



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
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Editorial

The empty pews speak for themselves. More and more Catholics are turning away from the Church, disaffected by ... what? One can only hazard a guess. It would not be surprising if they were disgusted by the findings of the Royal Commission; or disillusioned by the Church's refusal to fully implement all the recommendations of Vatican II; or impatient with the inability of the Church to move with the times and update its theology in light of new scholarly research; or frustrated by its attitude towards women; or maybe they have just totally rejected the authority the Church once stood for in their lives and doubt its relevance. A few hang on for the sense of community – and the chance to meet up with friends over a cup of coffee after Mass.

This month ARC has been invited to have an association with Catholic Church Reform – a global community based in the USA which supports decentralisation of the Church. Their invitation reads:

We are at a pivotal time as we have the audacity to hope that change may be forthcoming in the Church. Across the nation, people are celebrating the 50th remembrance of the Civil Rights movement. But simultaneous with this is the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The two leaders, Pope John XXIII and Martin Luther King inspired us and gave us all hope for a more inclusive worldview. The Civil Rights movement has not reached its full objective but most of us would agree that it is much further along than the outcomes of Vatican II for the Catholic Church.

As you may know, Pope Francis has called a meeting with his eight Cardinal advisers, representatives from every region of the world, to meet with him at the Vatican October 1 through 3. We are asking that our agreed-upon topic be placed on the meeting agenda backed up by the data gathered from all of the Church groups. We have asked Cardinal Rodriguez Maradiaga, the coordinator for the advisers, to be our messenger and deliver our letter and packet to the pope just prior to their scheduled meeting. The topics set by the pope for this meeting are (1) reform of the Curia, and (2) governance of the Church. Our objective is to address the changes we would like to see in how the Church is governed, namely, that we support the Pope in his desire to move away from so much clericalism and request that the people be given a voice and a vote in their Church.

Between September 4 and September 20, we will be gathering all the data from the groups who choose to participate and have something to contribute. This could include any petition, initiative, referendum, outcome of a conference, agreement resulting from a meeting, a mission statement, a rally, etc., etc., resulting from their efforts over the past several years. All of this will be summarized for the Pope. If you belong to an organization and have an item – one related to the general topic of greater involvement of the laity, including religious, in our Church – that you would like to have included, please send that information to info@CatholicChurchReform.com

Your ARC Secretariat has signed the letter prepared by Catholic Church Reform that will be presented to the Pope. It addresses decentralisation of decision making, equality of membership, the need for dialogue, and the confronting of the sexual abuse crisis. We will keep you informed of the outcome.

Margaret Knowlden

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Conference and Annual General Meeting

Saturday, January 18th, 2014

Dougherty Centre, 7 Victor St, Chatswood

It is with great pleasure that I can announce that we have been able to engage Michael Morwood to be the guest speaker at our conference and AGM when he visits Australia in January. This is the reason why we have decided to put back our AGM until this time but it will be well worth it. Michael is presently living in the USA as theologian in residence at the Kirkridge Retreat Center, Bangor, Pennsylvania. In the past ten years he has worked with progressive Christian groups in thirty USA states, in most provinces in Canada, as well as in Ireland and England.

Michael Morwood has over 40 years' experience in retreat, education, parish and adult faith development ministries. He is the author of several well-known books including *"Tomorrow's Catholic"* and his particular interest is in helping adult Christians examine what they believe and why they believe it, what they imagine and why they imagine the way they do.

While articulating Christian faith in ways that resonate with a contemporary understanding of our place in the universe, Michael is also concerned to shape an understanding of "God" and revelation that is not exclusive to any particular culture or religion. No group, no religion can validly claim to have exclusive access to God if God is the mysterious Presence sustaining everything in existence.



Drawing upon this theme, Michael will speak and conduct two open forums that will open up the two key issues that will define faith, practice and prayer in the 21st century:

1. *What understanding of "god" will we gather around?*
2. *What understanding of Jesus will we gather around?*

Michael will conclude the conference by helping us to formulate a summary of credible beliefs that will enable us

to challenge the outmoded concepts behind many of the doctrines of the Church, illustrating that such concepts do not stand up to reasonable, open, scholarly examination.

John Buggy

PLEASE NOTE this in your 2014 diary now and invite all your friends who seek a progressive approach to their faith and understanding of God.

