



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
September 2005 **Issue No. 17**

EDITORIAL

As we were preparing this edition we were given the news that the World Youth Day would be in Australia in 2008. While the hope is that such an event will be a positive uplifting experience for many, it is disturbing that Australia may have been favoured for the event because the Pope believes that the faith is dying in this country. If senior clergy and or archconservative forces gave him this impression, then it gives a further indication of just how much there is need for reform in the structures of our Church.

Mainstream churches 'appear moribund' the Pope is reported as saying. We might agree, but for a different reason. The manner in which so many Catholics wish to express their faith in appropriate liturgies is gradually being stifled with more and more regulations seemingly out of step with the respect for cultural differences that the Second Vatican Council sought to promote. Three articles in this issue highlight the way in which faith can be enhanced through ceremonies that reflect culture and interconnectedness along with simplicity that conveys meaning. A respect for the ideas and experiences that bring people to God enhances one's faith because the openness to learning from others who have the right spirit also enlightens us as well.

I expect that this may progressively be contrasted with attempts to increase church attendance by recourse to extravagant displays and statements from authorities. In this issue Morris West sees authority in this context as 'the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind' and its consequences come to the fore in the reflections of others about their experiences of the Neo-Catechumenate Way. Renewal or reform will only occur through those who are able to draw back

to the way Jesus treated people and who are inspired by what he emphasised.

That is why we see that our annual ARC conference in October is so important for our members and for drawing in more members who are frustrated by the exercise of authority in our Church. This event is a significant opportunity to deepen our understanding and then, through some public expression, show that our Church is much more than the notion of church that is now constantly being promoted by reactionary forces. Whether you call Jesus 'my Lord' (Spong) or see Lords as tyrants (Lambert), you have the opportunity to question and express your faith and gain insights from informed speakers and fellow travellers on a variety of issues. Enjoy the freedom of expression that will enrich your spirituality, share it with others, and help to shape the way in which we can go forward to reform the Church that is ours.

John Buggy

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ONE MAN'S VOICE

MORRIS WEST

ON 6 JUNE 1994, THE VEECH LECTURE WAS DELIVERED BY MORRIS WEST AT THE STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES. THIS WAS PUBLISHED IN *EUREKA STREET* (VOL.4 NO.6) AND THESE CONCLUDING REMARKS ARE RE-PUBLISHED WITH THEIR PERMISSION. ELEVEN YEARS LATER HIS PROPHECIES RING DESPONDENTLY TRUE – BUT HE LEAVES US WITH A GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

What do I see as the future of the Catholic Church? In the short term, under the present pontificate, I believe that the same trends will continue. The schism of indifference will spread. The number of candidates for service in religious and priestly life will continue to decline. Expressions of disagreement and contention within the body of the faithful will continue. There will be a massive protest by women and a continuing alienation of women from the celibate oligarchy by which the church is presently ruled. We will see more and more examples of two differing phenomena within the church: The first, the emergence of more and more rigorist groups, louder and more emphatic in their professions of allegiance to the ancient ways of the church by which it seems that many understand only what happened after the Council of Trent.

We shall see other charismatic groups, expressing the enthusiasm of even earlier times in prayer groups, in brotherly and sisterly associations within the congregation. But the deep hurt and division within the church will still remain within the post-Vatican II generation, who will see the fading of the hopes they had invested in the updating and renewal of the church. They will continue their tillage of whatever part of the vineyard they work in, but some of the heart will be gone from them and they will wear the ills of the church not with the joy of the children of God but like a penitential hair shirt. Meantime, by the mere fact of shortage of vocations the faithful will be distanced still further from the ministry of the word and of the sacrament.

How then will renewal come, because come it must? Even popes and curial cardinals are mortal. There are disagreements and dissensions in every one of the corridors of power, however much they may be hushed, however softly the dissension is expressed. So, I ask again, how will renewal come? I have to say what I said at the beginning: I believe in the power of the Spirit. I do not know, I cannot predict, how the Spirit may express itself to renew the life of faith and hope and, most importantly of all, of charity within the community.

