



# arcvoice

**A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.**  
**June 2014** **Issue No. 52**

## Editorial

**H**ow hard is it to get a message to Pope Francis? At this stage it is impossible to know. Although the Pope has said that he wants to hear from ordinary Catholics, we are not aware of any structures that enable the faithful to do that in a meaningful way. Through our linkage into the network of Catholic Church Reform International we have sent letters to him along with other Catholics of like mind from many countries. We do not know as yet whether he actually received them because we have had no reply. But we are responding to the challenge to communicate because no Pope in our living memory has expressed such a desire to be in touch with those of us who were previously just expected to “pray, pay and obey”.

The next stage in this effort to communicate is to show just how much people care about the issues facing our Church and to back it up with physical presence in Rome. The Synod on the Family, called by Pope Francis meets in Rome beginning on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. While some of you may have contributed to a less than satisfactory questionnaire sent out by the Bishops, we need to make our voice heard much more loudly and strongly. To this end we have thought it opportune to devote our annual conference this year to an international effort to make ourselves heard in the way that we want to express ourselves.

Invitations are going out to as many as possible of the forward-thinking Catholics known to us asking them to express their views on critical matters of family life. We are hoping that we will be able to influence the Synod through our solidarity with similar groups from around the world. The discussions will be structured so that we are able to co-ordinate our contribution and feedback with those in other countries and present a strong voice from the faithful to the Synod members without the filtering that could take place if it were left to members of our hierarchy. This is your chance to speak your mind with the support of an organised effort to have your views heard.

Documents have been prepared to help stimulate your thoughts and these will be refined and presented based on your feedback and that of other Catholics from around the world.

Then, in the days immediately before the Synod, many of the people from associations who are part of the Catholic Church Reform network will be gathering in Rome to be a physical witness to the aspirations for reform that is hoped for through the Synod. You may not be able to get to Rome but you should take this opportunity to express your viewpoint. Register now (see page 2) and invite a friend or two to register as well.

*John Buggy*

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*Have your say about the Synod on the Family*  
 called by Pope Francis to be held in Rome from 5-19 October 2014

Join with others in an international effort to provide input  
 to this significant event and express your views on:

- Fulfilling Relationships*
- Openness to Life*
- Gender and Sexuality*
- How the Church Teaches and Listens*

This **dialogue** will be held at  
**Mary MacKillop Place**  
**7-11 Mount Street, North Sydney NSW**  
**Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2014**  
 9.30 am – 4.00 pm

**Cost: \$10** (payable on the day – lunch provided)

!.....

**REGISTRATION**

(essential for catering purposes)

Name: ..... Number of people attending [ ]

Names of other guests: .....

Address: .....

..... Post Code .....

Telephone Number: .....

Email Address: .....

send to  
 ARC c/- Rob Brian  
 28 Lancaster Road, DOVER HEIGHTS, New South Wales 2030  
 or preferably email Rob Brian at: [rbrian@vtown.com.au](mailto:rbrian@vtown.com.au)

# Cardinal outlines possible paths to Communion for divorced, re-married

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service: Feb 28, 2014



Cardinal Kasper

VATICAN CITY (CNS)

**T**he Catholic Church needs to find a way to offer healing, strength and salvation to Catholics whose marriages have failed, who are committed to making a new union work, and who long to do so within the church and with the grace of Communion, Cardinal Walter Kasper told the world's cardinals.

Jesus' teaching on the indissolubility of sacramental marriage is clear, the retired German cardinal said, and it would harm individuals and the church to pretend otherwise. However, "after the shipwreck of sin, the shipwrecked person should not have a second boat at his or her disposal, but rather a life raft" in the form of the sacrament of Communion, he said.

Pope Francis had asked Cardinal Walter Kasper, a well-known theologian and author of a book on mercy as a fundamental trait of God, to introduce a Feb. 20-21 discussion by the College of Cardinals on family life. The Vatican did not publish the cardinal's text, but Catholic News Service obtained a copy.

The Catholic Church needs to find a way to help divorced and remarried Catholics who long to participate fully in the life of the church, Cardinal

Kasper told the cardinals. While insisting – for the good of individuals and of the church – on the need to affirm Jesus' teaching that sacramental marriage is indissoluble, he allowed for the possibility that in very specific cases the church could tolerate, though not accept, a second union.

From the first moments of creation, the cardinal said, God intended man and woman to be together, to form one flesh, to have children and to serve him together. But sin entered the world almost immediately, which is why even the Bible is filled with stories of husbands and wives hurting and betraying one another, he explained.

Christ, who came to set people free from the bonds of sin, established marriage as a sacrament, "an instrument of healing for the consequences of sin and an instrument of sanctifying grace," he said.

Because they are human and prone to sin, husbands and wives continually must follow a path of conversion, renewal and maturation, asking forgiveness and renewing their commitment to one another, Cardinal Kasper said. But the church also must be realistic and acknowledge "the complex and thorny problem" posed by Catholics whose marriages have failed, but who find support, family stability and happiness in a new relationship, he continued.

"One cannot propose a solution different from or contrary to the words of Jesus," the cardinal said. "The indissolubility of a sacramental marriage and the impossibility of a new marriage while the other partner is still alive is part of the binding tradition of the faith of the church and cannot be abandoned or dissolved by appealing to a superficial understanding of mercy at a discount price."

At the same time, "there is no human situation absolutely without hope or solution," he said Catholics profess their belief in the forgiveness of sins in the Creed, he explained. "That means that for one who converts, forgiveness is possible. If that's true for a murderer, it is also true for an adulterer."

Cardinal Kasper said it would be up to members of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family in October and the world Synod of Bishops in 2015 to discuss concrete proposals for helping divorced and civilly re-married Catholics participate more fully in the life of the church.

A possible avenue for finding those proposals, he said, would be to develop "pastoral and spiritual procedures" for helping couples convinced in

conscience that their first union was never a valid marriage. The decision cannot be left only to the couple, he said, because marriage has a public character, but that does not mean that a juridical solution – an annulment granted by a marriage tribunal – is the only way to handle the case.