Note from ARC's "treasurer"

We have 158 members who have not yet renewed their membership of ARC. It is not too late to do so, of course. We have continued to send out copies of *ARCvoice* on the understanding that you still wish to be a member. Please let us know if you would like us to discontinue.

The preferred payment method is for people to transfer their subscription direct into ARC's bank account at Westpac. The BSB is 032-089 and the account number is 14-7944. Please make sure to include your surname in the reference, something like this: "Jones – ARC sub". This would greatly help to keep the membership list up to date and involve the least amount of work. Electronic transfer of funds also provides you with an immediate receipt of the payment. A special thank-you to all the people who have made donations above the standard subscriptions.

Pædophilia and the church¹

The harsh reality

Gabriel Lomas

Of late we've been confronted by a succession of horrendous tales about the perpetration and institutional mis-management of pædophilia in the Catholic church. We've just sat through the revealing Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by Religious and other non-governmental organisations, and the equally confronting New South Wales Special Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the police investigation of certain child sexual abuse allegations in the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. And we're at the beginning of a probing Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Catholic institutions, along with other organisations, are certainly in the Public Eye.

An exposition of the horrifying experiences endured by victims of pædophilia, and the monstrous damage those experiences have wreaked on them, have jolted us into seeing more clearly the consequences of this perverted activity. The pædophile can injure the other person fatally, leaving nothing but bitterness and sourness where once there was innocence and trust, poisoning the other's mind and life forever. The worst consequences of the whole loathsome process are lasting effects that cloy the abused persons' existence, continually threatening to overwhelm them – and sometimes succeeding in doing so.

It's doubtful if there can be an adequate recompense for such injuries, one that restores the balance and brings things back to where they were. This is the heinousness

of pædophilia: certain human beings do things that can destroy the lives of others for ever. It's at this point that our considerations should begin, long before any thought arises about the position of the pædophile or of the institution that's involved. Only when we are earnestly and properly trying to remedy the effects on the abused can we turn to consider other factors.

How did this horrible state of affairs come about? Well, slowly. With stealth. It got a grip on the church as it developed and evolved. It's been there since time out of mind, and crops up in some ancient restrictions. Thus in about 100 CE, one of our earliest documents, *The Didache*,² tells Christians:

2.2: You must not corrupt young boys

And the *Synod of Elvira*³ (c 300-309 CE) targetted pædophilia when it compiled its eighty-one canons, saying that

12. Parents and other Christians who give up their children to sexual abuse are selling others' bodies, and if they do so [...] they shall not receive communion even at death.

and,

71. Those who sexually abuse boys (*stratoribus puerorum*) may not commune even when death approaches.

In 1051 CE, Peter Damian warned Rome about the consequences to children of sexual abuse in his dour *Book of Gomorrah*⁴. Indeed, there is a long history of us Christians being aware of the need to control and properly order our animal instincts.

Pædophilia has infiltrated church structures in the same

way that it has the social and cultural groups of humankind, and is a constituent of the way we humans behave in the exercise of dominance and control. We can use sex to assert ourselves and to put others down, to subjugate them and to display our power over them. And while that might be one of the things that animals regularly use sex for, we as human beings – and as Christian human beings – know that animal instincts



need to be controlled according to norms that govern the way we behave towards one another. Controlling children through sex is not one of them. Nor is the use of children for self-gratification, which is part of the perversion of pædophilia.

You will notice that the church documents quoted above are mainly concerned with the behaviour of the perpetrator, not with the horrendous effects on those they abuse. This aspect of the church's response has not changed a great deal. The church remains more concerned with saving face than with saving the abused, whereas the Church has focussed on the latter.

Can we avoid pædophilia in the future?

Well, we need to realise that we are caught up in the evolutionary process common to the whole cosmos and are part of the plan for humanity that our Creator has in place. Each one of us must do her or his uttermost, since we are facing a huge and hugely urgent problem. Yet we need to be aware that:

It is not our part to muster all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to decide. (J R R Tolkien 1955)

What can we do, then? Probably realise that we can't simply expect authorities to change and instigate effective new norms for us. We have to take matters into our own hands in a responsible and careful way, always bearing in mind that the last thing we ourselves want to do is to lessen the innocence and trust of our young ones.