I believe, though I cannot prove, that there will come a surge of power from women within the church, more and more of whom are highly trained educators, philosophers

and theologians, more and more of whom will give challenge to patriarchal mindsets – as St Catherine of Siena, a girl in her early 20s, once gave challenge to and heaped moral reproach upon the delinquent papacy in Avignon. There was a martial vigour in what she urged upon Gregory XI: *Siatemi uomo virile e non timoroso ... 'Be for me a virile man and not a coward.'*

I shall not be here to see the renewal, though I hope for it and pray for it and give my testimony on the crying need for it. It is not my wish that the testimony should incite dissension but rather that it should lead to a curative communion between those high and low in the church who are all, in the end, brothers and sisters under the skin.

If each of us were locked in a silent room, deprived of all sensory reference, we should very soon become disoriented and, finally, insane. The person who would probably endure longest would be the one who was practised in withdrawal, in meditation, whose life had an outside reference to God. The fact is, you see, that we live only in communion – not only with our present but with the past and the future as well. We are haunted by a whole poetry of living, by lullabies half-remembered and the sounds of train whistles in the night and the scent of lavender in a summer garden. We are haunted by grief, too, and fear and images of childhood terror and the macabre dissolutions of age.

But I am sure – and this is the nub of my testimony – that it is in this domain of our inner-most daily lives that the Holy Spirit establishes its own communion with us. This is how the gift is given, which we call grace: the sudden illumination, the sharp regret that leads to penitence or forgiveness, the opening of the heart to the risk of love. Authority is irrelevant here. Authority is the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind. It can command us to everything except love and understanding ... So what am I trying to tell you? Peter is dead and Paul is dead and James the brother of the Lord. Their dust is blown away by the winds of centuries. Were they large men, little men, fair or dark? Who knows? Who cares? The testimony of the Spirit made through them still endures ... "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." □

ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM:

A NEW CHRISTIANITY FOR A NEW WORLD

JOHN SHELBY SPONG

HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS, 2001

'I am a Christian. For forty-five years I have served the Christian church as a deacon, priest, and bishop. I continue to serve that church today in a wide variety of ways in my official retirement. I believe that God is real and that I live deeply and significantly as one related to that divine reality. I call Jesus my Lord. I believe that he has mediated God in a powerful and unique way to human history and to me ... I define my-self first and foremost as a Christian believer.'

YET:

- **I do not define** God as a supernatural being.
- **I do not believe** in a deity who can help a nation win a war, intervene to cure a loved one's sickness, allow a particular athletic team to defeat its opponent, or affect the weather for anyone's benefit.
- **I cannot interpret** Jesus as the earthly incarnation of this supernatural deity;
- **I cannot with credibility assume** that he possessed sufficient Godlike power to do such miraculous things as stilling the storm, banishing demons, walking on water, or expanding five loaves to provide sufficient bread to feed five thousand men, plus women and children.
- **I do not believe** that this Jesus could, or did in any literal way raise the dead, overcome a medically diagnosed paralysis, or restore sight to a person born blind or to one in whom the ability to see had been physiologically destroyed. Nor do I believe he enabled one who was mute and profoundly deaf since birth to hear. Healing stories can be looked at in a number of ways. To view them as supernatural, miraculous events is, in my opinion, the least credible of those possibilities.
- **I do not believe** that Jesus entered this world by the miracle of a virgin birth or that virgin births occur anywhere except in mythology.
- **I do not believe** that a literal star guided literal wise men to bring Jesus gifts or that literal angels sang to hillside shepherds to announce his birth. I do not believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem or that he fled into Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. I regard these as legends that later became historicized as the tradition grew and developed and as people sought to understand the meaning and the power of the Christ-life.
- **I do not believe** that the experience Christians celebrate at Easter was the physical resuscitation of the three-days-dead body of Jesus, nor do I believe that anyone literally talked with Jesus after the resurrection moment, gave him food, touched his resurrected flesh, or walked in any physical manner with his risen body. I find it interesting that all of the narratives that tell of such encounters occur only in the later gospels.
- **I do not believe** that Jesus, at the end of his earthly sojourn, returned to God by ascending in any literal sense into a heaven located somewhere above the sky.
- **I do not believe** that this Jesus founded a church or that he established an ecclesiastical hierarchy beginning with the twelve apostles and enduring to this day.
- **I do not believe** that he created sacraments as special means of grace, or which can be somehow controlled by the church, and thus are to be presided over only by the ordained. All of these things represent to me attempts on the part of human beings to accrue power for themselves and their particular religious institution.
- **I do not believe** that human beings are born in sin and that, unless baptized or somehow saved, they will be forever banished from God's presence. I do not regard the mythical concept of the fall of human life into some negative status as constituting the accurate view of our beginnings or of the origins of evil.
- **I do not believe** that women are any less human or less holy than men, and therefore I cannot imagine being part of a church that would discriminate against women in any manner or even suggest that a woman is unfit for any vocation the church offers generally to its people, from the papacy to the humblest role of service. I regard the church's traditional exclusion of woman from positions of leadership to be not a sacred tradition but a manifestation of the sin of patriarchy.
- **I do not believe** that homosexual people are abnormal, mentally sick, or morally depraved. Furthermore, I regard any sacred text that suggests otherwise to be both wrong and ill-informed.
- **I do not believe** that either skin pigmentation or ethnic background constitutes a matter of superiority or inferiority, and I regard any tradition or social system, including any part of the Christian church that operates on that assumption, to be unworthy of continued life.
- **I do not believe** that all Christian ethics have been inscribed either on tablets of stone or in the pages of the Christian scriptures and are therefore set for all time.
- **I do not believe** that the Bible is the 'word of God' in any literal sense. I do not regard it as the primary source of divine revelation. I do not believe that God dictated it or even inspired its production in its entirety. □

THE NEO-CATECHUMENATE WAY

THERE IS MOUNTING DISQUIET AT THE DISRUPTIVE ACTIVITIES OF THIS GROUP —
NOT ONLY IN REDFERN NSW BUT ALSO IN KELMSCOTT, WA AND OTHER
PARISHES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA,
THEY COULD BE COMING TO A PARISH NEAR YOU!

Paul Collins, in *Between The Rock and a Hard Place*, includes the Neo-Catechumenates in his chapter 'Catholicism and Fundamentalism':

My second sect is far less well known, but its influence may well be more pervasive than that of Opus Dei. It is the curiously titled Neo-Catechumenal Way (NC), or Neo-Catechumenate. In Australia they are colloquially known as 'Neo-Cats'. They are a kind of working class, poor person's Opus Dei. But even though they look different, they actually have much in common, and there are suspicions that the Opus have taken the NC under its wing. Both these organizations are convinced that they are the 'real' Catholics, and the rest of us are, at best, also-rans.

... The NC is relatively well established in Australia in the Dioceses of Darwin, Wollongong, Broome, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. Desperate for priest to staff parishes, bishops have allowed the NC to open two of their unusual 'Redemptoris Mater' seminaries in Australia, one each in Perth and Sydney' (pp.202-4).

Online Catholics Issue 57 also provide interesting background:

Founded by a Spanish painter Kiko Arguello, the Neo-Catechumenate Way began in Italy in 1964, where it became very strong amongst conservative youth. Essentially anti-democratic, anti-intellectual and anti-communist, the Way sees itself as offering 'post baptismal catechesis'. The Way's growth has been phenomenal, and it operates in 1,500 Roman Catholic dioceses in over 180 countries. There are 46 'Redemptoris Mater' missionary diocesan seminaries, which include one in Perth, and one in Sydney. Young men self-select to go on a special retreat to Rome. After this they may be sent to a Redemptoris Mater seminary somewhere in the world, for a period of up to seven years. The ordained Neo-Catechumenate priests are then sent on to yet other location in the world to minister in parishes. The Australian Catholic bishops sponsored 160 religious workers from overseas in the 12 months until last September. They came predominantly from Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is not known how many are of the Way.