As a diocesan bishop in Germany in 1993, Cardinal Kasper and two other bishops issued pastoral instructions to help priests minister to such couples. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, made the bishops drop the plan. A similar proposal made last year by the Archdiocese of Freiburg, Germany, was criticized by Cardinal Gerhard Muller, current prefect of the doctrinal congregation.

Citing a 1972 article by then-Father Joseph Ratzinger, Cardinal Kasper said the church also might consider some form of “canonical penitential practice” – a “path beyond strictness and leniency” – that would adapt the gradual process for the reintegration of sinners into full communion with the church used in the first centuries of Christianity.

To avoid the greater evil of offering no help to the divorced and remarried, cutting them and most likely their children off from the sacraments, he said, the church could “tolerate that which is impossible to accept” – a second union.

“A pastoral approach of tolerance, clemency and indulgence,” he said, would affirm that “the sacraments are not a prize for those who behave well or for an elite, excluding those who are most in need.” □



## Reflections on Hans Küng's final Amen!

Well-known Catholic theologian Hans Küng has recently published the third and last (over 700 pages) volume of his autobiography. The title is *Erlebte Menschlichkeit – Lived Humanity* and it covers the last thirty years of his life. It is a fascinating account of the events he experienced during that time. At the same time he announced that he does not intend to publish any further books. The memoirs have not yet been translated into English.

The conclusion of the last chapter in the book, dealing with his own death, made world media headlines. Küng is 85 years old and declares that his increasing serious physical illnesses of Parkinson's Disease and Macular Degeneration render him incapable of future functioning in his main professional activity as a writer. He may, therefore, decide, if necessary and in time to come, to be ready for consideration of giving his life back to his Creator God. He does not regard this action as a rebellious act against the Church, but as a gesture of ‘offering to return one's life back to the Creator’ which should also be available to any faithful human being.

In reality, he recently joined the Swiss organisation ‘Exit’, a self-help Society for assisted death practising euthanasia which already counts 70,000 Members and has accompanied 350 lives to their death last year. They

recently published Küng's decision in their regular Members' Journal and honoured him with a special award for his courageous confession of self-responsibility during a special ceremony for his life work.

Reactions from the World Press have been mainly positive. Küng supposedly declares that he does not wish to exist as a shadow of himself. He also tries to explain that, theologically speaking, every human being has the right to return his life into the hands of God. There does not appear to be an indication in Holy Scriptures that one has to keep living until the bitter end! He emphasizes that it is up to everybody individually to reach this conclusion, and that no physician, parliamentarian or religious functionary has a right to take over this decision.

Whilst Hans Küng has written many best-selling books over the years on religious issues and life philosophies, he is also known for his publications on global financial and business ethics, of world acclaim. He is often labelled as a rebel theologian, but is a man of faith. One of the commentaries states, that in spite of his critical mind, he is a practising Catholic Priest according to the Church's rules.

Peter Meury  
Member of ARC Secretariat

# The Fraudulent Origin of the Traditional Exclusion of Women from Priesthood in the Catholic Church

Alan Clague

Starting with the apostles and the first Christian communities, the Church has built up many beliefs and practices. Although the implication of the word 'tradition' is a continuance of the past, during the course of Church history new traditions have arisen and old ones have been modified or dropped. If we look at the earliest days of the followers of Christ, we see them adopt changes that seemed more appropriate for the times than their previous approach. The reasons for this include changed circumstances and a clearer understanding of the Scriptural basis of the tradition. At present, there are a number of Catholic traditions that are extremely controversial, and the cause of great concern both to 'traditionalists' and 'reformers'. One of these is the exclusion of women from priesthood in the Church, which is no longer in harmony with the values of Western society. This exclusion is contained in the Bible, yet the Bible also gives clear evidence of a major change in Christian practice towards women two generations after Paul and the apostles.

The early role of women in the Greek Christian communities started by Paul can be inferred from his epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. Women played a leadership role. They include Phoebe (Rom 16:1), Priscilla (Acts 18:18, 1 Cor 16:19), and Lydia (Acts 16:14). Phoebe is described as a 'deacon', but at this early stage there was no defined priesthood. In addition, Paul states that 'there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ' (Gal 3:28). He gives instructions for

women to wear proper head attire (a 'symbol of authority') when prophesising (1 Cor 11:5-10).

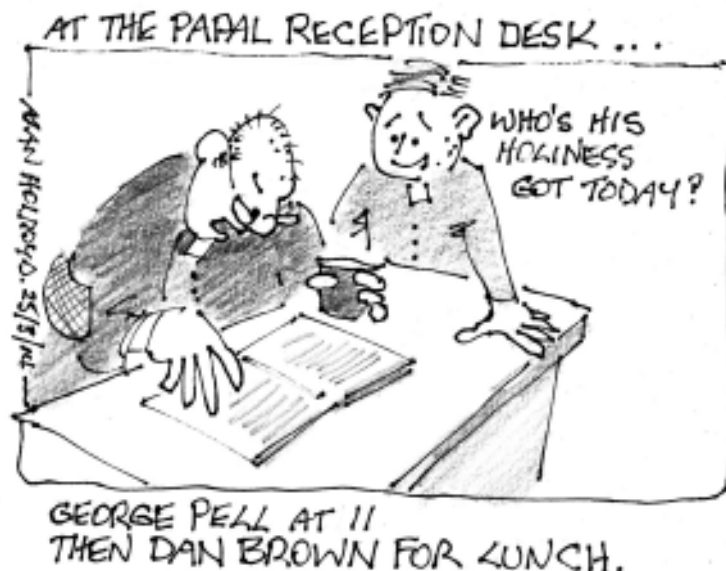
This status given to women was quite contrary to Greek tradition and, after his death, Christian leaders changed his instructions. The political climate was very antipathetic to groups who wished to change cultural norms, including the traditional family values that were strongly patriarchal. The first epistle to Timothy, written about 30 years after Paul's martyrdom, now states: 'I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man' (1 Tim 2:12). The epistle to Titus, written about the same time, states that young women must be 'submissive to their husbands' (Titus 2:5). Two other epistles, Ephesians and Colossians, also now believed to be written after Paul's martyrdom, express similar commands: 'Wives, be subject to your husbands' (Eph 5:22, Col 3:18). Colossians is also significant because the authentic Paul's statement in Galatians concerning

equality in Christ is repeated in Colossians 3:11, except that the equality of male and female is omitted.