We need to be more vigilant, as circumstances dictate: avoid institutional buildings and organisations that are known pædophile haunts; recognise the warning signs of pædophilia – secretive – behaviour between adults and children, silent activity when an adult is alone with youngsters, over-friendliness on the part of an adult, the complaints and comments of our own children, etc. – and take strong and swift action; confront those we think might be pædophiles and report our fears simultaneously to both the police and to those higher up in the church, making a careful note of the dates on which we do this. (Following what has been revealed in Victoria and Newcastle, it's no good expecting one of these to inform the other on our behalf.) We should not risk sending our children to institutions and organisations that have sheltered or might shelter pædophiles; in all cases form or join anti-pædophilia actions groups at institutes such as schools, clubs, play-

groups, etc; be wary of under-estimating the cunning of pædophiles or how dangerous they can be; draw up a list of questions to help get proper initial information from institutes and organisations regarding the way they handle the problem of pædophiles within their structures.

We should talk frequently about pædophilia with those in our care, and alert them to the dangers that lie in the groups and communities around them. We need to be open with them concerning suspicious adult behaviour, and warn them about being alone for any length of time with adults.

Harsh? Maybe. But it's better to be strict now than to be stricken with remorse twenty years hence.

Yet, at the end of it all, none of us know for certain how things will work out, although we do know that we shall be surprised and astonished at the changes and growth that can occur⁵. Sometimes the weather can be very favourable, and make all the difference: perhaps this present call for us to wake up to the issue of sexual abuse of the young is a sign that there are better times ahead.

References

- ¹ Throughout this article the term church (with a small 'c') is used concerning hierarchical structures, and the term Church (with a capital 'C') concerns the body of believers. This is a pretty rough-and-ready demarcation, and is meant to keep us aware of the truth that the group 'Church' embraces much more than the group 'church' does. The smaller group cannot exist apart from the larger one, but the reverse is not true.
- ² *Didache* (c 50 CE) translation by A Milavec 2003 Liturgical Press Collegeville Minnesota
- ³ <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/Canon%20Law/ElviraCanons.htm>
- ⁴ Waterloo, Ont., 1982. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. (Includes the response of the Pope.) Pierre J. Payer (ed.): Letters of Peter Damian 31-60, part of the Fathers of the Church - Medieval Continuation series issued by the Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1990. Owen J. Blum, O.F.M.
- ⁵ See 1 Corinthians 2.9, and related texts.

Gabriel Lomas was ordained in 1967 and ministered in the UK while waiting to take up a position in PNG, which he did in 1968. He worked there for 14 years, becoming a parish priest in the Huli area. He holds a BA in philosophy, MAs in theology and applied linguistics, and a PhD in linguistics. He now lives with his wife in retirement in Sydney.

Reshaping the Church with Bishop Robinson and Pope Francis

Andrew Hamilton

Culture has become a popular word to analyse organisations whose members do bad things: football clubs whose players dismantle bars and their patrons; political parties whose members are paraded before courts; and churches in which sexual abuse has been rife.

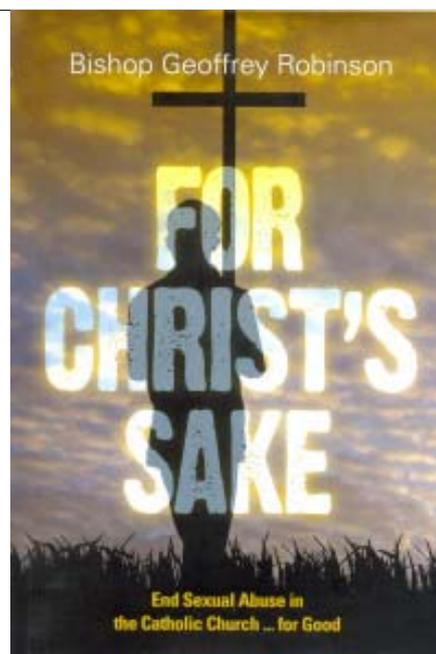
The culture of an organisation comprises the shared attitudes, values, patterns of relationship and practices that make it more likely that members will act in particular ways. In an army unit where there is a culture of binge drinking and contempt for women, more incidents of sexual assault may well occur than in other units where these features are absent.

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's recent book on the culture of the Catholic Church carries on his critique of the factors that have contributed to clerical sexual abuse of children and to denial and concealment of it. The aspects of Catholic culture that he believes are conducive to it include: a relationship with God dominated by fear; immaturity; compulsory clerical celibacy, an exclusively male caste standing over the church; a lonely way of life; a cult of privacy and secrecy; a compulsive need to defend the actions and attitudes of the Pope.