So how does the NC get into a parish? According to Paul Collins:

With the approval of the parish priest and the bishop, the NC team arrives in the parish to set up the Neo-Catechumenal Way ... the team is made up of a priest 'who is the guarantor of the ecclesiality of the message' and 'one or two couples and a young person'. They talk at the Sunday Masses and invite people to come and discover NC. *Ibid* p.204

A Perth parishioner, Maurice Hirjee, wrote to Fr O'Loughlin, Perth Vicar General:

We were asked to participate in an Adult Catechesis ... We thought this was more about building on the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a strengthening of our faith. The sessions were introduced as if the Catechists were in fact sent by the Bishop to the parish. We believed and attended. No questions were allowed

and no note-taking permitted. We were betrayed when we eventually discovered that this was in fact a recruitment process for the Neo-Catechumenate Way.

Online Catholics quotes another parishioner, Clive Maher:

... there was widespread concern that the Church property and hall were being used to recruit people to the Neo-Catechumenate Way. The recruitment material supplied shows an invitation to Catholic and non-Catholic adults for catechesis. It does not refer to the Neo-Catechumenate Way.

A Catholic priest, John Girdauskas of Queenstown, Tasmania, wrote of his experiences:

'As a priest, I worked from the beginning of 1994 to the end of 1996 in a parish in western Melbourne, where the Neo-Catechumenate had been asked to leave by my predecessor because of a whole range of painful issues ... there was much pressure and persistence to 'get back' into the parish ... There is so much that shows us, through local experiences (Australia) and overseas (UK and Wales), that sadly the Neo-catechumenate movement has caused more pain and division than unity or peace. They also seem answerable to no one, think of themselves as 'the only way' and have no regard for the local parish community, let alone the local parish priest.'

Online Catholics, Issue 57

<http://www.onlinecatholics.com.au/issue57/News2.php>

WHEN THE DROUGHT BREAKS

LYNNE GREEN

IN A HOT, DRY, INLAND AUSTRALIAN SUMMER, THE SUDDEN SMELL OF RAIN,
UP TO HALF AN HOUR BEFORE IT ACTUALLY FALLS,
IS SWEET: DOUBLY SO AFTER LONG DROUGHT

A sense of this is expressed in *Elizabeth's Song*, an evocative Australian version of the story of Mary's visit to her cousin, Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist. In Luke's Gospel (1:39-55), the account follows Mary's 'yes' to the invitation to become the mother of Jesus.

Elizabeth's Song presents her pregnancy – and Mary's visit – as if through Elizabeth's eyes. It sings of her new hope as the discovery of a deep, cool spring in a scorched, arid landscape, or rain which breaks the drought. This contemporary account has a note of celebration, praise and thanksgiving very like the original's.

In both, these link with the way the two women reach out and welcome each other, and affirm the gifts in their lives. It is evident, too, in any number of women, and groups of them in our churches and within the ecumenical movement today.

It is not confined to women: there is a growing sense of the Church as a 'community of women and men'.

This was the name given to a report written almost twenty years ago – about ways all might work together and complement each other's gifts and skills. It followed years of study and consultation before that, and culminated in a decision by leaders of the World Council of Churches to declare a special decade for women.

The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women began at Easter in 1988. Its focus was to be on affirming the gifts of women in Church and society. Its stated

aim was to show, especially, the willingness of the Churches to stand alongside women who are isolated or marginalised, as well as to raise awareness within the Churches of the need for and strong value of greater inclusiveness.

I wrote the paragraphs above more than ten years ago, midway through the Decade, and a few weeks before the beatification of Mary MacKillop, on 19th January 1995. Its context was a special issue of the Catholic Weekly, anticipating this, celebrating 'Women of Hope'.

I was an active participant in that Decade for seven of its ten years, and then for more than three years in the group we created to succeed it, because we felt the work was far from done: *Women in Solidarity Ecumenically*, WISE!

In its last year we painstakingly evaluated what the Decade had achieved. We realised that 'appointed' (clerical) leaders in the Churches had done little to be in solidarity with women in those ten years.