The most telling evidence that this was a change to the true Pauline tradition lies in 1 Corinthians, an authentic Pauline epistle. After telling women to be properly attired when prophesising in Chapter 11, in Chapter 14, in the middle of instructions on

an orderly way to prophesise, the following occurs: 'As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church' (1 Cor 14:33-35). This is widely accepted now as an interpolation made later to support the change in women's role that Church leaders considered to be necessary in the conditions prevailing at the time.

In the first century, there was a more flexible attitude to authentic authorship, and the authors of these documents probably did not think that they were being deceitful by attributing them to Paul. By today's standards, the documents would be considered fraudulent. Another side issue is that, when the New



Testament was being compiled from the mass of writings by the Church Fathers, one criterion for a document to be accepted as a work of Scripture was that its author had personal contact with Jesus. Thus, the epistle of Pope Clement to the Corinthians, written about 95 CE, which some considered to be canonical, was ultimately rejected. Using that criterion, these epistles would also have been rejected. They were included because they were considered to have been written by Paul himself.

This modern interpretation of Scripture illustrates two important facts. The authentic Paul was not inconsistent in his instructions on the role of women in the Church. He unambiguously equated the status of women to that of men. Just as important in today's context is the evidence which shows that Church leaders, two generations after Paul issued his instructions on

women in the Church, decided to change these instructions radically due to prevailing circumstances. Today's traditionalists who feel that, regardless of current circumstances, the Church cannot alter its traditions on women in the priesthood, should realise that, right from the earliest days, Church leaders felt that they were entitled to change Church rules if the circumstances warranted it. Not even Paul's explicit instructions were exempt from change. If traditionalists really want to maintain Church traditions they should revert to the authentic Paul: 'There is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ'.

ALAN CLAGUE is a retired Chemical Pathologist and holds a Master's degree in Theology. He is a member of the ARC Secretariat.

## One step forward, or two steps back?

### Divine Mercy Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration

When: Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Where: (A Sydney parish)

Programme:

- Mass
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- Blessing of The Divine Mercy Image
- Chaplet of The Divine Mercy (Sung)
- Benediction
- Veneration of the Divine Mercy Image
- Finishing approx. 5 pm
- Confession will take place from 2.00 pm

Jesus is Divine Mercy. Through Saint Faustina Kowalska from Poland, He has requested the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday to take place on the second Sunday of Easter. On this day, everybody is welcomed to receive in great abundance the gifts of the Resurrection. Besides we can obtain a Plenary Indulgence when we receive the Eucharist in state of Grace, attend Confession on the same day or within 7 days before or after. We could even do it on behalf of a person who has passed away. We encourage you to enter the Easter gift from the Risen Christ "Divine Mercy".

(Contact: Names and phone numbers provided)

Readers may be wondering if this is some kind of practical joke – a revival of our pre-Vatican II church. Alas, it is a genuine notice which appeared in the newsletter of a certain Sydney parish in April this year and we have to assume that the authors were sincere, if misguided.

Where have they been since the 1960s? Don't they know that 'Confession' is now known as 'Reconciliation' (although I personally haven't been for many years – see page 8)? Haven't they heard that embarrassing theologies like Plenary Indulgences have gradually fallen out of use. Such words like Limbo, Purgatory and 'state of grace' would be incomprehensible to anyone born after 1960.

Our concern must be that such practices are becoming more frequent in Australia as overseas priests take over the parishes, bringing their own conservative expressions of Catholicism. The fact that the mother-houses of these priests are paid substantial sums by the Australian dioceses for their services introduces a further disturbing element as the temple is turned into 'big business'.

*Margaret Knowlden*  
Editor

# An un-Christ-like Church?

Bill Humphreys

I wonder how many Catholics share the following:

I can no longer truthfully say, 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, if that means the Institution. I have no problem if it means "The People of God". Totally disillusioned by the present Institution, I think that, if Jesus came again, He would repeat His sevenfold indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time, on their current counterparts. That most certainly does not include Pope Francis. I believe He would see the Church as **un-Christ-like** for the following reasons:

- centuries-long handling of the sex abuse scandal;
- the all too frequent failure of an ordained priest to '... descend in humility and service and stand as one amongst those whom he serves.' (Håring, CSSR);
- anathemas (excluding not including);
- interdicts (more exclusion);
- excommunications (with the denial of the Last Rites, in effect eternal damnation);
- various Inquisitions (bereft of natural justice and notorious for extreme cruelty and burning at the stake, described as, "Terror in the Name of God");
- the flagrant use of the term 'mortal sin' (with its dire ramifications);
- the failure to accept, adopt and practise what Jesus taught in the Parables, such as 'The Good Shepherd' and 'The Prodigal Son'; and failing to embrace and proclaim the unconditional love of a compassionate God;
- the too-common practice among the hierarchy of self-aggrandising titles, attire and lifestyle;
- the acceptance by some bishops of the notion of a 'remnant church';
- the refusal, unwillingness or culpable incompetence to address the scandal of corruption in the *Curia* and the Vatican Bank;
- the indulgence of '...idoltrous pull of power, privilege and possessions...';

