



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
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Editorial

Again, we find in the pages of this 19th Report from Australian Reforming Catholics stories about the experiences, feelings and ideas of Catholics in the present Church and their desire to share those with others.

Membership of ARC means to me that I am not alone in my doubts and fears for the future of our Church. I can share those with others. Together we need to formulate questions about beliefs, teachings, structures and practices and find answers which the Hierarchy of the Church refuses to consider.

This refusal is stressed in the open letter from *Wir sind Kirche* to the bishops of Germany.

Another example is the letter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about the primacy of conscience signed by prominent Australian Catholics. That letter was sent in November 2005 and has not yet elicited any sort of response.

ARC is getting better known in the media as our spokesperson – John Buggy – is more often asked by for instance the ABC and The Sydney Morning Herald for comments on various proclamations or actions – or lack thereof – by the Hierarchy of the Church.

Another sign of growing recognition of ARC's existence is membership applications from new places or through the use of our website.

Arcvoice 19 is a 'bumper issue'. Our Editor, Margaret Knowlden, set aside her own rule about the maximum length of 700 words for articles to accommodate some important ones that are well above this maximum.

Alan Holroyd has not only produced one of his brilliant cartoons but also a thoughtful, wise commentary on the subject of 'making fun of...'.

The importance of language in the Church cannot be overstated, as Lynne Green and Margaret Knowlden point out.

Kevin Gallagher's article leads us into solutions found by those for whom the oppression by the patriarchal system became too much.

Alan Clague introduces the development of what could be called *position statements* for the changes in the church which the members of ARC find most important.

Rev. Bernard Thorogood shows that also the Uniting Church of Australia needs reform and Ted Lambert pleads – to my mind convincingly – that Jesus is in the first place our friend rather than our King or Lord.

The *International Observations* show how easy it is to get together people from all over The Netherlands for conferences.

Jim Taverne

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My Church is Dying

Blame the shepherds not the flock

R. John Kinkel

Roman Catholics in the West don't go to church much, are materialistic, and they are too comfortable with a Godless society. Church officials deplore such realities and hope for change. That's right: blame the victims!

Almost every article I read about this theme accepts the underlying premise of religious leaders: too much backsliding, too much sinning by church members. I beg to disagree. After spending three years researching and writing a book on the Catholic Church, I see a different picture: people are turned off by official church policies. They are turned away by weak leadership.

First, questionable teachings. Popes and bishops continue to assert that artificial birth control is wrong. The laity say it is ok. Rules do not allow priests to marry. Laity say there should be a change. Official teachings say women are to be excluded from all major leadership roles: priest, bishop, cardinal, Pope. It is God's will. Laypeople are astounded.

This triple dose of irrationality has sent many Catholics packing. Fewer people are going to Sunday Mass, less money is being collected, and churches and schools are closing. The Roman Catholic Church is short 160,000 priests worldwide based on 1978 staffing standards and little is being done to reverse these trends. The Pope and bishops won't budge; Catholics stare in disbelief.

Second, fiscal crisis. Over \$US1 billion dollars has been spent on the sexual abuse scandal caused by wayward priests and bishops. Three US dioceses are in Chapter 11 bankruptcy and some priest retirement funds are running out of money. The statistics published by church directories reveal that 600 schools in the US have closed in the last 10 years. In Berlin, Germany, the Catholic Church is closing or merging half of its 207 parishes to pay off millions in debt to banks and creditors. With fewer people drawn to church

services by uninspiring church leaders, there is less money put into the collection basket to promote the goals of its founder: Jesus Christ.

Third, no quest for the truth. Bishops from Rome to Ranchipur haven't a clue about reversing these and other downward trends. The religious fervour generated by Pope John Paul's funeral gave us a false sense of widespread religious re-awakening. World Youth Day in Germany last month will create a similar myth: young people are turning to the church in droves. The truth is that young people 16-25 are not going to church at all: only 5 per cent go to weekly Sunday services in the US.