Together these things made it more likely that priests will be tempted to abuse children, will have the opportunity to do so, will abuse with impunity, and have their actions denied and covered up by others.

If this is the culture, how can it be changed? Robinson's answer is to call for a new Church council that includes an equal number of laypeople, with women proportionately represented. Its one topic would be to identify the aspects of the Catholic culture that encouraged sexual abuse and to make the changes necessary. He, together with Bishops Pat Power and Bill Morris, has initiated a petition endorsing this proposal.

Robinson's analysis of harmful aspects of Catholic culture and endorsement of a Church council as the



remedy are persuasive. He has the personal authority that comes from himself having been abused, and from giving many years to persuading Catholics to attend to the harm done to the victims of sexual abuse, to recognise their responsibility to them, and to begin to institute effective safeguards.

A Church council could lead Catholics to address the harm done to people by the sexual abuse of children and to endorse structural changes. It may be a necessary condition for addressing the evil of clerical sexual abuse.

But a council focused on sexual abuse may not alone be sufficient to deal with the issues Robinson raises. It would assess the contribution made to sexual abuse by the aspects of Church culture identified by Robinson and by other participants, and make the institutional changes it believes necessary. But if it decided that some of the aspects of Church culture indicted by Robinson were not material to sexual abuse, they may be inconsistent with the Gospel. They would still need to be addressed.

Institutional changes, too, are insufficient unless relationships and attitudes change. Australians infatuated with cricket will recognise the truth of this in the contrast between the measures introduced by the Argus report and the performance of the national team. Medieval reformers certainly recognised it when they described the church as always needing reform in head and members. They insisted on the importance of good preaching, particularly embodied in the person and words of the pope, to make central what the Church is about.

From this perspective there is a happy conjunction between Robinson's project and the way of proceeding of Pope Francis. He has put his authority behind the

deconstruction of a clerical culture built on the power and incontestability of the papacy. He has done so in the name of the deeper Gospel values that the church serves.

His constant description of himself as the Bishop of Rome rather than as Pope, his preference for simplicity of life, dress and liturgy, his immediate contact with ordinary people as human beings and not simply as members of a religious or ethnic group, his concern for the poor, his conversational forms of teaching and listening and his focus on the example of Christ are the antithesis of churchiness and of clericalism. They also enable people to imagine a Church culture more deeply grounded in the Gospel than that criticised by Robinson.

Institutional reform of the Church and imaginative leadership are complementary. To shape a church which reaches out effectively to victims of sexual abuse, in which sexual abuse is seen as abhorrent, and in which appropriate structures discourage it, is essential. This can happen only if Catholics' imagination is captured by something freshly discovered as well as by something abhorred. That is where radical leadership comes in.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*
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'No Women Priests?'

WOW Responds to Pope Francis

Press Release 30th July 2013

On the question of 'women', WOW is alarmed by remarks made by Pope Francis during an interview with international journalists at the end of World Youth Days 2013. While saying that our Church 'doesn't yet have a truly deep theology of women', he also said that, on the question of the ordination of women, 'the church has spoken and said no. John Paul II, in a definitive formulation, said that door is closed.'

The church has spoken? We remind Pope Francis that the church is made up of millions of women and men who have been officially forbidden by the Vatican from even discussing the question of women's ordination. Pope John Paul II may have spoken but he is not the Church. The ban on women priests may have been a definitive expression of prejudice but it was not an infallible ruling and it does not reflect the will or best interests of the people of the Church.

Pope Francis recently called for an elimination of all forms of elitism and said that dialogue is the only way for individuals, families and societies to grow. Yet in trying to close down the question of women's ordination, Vatican leadership demonstrates how it clings to an elitist vision of an elevated and exclusively male

priesthood that stifles growth. In the refusal to dialogue, we are also witnessing a leadership fearful of open examination of the exclusion of women due to the shameful fact that it is based on sexism alone.

No truly deep theology of women in the Church? Pope Francis himself has recognised that 'women have a special mission in the Church as first witnesses of Christ's resurrection' and there are hundreds of documents and studies available on women's active involvement in the Church since the very beginning. We encourage Pope Francis to open his eyes to the plentiful theology available rather than focusing his energy on trying to limit women to non-speaking support roles.