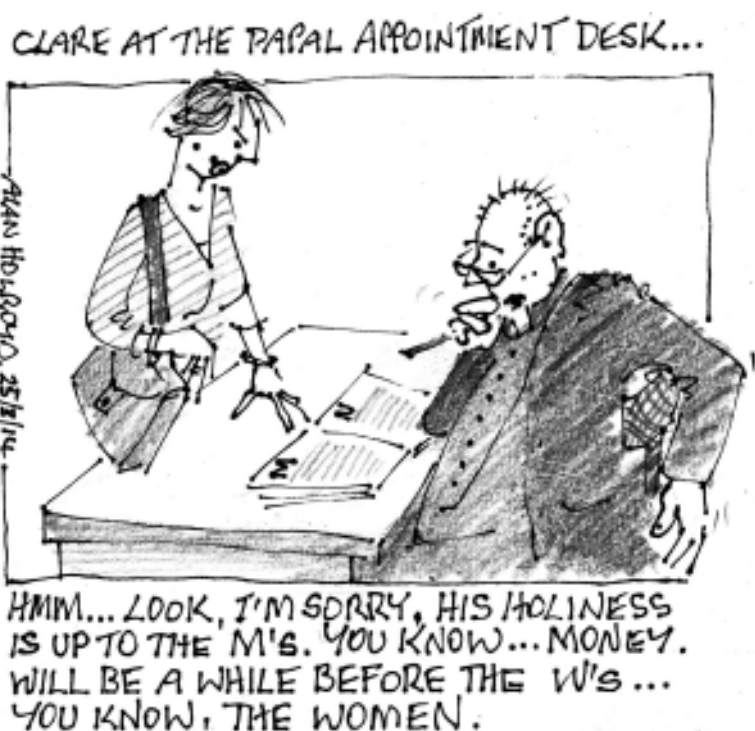
- the 'subtle sin of mistaking the symbols of religion for the substance of love, the rubric for true worship and external conformity for true conversion.' (O'Leary, PP).

The above is probably enough but there is one significant issue: What brought us to believe that *ecclesia* means what we know now as the Institutional Church? In fact, *ecclesia* comes from the Greek *ekklesia* meaning community, a word that describes, in that powerful term from Vatican II "The People of God".

It is important to stress that *anathemas*, etc. are human constructs, designed to preserve power, to threaten, to frighten and to exclude, characteristics of any secular institution. It is also important to note well that in these ecclesial constructs there is no reference to pastoral imperatives.

Under the refreshing and inspirational leadership of Pope Francis and, given that clericalism and careerism are forsaken, we may have a Church that is truly Christian.

Bill Humphreys was a Christian Brother for 20 years and taught in the Catholic Education System in Victoria, Canberra, New South Wales and as a missionary in Papua New Guinea. He was a Superior of a Religious Community, a Principal of a combined Primary and Secondary School and Assistant Novice Master. His varied experience, practical knowledge and valuable insights over a long life, provide a basis for the issues raised.



# Bless me Father!

Margaret Knowlden

The article by Claire Rawnsley in *ARCvoice* No.51, *Traumatised Catholics*, set me on a train of reflection about the established practice of ‘Going to Confession’ which was so much part of my own experience. For those of us reared as cradle Catholics, fortnightly (or even weekly) Confession was seen as non-negotiable. Reminded that cleanliness (of the soul) is next to godliness, we were lined up and told to go – a bit like visiting a spiritual laundromat!

My own first Confession at the age of seven was a terrifying experience – the box was so dark I could not even find the door, let alone the latch, to let myself out. No doubt I had been well briefed on the standard list of ‘sins’: disobedience, telling lies, stealing, cheating, saying unkind thing about others, etc. – all of which, I was taught, left nasty black marks on my soul. Once caught in the innocent act of opening a tin of bully beef on a Friday, I still recall the fear that I might die (and go straight to Hell) before the priest’s next visit when I could confess my ‘sin’ and receive absolution. Of course the guilt-free Protestants were able to finish off my gastronomic delight! I was only nine.

The consolation for Catholics was the availability of a weekly (or fortnightly) cleansing process – the Sacrament of Penance – whereby the soul could be restored to its original pristine, *Persil*-whiteness through the priest’s special, ‘God-given’, powers of absolution and the Church’s unique brand of spiritual washing powder: ‘Three Hail Marys’ or ‘Five Our Fathers’ – depending on the degree of stains!

From today’s more enlightened perspective, it never ceases to amaze me that no one ever suggested penance would have been much more effective if we had been told to reflect on the effect our sins had on others, or admonished to make reparation, i.e: correct the lies, restore the stolen goods (if not already consumed), apologise to the victims of our slander.

As a migrant, I was mystified to discover that Australians had their own unique sins. A self-righteous Catholic neighbour informed me that I was committing a mortal sin by sending our son to a State school, despite the fact that the Catholic school had 90 children in Kindergarten and the State school was looking for more pupils. When I sought clarification on the issue in Confession, I was refused absolution! My contemporaries also tell me that they regularly confessed ‘mortal sins of impure thoughts’ – our Irish nuns in Kenya were probably too inhibited to even mention the possibility of such transgressions!

I found some interesting objections to the Sacrament of Penance in a book by Barry Spurr: *Anglo-Catholic in Religion – T.S. Eliot and Christianity*: ‘... that it cultivates:

- an over-carefulness, morbidity and even an insincerity (in a persistent need to discover something to confess);
- an automatic idea of absolution from sin that fosters an attitude whereby sinning can repeatedly occur, as there is a ready solution to one’s guilt.

Why did it take an Anglican to state what should have been so patently obvious! John Cornwell’s book (on right) is indeed timely! □

Review:

John Cornwell: *The Dark Box: A Secret History of Confession*

Confession is a crucial ritual of the Catholic Church, offering absolution of sin and spiritual guidance to the faithful. Yet this ancient sacrament has also been a source of controversy and oppression, culminating, as prize-winning historian John Cornwell reveals in *The Dark Box*, with the scandal of clerical child abuse.

