of God, and the Roman Curia has been trying to put us all to sleep ever since! Today, the claim to be a Vatican II Catholic is met with derision by those currently influencing and controlling the

agenda in the Catholic church. Labeled '70's hippies' and worse, it now seems to be a criminal offense to have been born a 'baby boomer' and to have maintained an active church affiliation since Vatican II. We are now told that we didn't understand what the documents 'really' said, as if we were a theologically uneducated laity not capable of reading the documents for ourselves. Even though conservative popes, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have been at the helm throughout this period, apparently all the rest of us are to blame for the state the church finds itself in today, as the bishops of Ireland and the people of Cloyne have been told in recent times.

People are tired of beating their heads against a brick wall and are now finding other ways to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ outside of the church. Only two respondents stated that they went on to worship at other churches, while most of the rest found nourishment in a myriad of other ways outside the confines of any church. While some respondents state that they have lost faith in God altogether as a result of their experiences, the vast majority went to great lengths to explain that their faith in God remains strong; that, in fact, it was their faith in God that led them out of the Catholic church in the first place!

In my view the New Evangelisation and initiatives like 'Catholics Come Home' are doomed to failure while ever the very serious reasons people left in the first place go unaddressed. And until those in authority right up to the 'servant of the servants of God' are prepared actually to listen to the People of God, nothing will – or can – change. □

It is my belief that the Jesus message has been totally subverted and misrepresented. I believe the message was mostly about the truth of UNCONDITIONAL love, our interconnectedness (ALL are our brothers and sisters), the presence of god (divinity) within each one of us. We have literalised the message to the point of being ridiculous, often not stepping back far enough to see the contradictions. Many of us, and particularly our young people, have learnt to consider things with a much more critical mind. We (they) are much more aware of dualism and question it wherever it appears. Thus, many have become quite disillusioned with the Church as it just doesn't measure up, in their experience.

I have now found myself also in such a place. I have reached 'adulthood' and can make my own decisions based on my own experiences and intuitions. I believe that God speaks to me (us) always and in all ways. I am excited about the continuing journey especially as I discover many more travelling along the same road.

Life is now filled with possibility!

Extract from one of the exit stories selected and edited by Amanda McKenna and Brian Coyne.

For more stories, go to the website:

http://www.catholica.com.au/specials/exitstories/003_exitstories_200911.php

Thoughts at Christmastide

Gabriel Lomas

Consider the statuette below: a Mother-and-Child effigy far removed from the studios of classical Western art. It is an Egyptian Nativity figurine, remote even in time from the Nativity scene with which we ourselves are so familiar, celebrating a story that predates the Bethlehem narratives by more than 3,000 years.

This item can be seen in the Louvre, and is an effigy made some 500 years before Christ – an epoch previously called BC (before Christ) but nowadays designated as **B**efore the **C**ommon **E**ra. (Years since Christ – AD (anno domini) – are now labelled **CE** – *the Common Era*.) It depicts the goddess Isis suckling her infant son, Horus, and serves to remind us that the Christmas story as it has come down to us is just that – a story, but one meant to proclaim something important. We, as adults, need to explore it further. We can reconstruct that:

- the stories about, and sayings of, Jesus were originally passed on by word of mouth and in no clearly ordered sequence
- these stories and sayings gradually took on shape and form, and individual people began to record them in writing
- chunks of such writings were put together from time to time and re-arranged into some sort of order
- stories and sayings became remembered or part-remembered when events occurred or issues arose that required some sort of response or stance on the part of the early church communities
- the so-called *Infancy Narratives* were such a response, probably part of the debate about who Jesus was and what he was
- the developing awareness of who and what he was, called for some sort of statement about this in the evolving gospels
- the outcome was that accounts of Jesus' birth were placed at the beginnings of two major collections



Egyptian Mother & Child

of gospel stories and sayings (Matthew and Luke) that had emerged among the early Christian communities

- other editors of similar collections shaped a gospel (John) on the premise that Jesus pre-existed creation
- NB: Our earliest manuscript containing portions of Matthew is from around 50 CE; some portions of letters attributed to Paul are from around 70 CE; bits of John from around 125 CE; of Luke from around 250 CE

Among the chief issues that brought the *Infancy Narratives* into being was probably the question of the divinity of Christ. What was so special about him? Was he divine? Did he become divine? Was he made divine? Was he always divine?