No women priests? Perhaps, Pope Francis, it is time to show some more courage. It is long since past time that the Vatican officially opens wide the doors to genuine dialogue on the question of women's ordination in our Church.

* * * *

Founded in 1996, Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) is an international network of groups whose current mission is to see Catholic women admitted to all ordained ministries in the Church. WOW is founded on the gospel principle of equality and therefore opposes any discrimination. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no long male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) WOW currently includes representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, France, Germany Great Britain, Ireland, Malta, Poland, and the United States.

Ecumenism and Pastoral Care

How the Church comes to the people!

Probably the most Catholic State in Switzerland is beautiful Lucerne in the centre of the country. Many reputable theologians have preached in their churches, and it is also the home of the famous Hans Küng whose birthplace is in nearby Sursée.

A very successful ecumenical pilot project between the Catholic and Protestant Churches for everyday pastoral care has been launched – the Catholics always wanted a city or train station church. A public café or meeting place was opened last year in the Protestant St. Luke's Centre. Right near the main city railway station, in the attractive garden of St. Luke's Church, is the 'Twitter Bar'. It is a discussion and counselling café where people can meet freely without obligation for a cuppa or a mineral water and an obligation-free chat or discussion. They can even bring their own lunch. Opening hours are Monday to Friday 12 midday until 6.30 pm.

The principal idea is not for people to come for a religious service to a church building, but that the Church goes where people work or spend their leisure time. The café is often being visited for an everyday chat by students, women's groups, families or individuals. Some use the occasion to form groups for outings or to help each other, to solve day-to-day problems, even mundane issues like problems with a mobile phone.

Discussions may lead to issues about religion, faith or family problems. Consultation rooms are available for more personal issues if needed. It is also possible that someone rings to arrange for a personal meeting. Strict pastoral secrecy is of course being observed at all times.

A team of pastoral experts of both denominations is headed by Catholic theologian Olivia Portmann. Information is available from an attractive website www.twitscherbar.ch [sorry it is only in German!]. This also contains links to the Churches, Church Bulletins, press reports, etc. with contact email addresses to a couple of team members.

Recently a journalist enquired regarding the importance of religious issues in view of the two different denominations. Olivia Portmann pointed out that a strong Faith base is important to her. It gives her strength to appreciate and deal with the difficulties in

various life situations, to accept every human being as an individual, which is of paramount importance for a Christian. Religion *per se* is only discussed if the person requesting a meeting so desires, and this is very seldom the case.

The basis of the 'Twitter-Bar' concept is the Christian idea of help to fellow human beings. However, it is also an offer and invitation for people who are not 'churched' and who cannot find discussion possibilities through the usual channels of the established church organisations.

It has to be pointed out that a pastoral discussion is not a therapy. Experts for the latter are being referred to outside institutions.

Extract from the website and also from an article in
NeueLuzernerZeitung dated 12th July 2013

No longer am I moved
By the thunder of the organ;
Nor alerted by the clinking of thurible
chains,
Or the soft marble quiet
Of flickering candles.

These things have passed for me,
Passed away.

I now respond to the Maker of the cosmos
And its numberless parts,
Most of them quite unknown to us –
Like the little ants that go busily about their
tasks
As glittering planes glide in ignorance
overhead.

Gabriel Lomas
28/05/2012

Hierarchy's Mary is vastly different from ours

Joan Chittister

One of the major scientific discoveries of the 20th century revolves around the role played by communication in stressful situations — the notion that a person's communication style can soften or harden conflict depending on how it is used; the idea that simply the amount of information supplied in crucial situations affects the tone, the efficacy and the outcome of negotiations. As a result of those findings, whole corporations have changed their processes of decision-making and dissemination of information.

So with that in mind, people waited for information about the progress of the Vatican visitation of the LCWR from this year's gathering in Orlando, Fla. Given the fact that none was forthcoming, people drew their own conclusions.

I, on the other hand, went for the one piece of data the assembly managed to produce on the subject, the homily Bishop Sartain gave to the membership. And a clear piece of communication it was.

In this homily, Mary is 'quiet,' 'docile,' submits herself and has no 'desire or a need to figure things out ... or resolve them to her own personal satisfaction.' There was, we're told here, no 'no' or 'mine' in her. The Mary of this homily is a passive receptacle of what she understands to be the Word of God.