Drawing on extensive historical sources, contemporary reports, and first-hand accounts, Cornwell takes a hard look at the long evolution of confession. The papacy made annual, one-on-one confession obligatory for the first time in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the era that followed, confession was a source of spiritual consolation as well as sexual and mercenary scandal. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Church introduced the confession box to prevent sexual solicitation of women, but this private space gave rise to new forms of temptation, both for penitents and confessors.

Yet no phase in the story of the sacrament has had such drastic consequences as an historic decree by Pope Pius X in 1910. In reaction to the spiritual perils of the new century, Pius sought to safeguard the Catholic faithful by lowering the age at which children made their first confession from their early teens to seven, while exhorting all Catholics to confess frequently instead of annually. This sweeping, inappropriately early imposition of the sacrament gave priests an unprecedented and privileged role in the lives of young boys and girls – a role that a significant number would exploit in the decades that followed.

A much-needed account of confession’s fraught history, *The Dark Box* explores the sources of the sacrament’s harm and shame, while recognising its continuing power to offer consolation and reconciliation. □



# We will right this terrible wrong

Julian McDonald

*The Australian*, May 12 2014

**With searing eloquence, 11 men bravely told the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Perth of the devastating impact of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of Christian Brothers in residences at Castledare, Clontarf, Bindoon and Tardun in Western Australia more than 50 years ago.**

No one could be but moved by these men, who told of their painful experiences of stolen innocence, of being subjected to physical brutality and the depths of sexual depravity by supposedly religious men from whom they had every right to expect care, nurture and respect. Instead they were betrayed and treated as objects for sexual gratification.

A regret I have is that every Christian Brother in Oceania was not present to hear the testimony of the men: victims of an earlier generation of Christian Brothers.

The ongoing suffering of children so wantonly abused by those charged with their protection demands of their carers an immediate and effective response. That response is demanded from Christian Brothers for survivors now in the later stages of their lives.

At the Christian Brothers' Congregation Chapter held in Nairobi in March, I went on the record as saying there will be no future for the Christian Brothers unless and until we do all in our power to address the devastation inflicted on the lives of children and vulnerable adults by the sexually, emotionally and physically abusive conduct of some of our number. However, I am conscious that rhetoric is validated only by appropriate action. We have to find additional ways of engaging with those victimised so their voices are heard.

As the representative of all the decent, committed Christian Brothers living and working throughout Oceania, I accept our shame and ask forgiveness of those whom my Brothers have harmed. I have spent the past 25 years reaching out to victims to try to address the hurt they suffer. I acknowledge that there have been times when my efforts have been less than perfect. I can only promise to work at doing better. However, I

am confident this royal commission, at which I was a witness, will give us some direction. I pledge the co-operation of the Christian Brothers in working with the royal commission in whatever way we are able.

And as we wait for the findings to provide a pathway for the future, the Christian Brothers commit to continuing our work with survivors each and every day, knowing that help, care and compassion are needed in the present. I commit the Christian Brothers to working with survivors now on their individual needs and circumstances in an atmosphere of care, compassion and dignity.

I also urge the Catholic Church, of which the Christian Brothers are but part, to open itself to examining the causes and embracing the learnings from what has been a shameful episode in our history.

We cannot delegate our response to others to formulate but rather must look inside ourselves for the way forward, listening to views from within, however confronting we might find them.

The report into sexual abuse by Christian Brothers published by Brother Gerry Faulkner some 16 years ago offered some analysis of causes, some learnings and some suggested ways forward.

Moreover, I believe that the church cannot continue to ignore the voices of people, such as Bishop Geoffrey Robinson and Sister Angela Ryan, who have campaigned for decades to address the blight of sexual abuse by priests and religious orders. They have been the conscience for us all in this matter, but at times it would appear that they have even been punished for their courage.

I would like to thank judge Peter McClellan and the other commissioners and their staff for their work and dedication in pursuit of the painful truth, and I can assure them of our continuing support and co-operation.

And to the men who continue to suffer so greatly, we will not abandon you.

Brother Julian McDonald is deputy province leader,  
Christian Brothers Oceania Province

# Finding new hope in the Resurrection of Jesus

'Sue'

Published in *Catholica* 12.4.14

Reprinted with permission. The author prefers to remain  
anonymous

Over the years of my own spiritual seeking I read the autobiographies of many women who were searching for truth, seeking to discover what truth lay at the heart of the great religions of the world. Gradually their search shifted from a purely intellectual search to one that sought to encounter truth through various spiritual practices, particularly under the guidance of a spiritual teacher. Ultimately they sought a direct encounter with the mystery at the heart of life itself. Nothing less.

These were the spiritual autobiographies of modern women, women alive during the twentieth century. Though many came from a nominally Christian background, their explorations mostly led them into exploring different faith traditions, and staying with the one where they found an inspiring teacher, teachings that resonated, and a community on the same spiritual path. Like pieces of an intricate and beautiful jigsaw puzzle, their stories gradually began to fit together into some sort of coherent story of a spiritual journey.

Not all of the women whose stories I read spoke of the end of the journey, the point where they could say that the search was ended; probably, because at the time of writing they had not yet come to the end of their own journey. However, reading of Mary Magdalene's discovery of the empty tomb in this Easter Sunday gospel, I was reminded of the stories of several of those women whose search did take them where they wanted to go. These were women who had grown close to a spiritual *guru* or teacher, believing that that person could lead them from the darkness of ignorance to the light of union with God or enlightenment, only to have their teacher pass away before the goal was reached. Imagine the distress, the feelings of betrayal, the hopes dashed.

The death of the teacher sounds very much like the end of the story. It is not. It marks the point of entry in the dark night of the soul that St John of the Cross talks about. In effect it is the falling away of the human

person of the teacher. What remains in the end is only a memory of the love that existed between teacher and disciple. But then, in a surprising and mysterious way, that love begins to make itself felt again. The initial darkness starts to give way to the dawning of an even closer relationship with the teacher, at first faintly, but growing ever stronger over succeeding months. Falling in love with the teacher is eventually revealed as having been not a falling in love with a human person, but with the mystery present and revealed through the person of the teacher. The last step of the journey is that the person of the teacher has to fall away (or the relationship be ruptured in some way) in order that the Mystery itself may be revealed in the despairing heart of the seeker.