There is a piece of early Christian writing that sees Christ as being in the form of God, but not clinging to divinity. This is found in an ancient liturgical hymn quoted in Philippians 1.6-11. Philippians itself, which comprises 3 separate letters, dates from around 54 CE to 63 CE. All three letters are lumped together and popularly attributed to Paul of Tarsus or his followers.

Another early text, probably 57-58 CE, also attributed to Paul, records that Jesus was proclaimed / declared / designated Son of God and exalted as Lord through his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1.3-4). The probable meaning is that the resurrection showed that Jesus was Son of God (a Semitic-type circumlocution for divine).

But with this question of Christ's sonship we have to consider a lot of other things as well, such as:

- *Son of God* may or may not designate divinity – e.g. the Hebrews were called the sons of God, and the title was sometimes used in Semitic cultures to designate important or powerful persons
- in ancient Hebrew literature, this designation has a wide range, from individuals to the people of Israel collectively
- the wonders recorded in Matthew and Luke attribute divinity to Christ in 'theologies' that could be understood by Hebrews and non-Hebrews

respectively, all reflecting the thinking of early Christian communities circa 50 CE

- the Greco-Roman culture into which the early gospel texts emerged commonly proclaimed great rulers (e.g. Caesar) to be or to become divine
- the Johannine church communities seem to have considered Christ as divine, and pre-existing creation

Clearly, there is a puzzle here: who or what was Christ? The puzzle is compounded by notions such as all of us living and moving and having our being in God (Acts 17.28), and God dwelling in us (1 John 4.11). The Roman Eucharistic liturgy prays, during the mixing of water and wine, that ‘we may become partakers in the divinity of him who shared our humanity’.

It could be that bits from the Egyptian Isis-Horus myths have somehow got mixed up with the Bethlehem Nativity story as the narrators puzzled over who and what Christ was and is: some parts of the Bethlehem account look like pieces from the Isis-Horus jigsaw. An additional factor is that at the time the gospels were being formed, stories sometimes incorporated familiar elements from other tales and experiences to help them emphasise their message. And one of the messages of the Bethlehem Nativity story is that, somehow, human beings have become divinised.

It seems to me that divinisation – the union of or immersing of oneself in the divine – is a process that is only realised gradually, as we become more and more experientially conscious of who we are and what we are.

The emerging awareness of the early Christians over who and what Christ was and is, was bound up with their own growth in discovering who and what they themselves were. Given that the boy is father of the man – and the girl mother of the woman – the manifestation of Christ’s unique sonship in the

resurrection stories points back to what he always had been (and will be), and illustrates an emerging awareness about the Creator-creature relationship that is his. Equally, the stories show an emerging awareness about the Creator-creature relationship enjoyed by these Christians as followers of Christ.

We, too, live and move and have our being in God, although our awareness of this and the wonder and joy it engenders are somewhat uneven. Part of our maturation as Christians involves our becoming more constant in our consciousness of the remarkable reality in which we exist and are immersed. For this, we need to foster situations in which we more easily experience the Divine, and then extend this experience into a continual way of living and being.

Christ was Divine in a way that we are not. Our human jargon for this is that he was the incarnation of the Divine: the Word made flesh, God become human. In our limited human understanding and our restricted ability to express experiential knowledge of the Divine, we say that Jesus was the Son of God.

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(Contact GCJLomas@GabeLomas.org if you would like more specific references)

Recommended reading

Matthew Fox’s new book

THE POPE’S WAR:

WHY RATZINGER’S SECRET CRUSADE
HAS IMPERILED THE CHURCH
AND HOW IT CAN BE SAVED

The *Pope’s War* offers a provocative look at three decades of corruption in the Catholic Church, focusing on Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, and how the devastation the past two papacies has wrought can be a blessing in disguise to reinvent Christianity for a third millennium.

An internationally acclaimed theologian who was a member of the Dominican Order for thirty-four years, Matthew Fox was forbidden to teach theology by the then-cardinal in 1988 and was later dismissed from the Order. Now he presents insights from his twelve-year, up-close-and-personal battle with Ratzinger, tracing the historical roots of degradation in the Church and offering a new way to understand why Benedict XVI is mired in crisis as pope.



Emmy Silvius recently had the pleasure of meeting Bishop Patricia Fresen during her visit to Melbourne. She came away from the meeting impressed and inspired and sent this short essay which she entitled 'For the Love of My Church'.