Well, maybe. But it might be good to think about all that a bit in the light of the other things we also know about Mary.

The purpose of this column is not to parse what the bishop said about Mary on the Feast of the Assumption. I prefer instead to look at what he did not say about her because, it seems to me, what he left out of that homily says much about what is expected of women in the Catholic Church.

For instance, Mary answers the angel's declaration to her by questioning it. An angel! Someone of much higher rank, it would seem, than even apostolic delegates, and only then with a 'Be-it-done-unto-me' response to a situation to which, apparently, 'no' was a viable answer. Otherwise, why bother to have the conversation?

Even more important, perhaps, is the awareness that despite the seriousness — even the danger — of her situation, Mary did not go to any man — to the high priests of the temple, the local rabbi, her father or even Joseph — for directions about what to do next. She went to another woman for the wisdom she needed and followed that instead. No visitations here.

In another instance, at the wedding feast at Cana, Mary gives her own set of apostolic orders to no less than Jesus himself as well as to the wait staff, as in, 'Go and do what he tells you.'

Mary herself questioned the propriety of what Jesus was doing in the temple with the elders, and later is part of a crowd of family and friends who are even concerned that Jesus may be, as the Irish would say, 'losing the run of himself.'

And finally, if anyone wants to know just how influential and important a figure Mary was to the development of the early church, the very idea of her being part of the gathering of apostles on Pentecost when each of them is anointed into discipleship by the Holy Spirit ought to be enough to dispel the notion that what we have here is a woman without a strong sense of self.

No, the Mary not mentioned in this homily on the Assumption was a woman not intimidated into the Incarnation, not beholden to male answers, not shy about giving directions about what should be done, not without a high sense of personal responsibility, and not one bit in doubt about her place in the hierarchy of the church.

Those, I think, are precisely the qualities we see in women in our own time, that make for what some parts of the church are now calling 'radical feminism.'

From where I stand, that is a sad misuse of language and an even sadder case of spiritual blindness.

Joan Chittister's column, *From Where I Stand*,
is posted to NCRonline.org.

We need to re-think the Creation story mythology!

Kevin Treston

One of the greatest challenges for religions today is to remain faithful to the core of their revelation and yet be credible in how their beliefs are communicated in a world shaped by science. The universe is about 13.7 billion years old and the human species, in some primal identity, perhaps one million years old.

The first three chapters of the Book of Genesis express in symbolic language the creation of the world, the first humans, creatures and the reality of sinful behaviour. The sacred origin myth describes the goodness of creation and an act of disobedience by Adam and Eve. This act of disobedience was consequently theologically designated as the "Fall": After the fifth century the doctrine of original sin emanated out of the Fall myth and became part of the Christian tradition as an explanation of inherited evil within each person.

However, in the light of the general consensus of scientific opinion about the evolution of the human species, there are almost insuperable scientific obstacles to the veracity of the whole notion of the Fall and the doctrine of original sin, particularly in the literalist mode by which the doctrine has been explained and taught as official Christian teaching. The traditional interpretation of the Fall origin myth and the original sin doctrine have significantly shaped the way the Christ story has been told in Christian theology and worship.

The Mystery of Evil...

The problem of evil is an ongoing mystery. Every religious tradition recounts myths to explain its presence in the world. The shocking mayhem of World Wars, Holocaust, nuclear weaponry and mass ethnic killings have almost paralysed religious writers in seeking to reconcile the scope of evil in the world with beliefs about a loving God. Faced with suffering, loss and destruction, people cry out in anguish, "Why would God ever allow this evil to happen?"

The Fall/Redemption will always be an enduring historical feature of the traditional Christian story. Much of church teachings, theology, liturgy and devotions are experienced within the framework of the Fall/Redemption tradition.

However, is there an alternative interpretation to the Genesis myth as a Fall? Is there an interpretation of the origin myth which is more attuned to what science is saying about evolution, especially the evolution of the human species and consciousness? A rising tide of theological voices are generating questions in the light of evolutionary science about whether the framework of the Fall is a viable context within contemporary consciousness for an interpretation of the mission of Jesus who became the Christ.