This story of the death, burial and disappearance of the human person of Jesus represents three days of darkness and intense suffering for his closest followers. The empty tomb, with only the burial cloths remaining, serves to emphasise the fact that Jesus the man had gone. Nothing remained. No physical body, no grave to be made an object of pilgrimage and consolation. Mary and the other disciples were left with nothing, pushed into an abyss of nothingness.

It was in this abyss of nothingness that the miracle slowly began to happen. In the heart of each disciple, there began a dawning of the Light. There was a resurrection. The Mystery still wore the face of Jesus, but now it dwelled in the heart of each, rather than as a physical presence.

More than once I have heard women say, shortly after the death of a teacher, that they now feel even closer to that teacher. And perhaps in the end even the face disappears....and only the love remains.

In these days, more and more of us are feeling utterly disillusioned with what has been happening in the Catholic Church. People are leaving. It seems to be falling apart. If Pope John XXIII could not bring lasting reform, what hope has the present Pope of doing so? The Church seems like an empty tomb with only the vestments remaining. The Spirit seems to have departed.

In this context, the Easter story brings hope. Even if the institution dies and is buried, and we are left bereft that something that has been part of our lives for so long, is gone, this is not the end. What we loved will rise again, not as a physical institution, but as Spirit in the hearts of good men and women everywhere. This must be the faith and hope that the story of Easter brings for us today, on both a personal and a community level. □

## Recommended Reading

## ETHICS: with or without God

Mosaic Press

by Noel Preston

Extracts from the book:

## About the Cover:

A person stands at a crossroads puzzled at the choice of ways forward. Ethics are about choices among values, world views, lifestyles and, ultimately, about a vision of the good life. The pathways appear to diverge. Is one the pathway *with* God and the other *without*? Not at all, for down both tracks it seems the pathways actually converge as if the destination is reached either way, even when the tracks are not identical; what matters is keeping 'on track', not forgetting our shared identity as travellers and our common destination. In fact, though the author makes plain his personal understanding of the God-question, this book requires no narrow prescription when it comes to theology or religious preference. The title is not misleading but it would not be contradictory if it were *with and without God*. The difference between *the secular* and *the sacred* can distract and delude. The author's invitation is to a shared ethical vision supported by a spirituality which is available and common to all humanity, even though we make our way forward on differing pathways of belief.

However, there is a major *caveat*. The tracks may have dangerous detours which divert travellers from the common goal of sustaining earth's community of Life in the fairest possible way. Green is the dominant colour of the cover – and that represents the core of the author's approach which insists that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all good ethics, religious or otherwise, must be 'green' friendly, that is, eco-centric, with a clear commitment to eco-justice supported by eco-spirituality.

## From the Preface:

*Ethics: with or without God* is a text for a broader audience: the community of those who quest for the common good, whatever their faith or non-faith. Indeed, the case will be made for a shared ethic, and a convergence between so-called sacred and secular values. This volume is intended to be a resource for those working to build a more just, global, human community and those whose ecological convictions commit them to the defence of life on Earth. In other words, the heart of this text is a call to practise eco-justice, nurtured (for this author) in spirituality. Twenty-first century humanity faces enormous ethical challenges and it would be folly to sideline the great religious traditions and their institutions in addressing these challenges. At the same time, it is necessary to recover and discover a spirituality which will support us all in meeting these challenges, regardless of religious allegiance. *Ethics: with or without God* addresses the possibility of a spirituality and morality for today's world, and the deconstruction of traditional Christianity that may entail.

In every religion, it seems, there are unacceptable beliefs. The test I am applying here is an ethical one. If beliefs make you compassionate, kind and respectful of the sacred rights of others, this is good religion. If your beliefs make you intolerant, unkind and belligerent, this is bad religion, no matter how orthodox it is. Another test of acceptability is the credibility of beliefs, given contemporary science and the relationship between humanity and the rest of Earth's community of life.

I have some affinity with a well-known Australian atheist and sceptic, Phillip Adams, who counsels his fellow atheists and sceptics to remember that there is much to be done together with religious believers to save the planet and build a better world. In his words, "let us not let a little thing like God come between us".

Finally, a paramount insight for ethics from science and religion is the interrelatedness of all life or "inter-being". Faced with the evidence of damage to the biosphere through man-made global warming and exploitation of natural resources and, even more serious, the loss of bio-diversity, this insight suggests strongly that any credible ethic in our time must be eco-centric, as should be any supporting theology or spirituality. □

# I'm not speaking to God

Noelene Uren

For people of my generation, turning 21 was a major milestone in our lives. It was a rite of passage when we passed from childhood to adulthood, legally able to make our own decisions, to vote, to order our lives, to be ceremoniously handed the key to the door.

But long before our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday we had already been through a more important rite of passage. It was a different key to a different door, a door to a faith that would define our lives. Our baptism anointed us as followers of Christ and committed us to living as Christ had taught.

So began our education. We were taught to be loving, kind, tolerant, to live in Christ's likeness. We were also taught to believe in the power of prayer. And we did. Absolutely. No matter what we were praying for. Like my seven-year-old granddaughter falling to her knees in a recent blackout and praying, 'Please God make the power come on so the fish in my tank don't die'.

Power was immediately restored, Kate's faith completely unshaken, my son's reservations unspoken.

Like Kate, as children, our prayers were innocent. We were taught that 'Prayer is the raising up of our minds and hearts to God to adore Him, to bless His Holy Name, to praise His goodness and mercy, and to ask for all we need for soul and body'.

We did tend to latch onto that all we need for soul and body bit and rather roughly interpreted 'need' for 'want': a fine day because Mum is planning to take us to the beach; that bike I really need because all my friends have one. Then later, constant prayers that we would pass our Leaving Certificate, even though one of our nuns observed that our lack of study made us like the fat man pushing away from the table after an enormous meal and praying, 'Please Lord, make me thin'.