As members of women's networks involved in the Decade, on the other hand, being in solidarity meant we gained strength, and a new determination. More importantly, we realised that leadership could be about helping others to claim power over their lives – not about prescribing how they live.

'We just want you to come and sit with us where we are,' the mother of an aboriginal woman co-worker said to some of us, at an Indigenous Conference on partnership we were privileged to attend in those years.

□



JESUS IS NOT LORD

My questioning of the language which salutes Jesus as LORD led a friend to remark that, if I am intending to have changed a mountain of Biblical imagery and texts and hymns and prayers, etc., I am pushing a big boulder uphill. But I have to do it; otherwise it is all downhill for the truth. Remember, it is God we are trying to talk about. God will forgive an emerging and evolving social consciousness for misreading the Divine. That is how God is. But once we realise that God is not male, nor imperial (imperious) nor violent and, from timidity or nostalgia or disrespect or sheer laziness, fail to remedy our apprehension of God, where is there truth in more forgiveness? I imagine God might allow several generations for a stubborn and ignorant people to move. But on this issue I am already prophetic; I would not warrant forgiveness if I did not move.

'Jesus is Lord' now falls for me into the same category as the flat earth belief. It simply is not so. And no matter who said it or how it was said in the past, even with the authority of the Bible, it is still wrong. And so Revelation also has to be radically re-interpreted in the light of what we now know. And I suspect that the movement which began with Nicea through Chalcedon and various Constantinoples and Laterans and Trent and Vatican One was closing doors instead of opening them. Catholics, who have been under siege, are beginning to wonder whether God might be rather in freedom. Vatican II seemed to be going there.

'All Lords are tyrants.' I do not resilie from the literal meaning in this. Some Lords have been good men. In fact I have no right to judge the consciences of any of the

hundreds of thousands of Lords down the centuries. I do not judge their consciences but I do judge their assumption of power. Who gave each of them the right to rule others? Who laid the obligation on their subjects to obey the lord? The lord/subject relationship is a con, the power is usurped (even if the 'law' connives, or a mis-described God gives pseudo-validation, as in the 'divine right of kings'). The subjects have been wrongly denied their natural freedom. Every lord rules in objective tyranny.

In civil society we have evolved into democratic systems. We appoint some to govern, but we keep tabs on them and can vote them out. There is now talk within the Church of a 'discipleship of equals' (Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), and in ARC we are speaking of no one being in charge: all are in charge. These systems are radically (i.e. at the very root) different from the systems that have prevailed up until now. To regress would be to sinfully regress, there can now be no virtuous regression. We are evolving to this divine change or we are doomed to separation and violence. God is calling us out of darkness into the light.

We have for some centuries now perceived how unnatural and evil is the master/slave relationship whereby one human person owns another human person. Let us be ashamed and repentant that we ever built this greatest of all Unloves into our social structures. But the lord/subject relationship is the same in kind, only lesser in degree. It has taken further generations to begin to wonder how such a relationship can exist – one merely human person claims to have true authority to rule another human person. Perhaps divine charity is due for a run among us.

Ted Lambert

BOOK REVIEW

John Cornwell *The Pope in Winter*: Penguin Books, 2004

Sub-titled: *The Dark Face of John Paul II's Papacy*, this book offers a background to many anxieties expressed by ARC members. As the blurb on the back cover says:

The late John Paul II was portrayed by his admirers as one of history's great popes. But in The Pope in Winter, leading Vatican expert John Cornwell seriously questions the workings of his papacy and points to fundamental flaws – exacerbated by age and infirmity – that have alarming consequences for both the Catholic Church's future and John Paul II's successor.