Religious mega events deflect attention away from the real problems the church faces. With an ageing band of priests who are overworked and exhausted, only the bare essentials are getting done. Catholic spin doctors work diligently to convince us that it is not so. Conservative groups in the church, like Opus Dei, lobby to turn back the clock of renewal and change. Little is being accomplished to build outreach programs to touch the lost and the forgotten.

My church is dying but not because people are all bad. The groans of God's people can be heard if we only read the signs of the times. They are sheep without good shepherds; there are not enough pastors to go around. What is killing the spiritual enlightenment of Vatican II are poor leaders and terrible policies. Those entrusted with 'feeding the flock' have run out of vision and enthusiasm. How bad must it get before we get some fundamental change?

Dr R. John Kinkel lives in Michigan and is the author of the newly released book *Chaos in the Catholic Church: A Call for Reform*.

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Letters to the Editor

I refer to Geoff Mulhearn's article in arcvoice No.18 December 2005, asking 'Who are the Pearl Seekers?'

I am a pearl seeker. I am a peart (Margaret means a pearl) and I identify with the merchant who bought the pearl of great price. I seek to find myself and my place in the world.

Let us remember that ARC involves not only a reform of the church but a reform of ourselves for we are the church.

MARGARET McCLELLAN Cardiff NSW

I intended writing after the Conference to express my thanks and congratulations to the organizers for a very well organized Conference and one which I found to be balanced and inspirational. So, belatedly, very many thanks.

My reasons for coming were varied. Part of it was the kerfuffle about the locale for the previous Conference, and part of it was curiosity about the A R C itself. Not only was I encouraged but met quite a few old friends. All in all, a fine experience. ...

So, blessings on your work for us all, and renewed thanks to yourself and the members of the Secretariat.

BROTHER CHARLES HOWARD, Blacktown NSW

Pomp, Circumstance and Cartooning

(It's no joke)

Alan Holroyd

St Bernard of Clairvaux is reputed to have said that nothing funny comes from the devil. However, humour is very subjective particularly when considering the aftermath of the Danish cartoon that featured Mohummad. It does not matter what religion, it is seen to be blasphemous whether it is funny or not and one does not have to be an extremist to be offended. The freedom of speech ethic was and is used in the defence of the publishing of cartoons, yet bloodshed and dispute continues. Australia has a fine tradition of cartooning and those in power have had to deal with the pen of the caricaturist since early days of publishing. With the government's recent restrictions to our freedom of speech, the cartoonist now has to tread carefully.

One of the most difficult things Muslims have to cope with in Christianity is our diversity and flexibility, whereas Christians are challenged by what they see as the inflexibility of Islam. Had the Danish cartoonist composed something that featured Jesus, many would have been offended, others uncomfortable, but most Christians would have taken it in their stride. The popular movie *The Life of Brian* is an example of this.

When considering what is funny and what is not, Charlie Chaplin's portrayal of his *Little Champ* against the ostentatiousness and grandiosity of the big man in charge that featured in most of his stories comes to mind. Today, those with grandchildren know the popularity and positive values portrayed in stories of *Thomas the Tank Engine* and the key role of the *Fat Controller* – who is certainly not a vicious character but he's still in charge and self important. Chaplin's audience fell about with laughter when, due to the pomposity and grandiosity of the big man, he stumbled in the shoe-shop and fell. Chaplin was a great cartoonist – on film.

Not a day passes in the free world without the print media featuring a regular cartoonist who satirises the movers and shakers amongst those in power. In Australia it is invariably

the Prime Minister John Howard and no doubt his office keeps a scrapbook on all the cartoons for reference (and discussion around the coffee machine). The key mover and shaker in the Catholic Church in Australia is Cardinal George Pell and so many of the cartoons have to feature the big man. I guess his office also keeps a media cuttings scrapbook for reference.