This is where I ask your indulgence. I have come to know that my attitude to prayer never moved away from those days of my childhood. I haven't really grown up in my relationship with God. So I want to write about my personal journey. For many of you, you will have moved far beyond where I am, but for a few, maybe at times you have felt as I do, and my thoughts may strike a chord with you.

You see, I think I ended up with a frail, suspiciously human deity. For instance, I always had trouble with, 'Not my will but Thine be done'. What was the use of praying if I was saying to God that His will must always take precedence? I knew what was best for my family and through prayer tried to order their lives. At one stage, concerned about decisions my daughter was making, I prayed that she would take a different path. I ignored my wise parish priest who told me, 'Your daughter is an adult. You've done your job. Now hand her back to God and say, 'She's your responsibility, Lord'. I couldn't. I kept praying. My daughter kept making her own decisions. I felt as if God just wasn't listening.

And so, throughout my adult life, I have pestered God with my will. I was the youngest of ten, and one by one I saw my three brothers and three of my sisters die before their mid-fifties. I had prayed and prayed for each one, tried to accept their deaths as God's will, privately thought it was all a horrible mistake, but still kept praying my way, trying to change my world to fit my perception of what it should be.

Until the last seven months when I had to confront the fact that even my simple prayer, 'God take care of my children', had, to my mind, gone un-answered. My beautiful daughter had been diagnosed with breast cancer. I had watched a much-loved sister and two friends die of this dreadful disease. It was happening again. So like a child in a tantrum I thought, 'That's it! I'm not speaking to God anymore.' Illogically, considering my own attitude, I was grateful to all my friends who rallied in prayer. They could cajole my human deity. Meanwhile I had figuratively gone into my room, turned the key that had been given to me so long ago, and sulked.

One of my daughter's colleagues in Ireland told her that all of the people she knew there were praying for her. 'Good,' she said, 'Because my mother isn't speaking to God.' 'Oh dear,' he replied, 'Mothers do take things so personally'.

I know now that I had taken it personally. God just wasn't hearing me and I felt resentfully that it was hopeless. I forgot the old adage that holding on to resentment is like drinking a cup of poison and expecting the other person to die.

So I went to London to be with my daughter through her burden of chemotherapy and watched my beloved child fight with courage, strength, dignity and wit. No matter how dreadful she felt and despite her husband's concern, she faced each day determined to keep things as normal as possible for their two little boys. I saw her, sometimes looking ashen and exhausted, as each morning she prepared their breakfast because that was what she normally did and I marvelled at the person she is, this woman for whom I've prayed since she first drew breath.

It was then that it began to dawn on me. Maybe, after all, my prayers had been answered. I couldn't ask God, as I had done, to change the course of another person's life, but God had given her the talents that had enabled her to cope with that life. Maybe God did know best.

And maybe I needed to grow up in my relationship with God. I needed help to do this and in a reversal of roles it was my daughter who helped me.

She lent me *Mediations* by Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor from 161 to 180 AD. His wisdom is timeless. On prayer he wrote, 'Either God has power or He doesn't. If He doesn't, why pray? If He does, then why not pray for something else, instead of for things to happen, or not to happen. Pray not to feel fear, or desire, or grief. If God can do anything, surely He can do that for us.'

Am I seeing things differently? I'm trying. Proust wrote: 'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.'

I need to see things through new eyes.

Before I left London I went with my daughter to Windsor, to St George's Chapel. We stood by the tomb of George VI and read this inscription.

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,*

*Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.*

*And he replied:*

*'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of GOD,*

*That shall be better than a light,*

*And safer than the known way.'*

Perhaps that is really what prayer is. Just putting your hand into the hand of God. □

NOELENE UREN was a primary school teacher and for some years was an Infants Mistress when such an appointment existed, then later a Primary School Principal.

This article was written when she was asked to give the homily for a Family Group weekend in Gerroa. It was 2008 and she had just returned from London. In the six years since then her daughter, Lesley, thankfully appears to have recovered.

## We Cannot Pray to You

By: Rabbi Jack Riemer

We cannot pray to You, O God,  
to banish war,  
for You have filled the world  
with paths to peace,  
if only we would take them.

We cannot pray to You  
to end starvation,  
for there is food enough for all,  
if only we would share it.

We cannot merely pray  
for prejudice to cease,  
for we might see  
the good in all  
that lies before our eyes,  
if only we would use them.

We cannot merely pray  
"Root out despair",  
for the spark of hope  
already waits within the human  
heart,  
for us to fan it into flame.

We must not ask of You, O God,  
to take the task that You  
have given us.  
We cannot shirk,  
we cannot flee away,  
Avoiding obligation for ever.

*Therefore we pray, O God,  
for wisdom and will, for courage  
to do and to become,  
not only to look on  
with helpless yearning  
as though we had no strength.*

For Your sake and ours  
speedily and soon, let it be:  
that our land may be safe,  
that our lives may be blessed.

Adapted from Rabbi Jack Riemer's *New Prayers for the High Holy Days*, as it appears in *Gates of Repentance*, pp. 363-364

# The Pell Factor

Chris Geraghty

Sydney is vacant again, and many of the faithful are breathing a huge sigh of relief, though at the back of our minds lurks a suspicion mixed with fear that we will be saddled, for a long time to come, with a little repellent clone of the great man.

George is off to Rome – where he belongs. It's a move long overdue. Some years ago, perhaps in anticipation of this journey, he built a home for himself close to the Vatican – a suite of rooms in *Casa Australiana* just waiting for him to appear with his baggage. Rumors have abounded for some years of his imminent appointment to some job or other over there. Now as head of the Vatican Finance Department, a supra-national Hockey Joe, he can do little harm, and maybe he can do some good for humanity, for the Church.