One of the most extraordinary features of our contemporary Western culture is the dramatic leap in consciousness in a relatively short space of time. Consciousness opens us out to a larger sphere of understanding and deeper meaning. Something new is happening culturally and it is happening very rapidly. Just think how much cultural thinking has changed even within the last few decades on such matters as the internet, communications technology, globalisation, status of women, ecological concerns, climate change, religious cooperation, genetics, multiculturalism and a hundred other examples we could propose to illustrate the rapidity of radical change. How well does the Christian narrative engage with an evolutionary understanding of the human species and creation?

This book (i.e. *Modern Credo: Telling the Christ Story Within the Context of Creation* by Kevin Treston) focuses on those Christians whose life and faith are shaped by Western consciousness. Certain assumptions about life and faith in Western-orientated countries are not necessarily relevant to Christians in such countries as China, Egypt or indigenous peoples. However, I would hold that many of the basic themes of the book have some application to all Christians in the world.

Science is challenging traditional religions to reframe their messages in accord with scientifically-demonstrated evidence. To avoid aligning certain tenets in religious belief with established science is to strain the credibility of believers and non-believers alike. The images and symbols associated with God arise out of the Judeo-Christian tradition in a pre-scientific era. If understood literally, these symbols are increasingly at variance with modern science, especially with an understanding of the evolutionary nature of all things.

It is almost banal to state that Christianity in Western countries is in crisis. The reasons for the decline of Christianity as a vibrant public voice are too complex to analyse in this book. However, one aspect of the crisis in Christianity is the question as to how well the Christian message interacts and transforms cultural consciousness. The Christian community cannot do its mission effectively unless its voice speaks to the lived reality of the people. Another feature of the nature of the crisis is a challenge for religions to transform their mode of communicating beliefs from a literalist to a symbolic mode of expressing their beliefs.

The second half of this article (which includes "A re-interpretation of the Genesis origin mythology" and "The word 'evolution' is not even mentioned in the Catechism.") will be printed in the next issue of *ARCvoice*.

If you would like the complete article now, it is available from your editor:

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Or, read the book:

Kevin Treston: *Modern Credo: Telling the Christ Story Within the Context of Creation*

The Latest Vatican Financial Report

Paul Collins

On Thursday 4 July 2013 the Holy See and the Vatican City State publicly issued a Consolidated Financial Statement for the financial year 2012-2013. It makes interesting reading.

Firstly let's look at the Holy See, meaning the *curia* and the papal government of the Church. It employs 2,823 people, pays for the Sala Stampa (the Vatican press office) and Vatican Radio and media including the daily newspaper *osservatore romano*, and pays the newly-enacted Italian property taxes called IMU to the local Rome Commune (council). This year IMU cost the Holy See five million Euros. Nevertheless the Holy See closed the year with a net profit of 2,185,622 Euros 'due mainly to good performance in financial management'. In other words they have successfully introduced modern accounting procedures.

The Government, or 'Governorate' as the Romans call it, of the Vatican City State also reported a profit; they were in the black to the tune of 23,079,800 Euros. The Vatican City State employs 1,936 people and the profit would have come from the Vatican museums, post office and the Vatican shop. The scandal-ridden Institute for the Works of Religion, the Vatican bank, gave the pope 50 million Euros 'in support of his apostolic and charitable ministries'.

Despite being generally 'in the black' due to better administration, worldwide contributions to the Holy See are falling sharply. 'Peter's Pence' dropped from

US\$69,711,772 in 2011 to US\$65,922,637 in 2012. Contributions from 'ecclesiastical circumscriptions throughout the world' (i.e. dioceses) dropped from US\$32,128,675 in 2011 to US\$28,303,239 in 2012, an overall reduction of 11.9%. Religious orders are also getting more tight-fisted with the Vatican. Their contributions dropped from US\$1,194,217 in 2011 to US\$1,133,466 in 2012, a reduction of 5.09%. This drop is significant in the sense that Catholics are clearly less willing to give to the Vatican until it cleans up its act and is willing to give bishops, priests and laity a greater say in the running of the Church. The days of the absolute monarchy are over.

The Holy See's overall operating budget (as distinct from that of the Vatican City State) is around US\$330 million. It is worth noting this because of the absurd statements that many make about the 'wealth' of the Vatican. Some imagine that the Holy See owns all Catholic real estate across the world, whereas in fact, the Vatican's operating budget is the about the size of a middle-ranking state university.

PAUL COLLINS is the author of thirteen books, the most recent being *The Birth of the West* (2013). He is an historian, broadcaster and writer on Catholic, ethical and environmental issues.