Soon after *Online Catholics* started, Ted Lambert submitted an article to the editor, Kate Mannix. Ted asked if I would illustrate one of his key points – which I did – and the article was accepted and published online. Kate was looking for a point of difference in OLC and, with Ted's help, she contacted me. We chatted and so 'Shades of Grey' has featured on a fortnightly basis since then.

Online Catholics have an introductory offer of two free editions – one of which will feature a cartoon by Alan Holroyd under the title 'Shades of Grey' onlinecatholics.com.au



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Does it matter how I say it?

Lynne Green

That's a question I've been asking myself a lot, for a long time, but a lot more recently. It's about what difference the language I use makes to whether I see myself as an active participant in the Church. Also, do I see that Church (with a capital 'C') as part of a wider human family? Are we a group of friends, who share a common friend in Jesus? Because we are friends, do we reach out to include others as our friends – in fact – not just a rosy 'pipe-dream'?

The question began bubbling up – again – as I worked with people preparing intercessions for the feast of Christ the King late last year. As usual I was scanning the scripture passages we would hear being read. In the prayers we write (and re-write!) we try to make a link between those texts and how we participate in our world, how we interact with people who are trying to help others in that world, and how we engage in issues that concern us.

Notice those words: 'participate', 'interact', 'engage'? What I call PIE – not the 'in the sky' variety, but a firmly grounded one. A pie with legs, perhaps, a bit like a pastry version of the M&M's we see in that TV ad? Good for trundling around on, letting it poke its nose in, stretch out a hand to help someone who's a bit bogged down.

What disturbed me about the readings was the whole 'King' and 'Lord' business, inherited from a past we share with at least two other major faith groups. Where on earth, now, do we bump into kings and lords – how relevant are they to a senescent sister from the suburbs and those she mixes with?

The readings were from the Prophet Ezekiel (34: 11-12; 15-17); the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (15: 29-26; 28), and Matthew's Gospel (25: 31-46). The most confronting of these was from Paul to the Corinthians. I doubt I would have worked any more happily with him than I have with some latter-day male, bachelor, clerics with whom I've had disagreements from time to time.

More significantly, I wondered what impact the readings would have – the following Sunday – on the wide 'spread' of people who come to the Mass I usually go to. The exclusively male context aside, is being 'brought to life in Christ' a really freeing experience when, as Paul insists, it must be 'in the proper order'? And, coincidentally, who decides what is that proper order? It pictures the end of time, when Christ will have 'put all his enemies under his feet', and everything is 'subjected' to him, and he, in turn, is

subjected to God, 'so that God may be all in all.' So what's the point? How 'vital' is such a life?

More of the same in Matthew – where the king's main traits are punitive. Come to think of it, if that's how kings are, there are quite a few of them – causing pain and heartbreak worldwide right now. Of course, we need to remember that biblical scholarship can help us to understand the *context*. The danger is that we will transfer the meaning it had in that context, unwittingly, into our own modern setting, and it won't work. It is a danger reinforced by the unthinking way in which modern news media endlessly re-play the myths spawned to justify the use of force against people whom those with military power categorise as a threat. There's a danger, too, that the same unscrupulous types of people will keep on scapegoating disadvantaged people.

I still value an idea often spoken about during Vatican II, and quite a bit in the years straight after it. It was that, as Christ's followers, we are called to be 'counter-cultural', which meant, among other things, challenging those who used power corruptly, to control others. It was linked, too, with 'being in solidarity' with others, and 'giving a voice to the voiceless'. More recently, in ecumenical efforts, I have also come across the idea of 'partnership'. It describes a way of helping people living in what we call 'Third World' conditions, by inviting them to decide what needs to be done to help them live better (not telling them what we think we can or they should do). It involves supporting them in this, with finance, technical back-up, etc. In other words, it puts them in charge – they are not inert, passive recipients.