Published a year before his death, one wonders if John Paul II was even aware of the book's existence – or (given his refusal to ever listen to anyone) would have cared. However, this very readable, unputdownable, comprehensive account of John Paul II's life and times might be compulsory reading for any Catholic concerned enough to ask how the church arrived at its present state: an autocratic papacy with concentration of power at the top; declining church attendances; priest 'defections' and fewer people joining religious orders; support for fundamentalist groups (Opus Dei, Neo-Catechumenates, Legionaries of Christ);

persecution of liberal thinkers (including our own Paul Collins); winding back of Vatican II; contempt for women; sexual abuse scandals; deaths from AIDS (due to the Church's opposition to the use of condoms); stacking of the curia with the Pope's own think-alike cardinals. The list goes on and, in addressing them all, Cornwell asks extremely awkward questions, with plenty of supportive anecdotal evidence and eyewitness accounts.

The last paragraph says it all:

John Henry Newman, the nineteenth-century Anglican convert, theologian and cardinal, gave warning of the dangers of an autocratic long-lived papacy. 'It is anomaly,' he wrote, 'and bears no good fruit; he becomes a god, has no one to contradict him, does not know facts and does cruel things without meaning it.' We can only hope that his successor will be first and foremost a bishop among brother bishops, a judge of final appeal presiding in charity over differences and decisions, and a human being who knows, despite his call to leadership, that he remains a pilgrim with all humanity.

Of course by now the successor has been elected and, given his track record as Cardinal Ratzinger, concerned Catholics have every reason to fear for the future of our Church. The challenge for ARC could well be – given the impact of John Paul II – how much of a Church will there be left to reform?

Margaret Knowlden

John Paul burst out angrily, "Don't you think that the irresponsible behaviour of men is caused by women?"

Quoted by Mrs Nafis Sadik, the Pakistani head of the UN Fund for Population Activities, describing her interview with Pope John Paul.

A HINDU RELIGIOUS SERVICE

In the first year of our marriage (1949/50) Margot and I lived at 3 Soembing Ave in Semarang on the North coast of Central Java. It was a short, dead-end street on a ridge in the hills south of the city. At the end of the ridge was a fairly level, open area with a more than 180° view over the valley.

In September 1988 we visited Semarang again and stayed a few nights in a hotel overlooking our old street. The hotel had lost much of its glamour in the past 40 years, but we made ourselves comfortable under a huge mango tree. With the afternoon breezes, we ventured forth and walked to the end of 'our street'. To our disappointment a huge fence stopped us. The vacant lot had become the terrain of a Balinese temple as yet unfinished. A young Balinese man saw us and hastened to invite us in, showed us around and introduced us to a young woman who was making small, exquisite flower arrangements. The young man explained that this was for that evening's celebration of 'the death of the full moon' (*Burnama Siddhi* meaning perfect full moon) and invited us to come back that evening at 7 o'clock. We did that and were welcomed by a gentleman who asked us to participate in the liturgy and he also offered to explain what the ceremony was about. He spoke fluent German and some English as well. At that time there were a few hundred Balinese living in Semarang, many of them very well educated.

It was an amazing experience to join a service in the open air, where the moon played its part, shining on us, then disappearing behind clouds and again becoming visible – a backdrop for the elegant towering stone temple. We all sat on mats on the floor. Each of the participants was given one of the delicate flower arrangements that the young woman had prepared that afternoon. The faithful consisted of women, men and children. The little ones were free to walk around if sitting still became too much. A priest arrived and presided over the celebration. He led in prayer and in hymns. He also gave a homily. Although we could not follow what was being said and sung, we felt not only accepted, but one with the congregation.

During an interval our Balinese friend talked to us about the significance of the prayers and the liturgy and he stressed the belief in God, not Gods or our God, but God. The priest blessed us all with holy water and then distributed the symbols of life by placing rice and water in the cupped hands of all present. It was such a privilege for us to join – as a matter of course – on what we could compare with the Eucharist.

Both of us felt then and still feel now, that in this Balinese-Hindu service we were truly one with the others and were accepted as belonging, unconditionally: One God for all of us and all of us for the one God, no matter how we conceive of God. My flower arrangement – placed between two glass plates – hangs next to my desk at home.

Jim Taverne

A SECULAR FUNERAL

We hardly knew Norman – he had joined the local Lions Club a couple of years ago as a possible interest to offset the onset of Alzheimer's disease. He was always smartly attired, polite – the perfect gentleman – willing to help but somehow distant, and I had difficulty in engaging him in even small chat. I welcomed 'partners' nights' when I could find a kindred spirit in his wife, Margaret.