For more information on Vatican finances, see his article in Eureka Street, 14.8.2012: *The truth about the Vatican's money*

Engaging!

Lynne Green

I'd just taken 'one small step' onto the footpath. Like that astronaut I'd watched with my science class all those years ago: as he actually did it! This time, I was on my way to do a bit of Saturday 'market-placing', and an engaging very young boy with his Dad, just leaving the shops I was heading for, set my mind ticking. I began thinking about a new kind of 'giant leap' (*astro-man's* naming): in inter-church relations, of all things!

What was so 'engaging' about the youngster? I had just asked him if he was taking Dad for a walk. He said yes, and explained they had a couple more things to do, and then turned the conversation to me, with a series of considered questions, which lasted for two or three minutes. And Dad just stood by, smiling, I think to encourage his son, and assure him he could safely do that 'interacting'! Then we went our separate ways, and soon I took the first of several short, reflective, coffee-infused 'stop-overs', and kept enjoying being with others, so later added 'participating' to 'inter-acting' and 'engaging' – for my list of valuable life skills.

Let me explain that connection with being '*ecumenical*'. Since 2011 I have been saddened by a decision made by bishops in NSW and ACT dioceses to withdraw from the **NSW Ecumenical Council**. And, in June last year, Cardinal George Pell, in a letter to announce this step, said that he believed the Council had 'run its course'! I couldn't disagree more, in particular because – having worked ecumenically in the early to mid 1990's – I remain a committed ecumenist. Some friends would even say '*ecumaniac*'!

My thoughts on this had only just been opened up again – before that pre-schooler quizzed me – when I'd received a copy of the NSW Ecumenical Council's newsletter, **Sharing**, now an online version. Its name has never been more of a focus, for me, as it was full of reasons why people in all our churches need to keep '*sharing/engaging*' with each other, and with many others in our world/lives.

One article in this latest issue of **Sharing**, was an extract from David Gill's homily at a service for this year's **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**,¹ in which he had asked if [we] 'need reminding that when churches are in trouble, their ecumenical relationships show it?' For me, this can apply two ways: splitting us apart, or drawing us together – my preferred option – to '*engage*', and also '*interact*'. From my experience as one who also

'*participated*' in the days when NSW/ACT Catholic dioceses joined the Council, one by one, beginning in 1991/1992, we appreciated there was so much we could do '**Better Together**'.² And we did! With so much joy – and hard 'yakka'!

A second article, from a speech by the Uniting Church NSW/ACT Moderator at the NSW Ecumenical Council's AGM this year, focussed on three examples of ways in which the churches needed to act together: 'for the common good'³. They were: in securing justice for refugees and asylum-seekers; in reducing 'the gap that exists between the strugglers and those who are prospering'; and addressing the impact of burning fossil fuels on '*Global Warming*' in our time. My question – how can we NOT 'engage'?

The final item, perhaps the most heartening for me – right now – is the Council's '**Invitation to Join Ecumenical Friends (NSW /ACT)**'. Far more participative, inter-active and engaging (spelt PIE in another article I did for *ARCvoice* years ago, on language in liturgy)! And, it's certainly better than signing on for 'those-who-just-sit-on-hands' club.

I'm an eager, already-committed, life member of *Ecumenical Friends*. And, I'm ready to help with another 'giant leap' – metaphorically-speaking! We need it.

Footnotes

- (1) David, a minister of the Uniting Church, was the first General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, which replaced the Australian Council of Churches. The service was held at St James Anglican Church in Sydney – city.
- (2) Better Together was the column I wrote for the *Catholic Weekly* while I was '*liaison officer*' for Sydney's Catholic Ecumenical Commission in early to mid-1990's.
- (3) The phrase '*for the common good*' was also recently used in the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Election Statement, 2013.

LYNNE GREEN, a Catholic sister, worked in secondary schools run by her order between 1964 and 1982, was registrar at St Paul's Late Vocation National Seminary, run by the msc priests, from 1984 to 1991, and was Liaison Officer of Sydney's Ecumenical Commission from 1991 to 1996. During the time from when Sydney joined the NSW Ecumenical Council in 1992 she was a representative of Sydney Diocese on the Council's executive committee, and several of its working groups, including the Task Group which facilitated the Taizé Pilgrimage of Trust here, work which continues until the present.

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