So, with this sort of thinking in mind, how can groups of people like those I work with make some kind of difference, to how we think about ourselves as church – surely the small 'c' one is OK? If it's about writing intercessions, one helpful step in the right direction can be sometimes to vary the Cue and Response ('Lord, hear us, Lord, hear our prayer') spoken after those prayers. I was thinking, that Sunday, a good variant might have been 'Loving God, hear us/hear our prayer'. It might have muted the thundering tone of Paul to his audience in Corinth. I believe they were a 'stropy' lot, but . . . Of course, it is also important for the reader to alert people we are praying with to such changes so they can join in – have it in a printed copy or on *PowerPoint*. Then, the next year, perhaps a step further, might be to 'Jesus, our friend, hear us'?

Another helpful idea when preparing intercessions is to use language – for example in the one for the Church with a big 'C' – which models the fact that we are all the Church. It's not just the 'boss men'. We can remind ourselves we have a part to play in achieving the positive outcome we pray for. It may help to break through the 'out there God'

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kind of thinking that still tends to shackle us. It is not enough, either, to revel in how great it is to be participating in the Church – seeing it as some kind of cosy club. We can encourage each other to move beyond being smug, to being church, with work to do in and for our world.

For example, a prayer like ‘May Christ’s healing in each of us lead us to fuller participation in the Church’ can be nudged a little, to become ‘As members of the Church, may we offer Christ’s healing to others, where we live and work.’

The *General Instructions* to the Roman Missal recommend several categories of prayer to be included in the General Intercessions. One of them is ‘for the public authorities and for the salvation of the world’, and another is ‘for those oppressed by any need’. It can be valuable to use an approach similar to the one outlined above in these, as well. On ‘public authorities’ – it may help not to be too facile about equating those authorities with ‘our political leaders’, and be better to stress that politicians represent us, and that we want them to be answerable to us. Along the way, this also reminds us we need to be involved in achieving that positive outcome, too. Like picturing the church/us as being in and for the

world, it is an invitation to model being interactive – the second slice of that pie I find so nutritious! Also, as we avoid the trap of seeming to use the prayer to criticise them – as they often do to others, in their public statements – we can help to raise awareness about maintaining standards of public conduct. Once again, an emphasis that the clearest way for Jesus to have an impact on people’s lives is through us!

We can remind ourselves of one more thing, and – as we do – help those we’re praying with become aware that we are engaged with our world, precisely because we are the church. The most effective intercessions are simply stated, so that they can be clearly understood. That means we keep them short – the people we’re inviting to join in the responses have just been digesting a homily – and that means we use everyday English. Why ‘seek’ when we can ‘look for’, ‘facilitate’, when we can help? The final test is the say-it-out-loud one – each petition only gets said once and can’t be re-played.

Does it matter how I say it? Yes, I think it does. I’m sure, too, that how we say it together makes a difference. What do you think?

Watch your Language

Margaret Knowlden

One of the good things about the Latin Mass was that we didn’t understand what was being said – although I admit that, even if we had understood, we never questioned anything. Vatican II has changed all that.

For many years our Parish was run by an enlightened Order of priests and The Creed was never said. However, now we have reverted to the control of the Diocese, we are expected to toe the Bishop’s line and have to dutifully recite the words of The Creed displayed on an overhead screen.

I find this weekly, mindless, parrot-like recitation of concepts in which I no longer believe an insult to intelligence and cannot even bring myself to repeat the words. What does ‘begotten not made’ mean? Does anyone believe in ‘one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’, The Trinity or The Ascension?

Instead, I improve the shining hour by counting the male words. There are 23 of them (father, lord, son, he, him etc.) and the only female reference is the ‘virgin’. Even with the Holy Spirit, it is still jobs for the boys.