A meeting with an impressive woman...

People often ask: *'Why stay in a Church that discriminates against women? Why put up with authoritarian leaders who appear to be more concerned with pomp and ceremony than with the individual Catholic? Why hope against hope that it will become more accountable, more Christ-like in its dealings with people whatever their gender, faith or orientation?'*

It's a fair question for sure. For me the answer is similar to why I don't run away and hide on some remote island every time I see injustices occur in our society. Admittedly, it is a lot easier to hold our Local, State and Federal parliamentarians accountable as we live in a democratic society. But the surge of passion that swells from deep within when speaking out on social matters comes from the same source as the surge of passion that says 'enough is enough' when it comes to religious injustices. That surge is my spirit speaking out for the rights of my Church.

Recently I was greatly blessed to have met Patricia Fresen at a private gathering in Melbourne. Patricia was a Dominican Sister in South Africa for over 45 years prior to her ordination. She had studied Theology for seven years in Rome and then taught Systematic Theology, Spirituality and Homiletics at the seminary in Pretoria. She now resides in Germany. Patricia is one of three female bishops in Western Europe (but one of eleven female bishops worldwide). There are times in one's life when we can feel we are witnessing an historical event. This was undoubtedly one such event. Patricia is an inspirational woman. Not only does she show enormous courage in the face of adversity but she remains humble, patient and resilient in her dealings with media and curious members of the Church.



John Cleary interviewed Patricia on his *Sunday Nights* radio program on 18 September 2011. It provides a good introduction to her story. It's amazing that despite all the injustices done to so many within the Catholic community we can still manage to smile at some of the ridiculous quotations put forward by the hierarchy as justification for this. For example, Patricia was told that even though she was ordained by a Bishop in good standing with Rome, **her ordination could not be valid as, being a woman, it would 'not take'**. As if the reception of blessings depends on having certain body parts!

That Patricia was ordained by a practising Bishop in good standing with Rome is of vital importance. All over the world Catholic bishops are part of a lineage that goes back to the time of the Apostles. This doctrine called Apostolic Succession asserts that the chosen successors have inherited the spiritual, ecclesiastical and sacramental authority, power, and responsibility that were given to the Apostles directly by Jesus Christ. This is re-affirmed each Sunday in the reciting of the *Nicene Creed*: *'We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church...'* Sadly, this particular Bishop cannot be named as he would immediately be excommunicated. Thus, whilst he is still alive, all official documentation is kept secret until it can safely be revealed.

Currently there are about 200 women Catholic priests, most living in the United States. Each of these women has found inspiration from a deep and powerful calling. It certainly has nothing to do with fame, money or choosing the easy life. The women need to be well qualified in Theology and are self-funded. They also need to have a community and be accepted by that community as a leader before being ordained as a priest.

The following quotation is from the WomenPriests website:

The voice of the Catholic people – the *sensus fidelium* – has spoken. We women are no longer asking for permission to be priests. Instead, we have

History

taken back our rightful God-given place ministering to Catholics as inclusive and welcoming priests.

Yes, we have challenged and broken the Church's Canon Law 1024, an unjust law that discriminates against women. Despite what some bishops may lead the faithful to believe, our ordinations are valid because we are ordained in the line of unbroken apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic people have accepted us as their priests and they continue to support us as we grow from the seven bold women first ordained on the Danube River in 2002. Ordained women are already ministering in over 23 states across the country. We are here to stay. We are not going away.

Earlier this year I wrote an article on Lay Ministry for *Catholica* wherein I stated:

What we need to do is to rediscover the meaning and significance of our baptismal call and to discern both the gifts we have been given by God and the role we are called to play in furthering Christ's mission in the world. It is absolutely vital that we move away from the pyramid structure of the Church of pre-Vatican II and claim a Church where all participate equally in truth and love whilst exercising our rights as a priestly people.

More women are feeling confident speaking about their inner desire to become a priest, and quite a number of these women belong to a religious order. Hopefully when they are ready to take the next step their communities will continue to support them. Is it possible that the comment: *'Not in my lifetime'* has become obsolete in relation to gender equality within our Catholic Church?

www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

This article and its banner was first published in *Catholica* (16.9.11)

It is republished with the author's permission

Emmy Silvius has a Degree in theology (Melbourne College of Divinity), is a founding member of Catholics for Renewal and has a passion for social justice. Also check out John Wijngaards' website www.womenpriests.org which represents his attempts to reach the goal without stepping outside the boundaries.