But this is not the change the Vatican needed and the faithful have been crying out for. This is only a medium force shake-up. A mere rumble. The world has been waiting for, the faithful have been praying for the sound of the heavy, tectonic plates grinding and shifting under the chair of Peter. Hopefully there is more, much more, to come.

George is too old, too clerical and the wrong sex. The Pope does not need a Cardinal of advanced years or even an ordained priest to do the work involved. Someone younger, someone more experienced, more worldly, with a proven record of transparency and openness – ideally, a woman from the world of banking and finance – to bring the Vatican financial crisis out of the shadows into the modern world. This is an opportunity missed. Jobs for the boys – for the old boys. More of the same and we had been hoping for a sign to give us hope, to bring a smile to our face and put a spring in our step. A smile – yes – but for a completely different reason.

But it could have been worse. At least George has the necessary personality, if not all the credentials to do the job. He's proved himself to be a reasonably good administrator. Not so good a pastor or a leader of men. Not a man with a natural ability to choose the right man for a job. Sydney and Australia have suffered from his choices to fill episcopal positions. Some of the shoulders he has placed his hand upon have belonged to company men with limited capacities. And the most

senior prelate in Australia, together with the team he has captained, has proven himself unable to provide strong moral leadership and guidance to the nation. They have all remained inexplicably mute, and in the face of constant provocation. They have not contributed in any significant way to a national debate on critical moral issues such as the cruel and inhumane treatment of refugees by both major political parties, the tragedy of the dispossession of Aboriginals, the neglect of growing psychiatric illness in general, and particularly among Australia's young (a national scandal), the secrecy in government, the bad behaviour of politicians in the Parliament itself, bullying in schools and in the workplace, even among politicians, the drinking and drug culture, the need for advocacy for the underprivileged and the working poor, the obscene expansion of the rich class and an uneven distribution of wealth, the crass and un-principled materialism of many government policies, a search for happiness, the inadequacy of our overseas relief contributions – the list is long.

While in Sydney, the Cardinal was energetic in defending dogmatic utterances of the Church, the authority of Rome and the integrity of a monolithic Church, condemning abortion and homosexuality, but he did not prove to be an effective, attractive religious or moral leader. Too churchy. Too reactionary. Too authoritarian. An eminent friend of the establishment. Too close to money and to power.

But most people would agree that George can get things done. He's determined. He's decisive. No shilly-shallying. Somewhat heavy-handed. And by reputation, he can bully with the best. Maybe he will be able to uncover corruption in the ranks and execute some clerical thugs. I don't expect, on Rome's past record, that these men (I presume they are all men, as they are in New South Wales) will be given a fair hearing in open court, with their name spread about on the front pages of *Osservatore Romano*.

Perhaps he could have done much damage in other portfolios – choosing bishops for the world, conducting show-trials of dissident theologians, putting American nuns on the rack – but in this portfolio, so far away from the message and spirit of Jesus, George might shine. Let us hope so.

And now, closer to home – with the See of Sydney vacant. The last time, the position was filled in the dead of night, without consultation. *A fait accompli*. The faithful of the Sydney archdiocese woke up in the morning and found that God had given them George.

They were not happy and some of them have not forgotten. Now that is history and we have to get over it. Nevertheless, Rome did treat us badly, without respect, high-handedly.

Now let the new process begin. We know what Pope Francis is looking for in a bishop – someone close to the people. A pastor who has the whiff of sheep on hardened hands, sheep droppings between his toes, the oily feel of wool embedded in his clothes. Someone who hears the bleating and knows his sheep by name, who will spend the night in the cold mountains in search of the lost one. Happy. Humorous. Intelligent. Outgoing and outspoken. A true believer, deeply spiritual. With

an interest in the world, in literature, poetry, drama or music – it doesn't matter, but someone who is not enclosed in a clerical club, looking for the first place at the tables of the rich. These men are not easy to find. You have to look far and wide. But the people of Sydney can help Pope Francis find the right man. The gene pool is ridiculously limited, to men, to old men, to clerical men. But some have escaped the mould and grown against the grain, into real people who can lead us out of the desert, refresh us, create a world of the Spirit and make us proud again to be recognised as Catholics. I am sure many Catholics, men and women, young and old, stand ready to lend a hand. □



## Exit Cardinal Pell, with a bombshell

Elizabeth Farrelly

*The Sydney Morning Herald* April 3, 2014

George Pell wants to insure priests against being sued for child sexual abuse. My head is still rotating on its axis. Our man in purple, our alpha priest, moral paragon. Our Vatican princeling, just days from taking up his *dauphindom* in Rome: he *said* that? He dropped this fissile solipsism on our public debate and left, smacking the dust from his hands like, *we're done now, right?*

For this was no dinner party throw-away. The cardinal – fully frocked, schooled and pre-meditated – breathed his proposition into the stone tablets of a royal commission. He wanted it recorded and kept. Forever.

But insurance? Does he think child sex is some unavoidable occupational hazard? Something a priest will sooner or later fall to? An accident? If you wanted to maximise the damage already done to countless children, you'd be hard put to find a surer way, or crueller.

It was already accepted that the church had systematically preyed on its charges, breaking their still-soft hearts by telling them not just to take it and be quiet, but that this – *this!* – is how God loves them.

For full text of article, contact The Editor  
[mknowlden@bigpond.com.au](mailto:mknowlden@bigpond.com.au)

new book

by Michael Morwood

*In Memory of Jesus*

now available in Australia

It may be purchased from his website, [www.morwood.org](http://www.morwood.org) for \$20 which will include postage from Perth to anywhere in Australia.

It is also available from Amazon.com which has a Kindle version of the book as well.

Brief Description:

*In Memory of Jesus* blends imaginative conversation and the author's own personal journey of coming to know Jesus as friend to produce a realistic human picture of the person at the heart of Christian faith. Morwood maintains that Christianity must return to focussing on the human Jesus and his message if it is to have relevance in the modern world.

A new printing of *Children Praying a New Story* is now available from Amazon.com, including a Kindle version. It is not available from Michael's website for purchase in Australia.

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