What does it say about our Church that we cannot break with tradition and change the words to something more appropriate to our times? Try complaining and the stock reply is: ‘It is not negotiable!’ (ie, set in concrete). Or ‘The congregation gets thrown by changes’ – as if the words of a favourite nursery rhyme have been altered. Inclusive language is also enshrined in law. How can our Church continue to be exempt and be so insensitive to the women who form the majority of the congregation? It does matter how you say it – and I, for one, do care!

There is another way!

We believe in one God, our Parent who sustains us,
 who made heaven and earth,
 and everything that is, seen and unseen.
 We believe in one who saved us, Jesus Christ, God’s child,
 eternally begotten by our Parent,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 true God from true God, begotten, not made.
 Through Jesus all things were made.
 To support us he came from heaven:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
 and was human, like us.
 For our sake Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate;
 he suffered death and was buried.
 On the third day he rose again
 as the Scriptures predicted;
 he went to heaven, to be beside God, our Parent.
 Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead,
 and will sustain our world forever.
 We believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the Comforter, who gives us life,
 together with our Parent and Jesus who saves us.
 The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets.
 We believe in one, holy, universal and apostolic Church.
 We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
 We hope for the resurrection of the dead,
 and life in a world to come. AMEN.

Emerging Spirituality and Small Communities

Kevin Gallagher

I would like to preface my experience with small faith communities with a couple of quotes from the eminent German Theologian, Karl Rahner:

1. *'The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he or she will not exist at all. If by mysticism we mean, not singular parapsychological phenomena, but a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence, this statement is very true, and its truth and importance will become still clearer in the spirituality of the future. For, according to scripture and the church's teaching, rightly understood, the ultimate conviction and decision of faith comes, in the last resort, not from a pedagogic indoctrination from outside, supported by public opinion in secular society or in the church, nor from a merely rational argument of fundamental theology, but from the experience of God, of his Spirit, of his freedom, bursting out of the very heart of human existence and able to be really experienced there, even though this experience cannot be wholly a matter for reflection or be verbally objectified'.* (Karl Rahner, *The Practice of the Faith*, SCM Press 1985, p 22)

2. *Today we are experiencing a serious break down of a church culture built around conformity, blind obedience to authority, religious attitudes that border on superstition, notions that the sacred is separate from human experience, and strict control over people's thinking and acting. This view is evident in their refusal to be tied to a Sunday Mass obligation under the pain of serious sin; in their refusal to allow church authority to discount their experience and sincerity; in their refusal to tolerate liturgies which do not nurture their faith or affirm God's presence with them; in their refusal to work any longer with a system of governance which is not able to break new ground because it is locked into a theological worldview steadfastly resistant to change...'* (Karl Rahner, 'Concern for the Church' in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 20, p 150)

For many, childhood images of God, Jesus and the church remain intact well into adulthood. Some continue to hold these images with deep conviction, sometimes accompanied with warm personal devotion, often tied to rigid doctrinal positions. Unlike other fields of learning that mature by

stages of growth, their religious education remains stunted, set solid for all time and, for the most part, irrelevant to the rest of life. They perpetually ask the question: 'Why does a God of love allow so much suffering in the world?'; or 'Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?'. Joan Chittister, OSB, describes this image of God as 'a God who makes traffic lights turn green, who turns lottery tickets into sweepstake winners, and turns rain on a picnic day into sun. And so they become the eternal adult children of magical coincidence in a world crying out for clear-eyed, hard-headed responsible shapers of this clay we've been given to call life.'

For others, both within and outside the church, these childhood images can become a problem, producing perplexity and doubt, often leading to indifference towards, or rejection of the religion of their childhood. Many do not find a persuasive alternative to replace their childhood images of God/religion.

For those who find the incentive, opportunity, and the courage to explore and develop an adult approach to God, there comes a time when their childhood images no longer make a great deal of sense.

The aspirations of these spiritual seekers tend to reject activity based on compliance which is lived from the 'outside-in', and is extremely stifling for the individual. Their spirituality on the other hand, grows out of, and beyond the codes and cults of religion, as one makes it his or her own. Spirituality is the internalising of a religious tradition that is at once true to the tradition, and also uniquely true to the individual. Spirituality, in this sense, is lived from the 'inside out'. It is a personal relationship with the Holy One.