The Roman Catholic Womenpriests is a renewal movement within the Church that began in Germany with the ordination of seven women on the Danube River in 2002. In 2003, Gisela Forster and Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger (two of the original Danube seven) were ordained bishops and in 2005 Patricia Fresen from South Africa (who currently lives in Germany) was also ordained a bishop. Womenbishops ordained in Apostolic Succession continue to carry out the work of ordaining women in the Roman Catholic Church. In 2006, Ida Reming was ordained a bishop and in 2008 Dana Reynolds of California became the first American Roman Catholic Womanbishop. These women and those who have come after them continue to carry on the pastoral work of ordaining women to the priesthood. Currently there are about 200 Roman Catholic women worldwide who are reclaiming their ancient spiritual heritage and are re-shaping a more inclusive, Christ-centred Church for the 21st century. We advocate a new model of priestly ministry united with the people with whom we serve. We are rooted in a response to Jesus who called women and men to be disciples and equals living the Gospel. □

RECOMMENDED READING

Chris McGillion & John O'Carroll
Our Fathers: What Australian Catholic priests really think about their lives and their church

Author(s): Chris McGillion & John O'Carroll,
Publisher: John Garratt

While many people assume they know what priests think, the reality is that the private views of priests are rarely known outside their own ranks and the small circle of their closest friends.

This book, based on a survey sent to every priest working in parish ministry in Australia as well as on interviews with more than 50 priests across the country, reveals the true thoughts of priests about their vocation, their working lives, and issues confronting the church today. The results will inform, shock and challenge all Catholics.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Chris McGillion is a former religious affairs editor for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and has written on religious issues for newspapers and magazines including *The Age*, *Brisbane Times*, *Eureka Street*, *The Tablet* (UK) and the *National Catholic Reporter* (US). He now teaches journalism at Charles Sturt University.

John O'Carroll has written extensively on religious and philosophical issues. He teaches at Charles Sturt University.

REVIEW:

The objectivity of the data gleaned from a written survey of 542 priests and face-to-face interviews with another 50 is extremely important at this time as the Australian Church faces unprecedented challenges of credibility and relevance in an educated and highly sophisticated community. The fact that the survey was conducted by Chris McGillion and John O'Carroll, lecturers in a State University, guarantees the objectivity of the findings and data.

Daniel Donovan
Catholica

Priesting in a new world

(Fr.) Brendan Hoban

Administrator, Ballina Cathedral, Ireland

This article from *Western People* was found by ARC Member, Kevin Doherty, inserted in a parish bulletin in Durham, UK. It is a poignant expression of a priest's honest feelings during the present crisis in Ireland.

A relic of the Curé (parish priest) of Ars is coming to Knock. The Curé (or St John Vianney) was a parish priest in Ars, near Lyons in France, who was renowned for his piety – particularly for spending long hours in the confessional. He struggled to reach the academic standards in the seminary and, for some years, there was a doubt about whether he would ever be ordained. However, after ordination and an appointment to Ars, he became famous throughout France and the Christian world. At one point the number of pilgrims coming to Ars had reached 20,000 a year.

A simple, gentle, patient and cheerful man, he was canonised in 1905 and it was proposed to give him the title of 'Patron Saint of Parish Priests'. He's in the news because last June, when Pope Benedict opened 'The Year of Priests', he again proposed John Vianney as a model for priesthood. Hence, the decision to celebrate the Year of the Priest by bringing his relics to Knock and other venues.

I must admit my heart sank when I heard that the Curé of Ars was proposed as a model for priests in 2009. While I have nothing but admiration for the saintly curé, what worked as a model for priesthood in 1905 hardly responds to the needs of our totally different context for priesting in the 21st century.

It seems starkly obvious that dusting off a century-old model and refurbishing it for modern times wouldn't work with the old Ford Model T, and won't work with the gentle curé. What, in God's name, is Pope Benedict thinking? Why have we to look back to the 19th century for an answer to every question posed in the 21st? To put it another way, if the Curé of Ars is the answer, we need to ask ourselves whether we have located the right questions about priesthood today.