The news that Norman had died at home of a massive heart attack came with a mixture of sadness and relief, possibly even for his family. Alzheimer's is indeed a cruel ailment, as hard for others as for the victim.

Norman's funeral at the Crematorium was a celebration, with a simple service guided by a charming woman celebrant. We were handed artistically designed booklets with photos of Norman at various stages throughout his life; accompanying music selected from his vast repertoire pervaded the chapel; tributes from his sons, step-daughters and step-son, and lastly from his beloved wife – including her own love poem – were testimony to a man who had lived, loved and been loved, and enjoyed life to the fullest. His career as a journalist complemented his love of travel and adventure, a passion for sailing, cooking, music, literature and, most of all, for people. It was indeed a funeral filled with love and humour.

Some might see the absence of a 'religious' service as somehow denying Norman a special Rite of Passage. But

the atmosphere in the crematorium chapel that day made me reflect on the irrelevance of many church funerals, at which non-Catholic mourners in particular (and even some Catholics) find the drawn-out rituals of a Requiem Mass meaningless and inappropriate. Platitudinous intonations about heaven and the after-life may not reflect the beliefs of the departed or of many thinking people who are today challenged by new revelations of science, theology, philosophy, space exploration. Time-worn hymns, relics of a bygone era, are hardly appropriate to today's world.

A funeral should be celebration of a life – the chance to reflect on the footprints one person has left on this earth. Attempts by some clerics to curtail the number of personal eulogies (because they take too long) is to deny the importance of this opportunity for family and friends to say the things they perhaps hadn't said before. For me the occasion was tinged with the sadness that I had not had the privilege to know the *real* Norman. But it made me confident that this was how I want my own funeral to be conducted – and I hope my family will respect my wishes – with perhaps some of my favourite songs from *The Seekers*!

As we left the crematorium chapel to the music of Chopin's *Prelude in A from Les Sylphides*, Margaret invited us to feel the LOVE... and we did! It was truly tangible. I am sure that the love of God was more present there than in many religious institutions.

Margaret Knowlden

Have your say!

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic church.

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome (maximum length: articles 700 words, letters 100 words)

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the editor or of ARC

Please send material to:

The Editor

ARCVoice

32 Awatea Road ST IVES CHASE NSW 2075
OR (preferably) email: knowlden1@bigpond.com
Tel: 02 9449 7275 Fax 02 9449 5017

ARC Secretariat

Rob Brian tel: 02 9371 8519 rbrian@vtown.com.au

John Buggy tel: 02 9451 8393 jbuggy@ozemail.com.au

Chris Crothers tel: 02 9747 1787 chris.crothers@bigpond.com

Paul Denny tel: 03 5174 0741 chewyd@tpg.com.au

Michael Gravener tel: 0400.990.301 msg2000@bigblue.net.au

Lynne Green tel: 02 9807 8281 lynnegr@iprimus.com.au

Margaret Knowlden tel: 02 9449 7275 knowlden1@bigpond.com

Ted Lambert tel/fax 08 8287 6338 lambert1@chariot.net.au

Jim Taverne tel: 02 9449 2923 jagota@ozemail.com.au

ARC Brochure

A new brochure has been produced and is available on request. It includes a Membership Application form and addresses the questions:

- ◆ What is *Australian Reforming Catholics*?
- ◆ How was **ARC** established?
- ◆ What does **ARC** do?
- ◆ How is **ARC** organised?

Distributing the brochure is an important way of helping our movement to grow. Enquiries:

Australian Reforming Catholics

c/- Jim Taverne, 4/1035 Pacific Highway, Pymble, NSW, 2073
tel: 02 9449 2923 jagota@ozemail.com.au

ARC Conference - 2005

"Imagining Church in Australia"

with speakers

Patricia Brennan Katrina Brill RSJ

Paul Collins Michael Morwood

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8-9th October, 2005

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