One of the most astute commentators on priesthood today, Donald Cozzens, has described the last few decades as 'a dark night of the soul' for Catholic priests. We know what he means. For my own part I never remember a time when priests were at such a low ebb: sad, fearful, disappointed, disillusioned, angry,

despairing, almost adrift in the enveloping darkness. Adding the Curé to the mix as a model for priesthood today is almost seen as copper-fastening a growing conviction that the deeper the crisis the more our leaders seem to take refuge in some weird parallel universe.

It is no fun being a priest today. We are caught in a kind of stereo world, and are not quite sure where the sounds are coming from or even sometimes what they mean. On the one hand we listen to 'the signs of the times' and respond to

the needs of the people, including openness to lay involvement and sensitivity to people's experiences and needs; and, on the other hand, we operate within a hierarchical and patriarchal system of implicit control. Trying to ride the same horse going in different directions.

We are expected to be approachable, sensitive, caring and available, inspiring leaders, competent administrators, good organisers, able preachers, involved with schools, organisations, committees, visiting the housebound, kind to the old, concerned about the young, sensitive to everyone and to be available to everyone all the time.



On top of that we have to deal with a series of complex pastoral situations, expected to respond to the complicated needs of people in the world today while at the same time implementing a series of often impractical norms and regulations from the Bishops who are at a safe distance from parish life, and officials in Rome who never worked a day in a parish in their lives. And then, if the priest doesn't get it right, a self-appointed nest of aggressive reactionary ultra-conservative Catholics are at hand to point out the errors of our ways or report us to our bishop and to Rome.

Who, in his right mind, would want to find himself trying to respond to such competing and conflicting expectations? And with little or no appreciation of or training for such complex and demanding work. And, at the same time, to be forever on duty – living over the shop, as it were – and often living isolated and lonely lives, while colleagues leave for more satisfying climes and bishops and popes lob advice at us from the far distance. Is it any wonder we have few vocations? Isn't the big wonder not that so many have left the priesthood but that so many of us are still hanging in there? Is it any wonder that so many of us are tired, tired, tired?

On top of all that, priests have become bad news. Unfairly and discouragingly, though understandably, all priests have had to bear the burden and the stigma of the clerical child sexual abuse scandals, in a way for example that teachers haven't to bear vocational responsibility for the failures of an equivalent tiny minority of their colleagues. And, of course, as the priest is the easiest clerical target to get on the public radar, we are now endlessly humiliated and disparaged in the media and, if the truth be told, the butts of endless jokes about our sexual lives.

Priests – many of them suffering from overwork, lack of energy, confusion and 'burnout' with little sense of support in or understanding of their plight – are now beginning to wonder is there anyone left on their side any more.

Last Sunday as I bought an item in a shop the owner took my money, gave me the change and then handed me twenty euros and said, 'You're having a hard time of it, buy something for yourself'. The sudden gesture of disinterested kindness left me speechless; afterwards as I examined my own attitude to it I was struck by how much it meant to me and how vulnerable I was.

To tell you the truth I don't think Pope Benedict has any idea what's happening to priests in the world: that we're struggling to pastor our people in a complex and

difficult world where old answers make no sense to new questions; that we find ourselves in a place where we've never been before; and we wonder, sometimes fearfully, about when or if we will emerge from the bleakness; that we're disappearing and will be effectively gone in 20 years, unless the priesthood is re-imaged and re-invented for a different world; that we need to examine issues like the ordination of women, celibacy and priesthood; and that encouraging us to be like the Curé of Ars seems like a last straw that might break many a camel's back. And many a priest's spirit. □

middle-aged tree

Old tree – no longer sapling, pliant, untried;
standing sturdily now,
yet with body beginning to bend . . .

A limb or two lopped – God knows when, or why.

At times, pain lurking, still there,
where cuts were, and wounds;
scar-tissue bursts
to occasional green spring.

Boughs outstretched,
with burden of sweetness, and care . . .
some drooping earthward,
prone to the wind;
some thrusting sunward,
beauty growing, and fading . . .

Leaves, sun-drenched, cast tenuous shadows . . .

Sudden chattering of birds in branches;
dusk, moments of hush;
coolness, rest, night's gloom . . .

Sap, dear life's blood, stirring in my veins . . .

New day, suns caressing,
roots deep: in You.

Lynne Green (1981)

Have your say!

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Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

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