This is basically the approach of small communities who come together to share their faith experiences, their on-going spiritual development, care for their families and each other. For anyone working with them, the 'spin-off' rewards are mutual. The cohesion of faith and life necessarily propels groups and individuals to focus on the issues of justice, social equality, the dignity of every person, and concerns for Gospel values, so urgently needed in our world today. Love, compassion and justice make the Kingdom manifest.

The exploration of small faith communities tends to develop out of an individual and collective evolving spiritual journey, prompted by a desire to know what is real ... what matters personally ... what has been discarded along the way ... and what has been personally discovered.

Sharing personal experiences with significant people, who come into our lives, helps us look at reality and be true to ourselves. A relationship with significant persons goes

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beyond spiritual direction or counselling. It is the recognition of being to being. It solicits neither approval nor disapproval. It engenders trust. It is only with such significant beings that you risk sharing the deeper issues of life, personal growth and vulnerability, that lie beneath the exterior facades we present to protect our fragility.

For anyone seeking truth beyond the limits of prejudice, fixed ideas, and religious fear, I believe it would be valid to say that real and honest reflection comes about mainly at those times when we experience doubts or a crisis of faith. Such critical times force us to redefine our beliefs, our notions of divinity, all of which has to be juxtaposed with the evolving world in which these concepts are lived out. In this evolving world change is massive, profound and rapid. The struggle of small communities, as well as individuals, reflects the struggle of many. The persons we gravitate towards, young and old, are more confidently searching for a spiritual path to God, as opposed to following a religion. The effort to mature and define a belief system, which is spiritually, intellectually, and morally satisfying, is now more an individual responsibility, than an institutional one.

We are living in interesting times. The God we worship is markedly different from the God of our grandparents. Hierarchies in both temporal and religious institutions are rocking. Much that has been held sacred is crumbling and our beliefs are less often dictated from on high. Sacredness is no longer confined to theology, religious ritual, ceremony, holy places, images or devotional practises. The scope of sacredness extends to the cosmological frontier of an ever-expanding universe.

Our formative years were modelled on a mechanical god who controls the universe, who pulls the strings of human puppets to make them dance to an orchestrated tune. God's 'out there' and we are here. Religion was founded on dualism, the dichotomy of soul and body, reaching its zenith in Augustine's notion of original sin. Carl Jung says there are two ways to lose your soul, and one is to worship a god 'out there.' The truth is we are in divinity and divinity in us. Divinity is all around us and in us.

Prophetic voices in the Church are joining the ranks of historians and sociologists who have told us for some time now that religious apostolic orders have fulfilled their purpose, and that they will have to move into something new. Even the parish structure is in for a hard time with the critical priest shortage, combined with a fall off in church attendance of youth as well as adults. For many, (without questioning their genuineness) church attendance emulates the consumerism of our culture. It's like going through the check out with a weekly supply of grace. And if the structure itself is in such bad shape, why continue to put money and resources into maintaining buildings to be admired as museum pieces. Bricks and mortar never promoted the Kingdom. Jesus saw the importance of people and proclaimed the Kingdom of God was already within them.

Small faith communities present the challenge: 'Are we prepared to face the difficult questions and step into a world of uncertainty that growth and maturity demand? Or will we stay with a childish, (not childlike) view of God and the so called security of a bygone past? Ecologists say: If we don't change we will not get where we are going.' This is also true of the Church. Eventually there will be meltdown! Our spiritual challenge is about change, not sustaining the status quo at all costs. But that's too general. More importantly, each member of any faith community is challenged with the questions: 'Am I prepared to change? Am I open to read the signs of the times in my *own* history? After all, the only thing one can change is oneself. Many encounter a moment of truth when they distinguish between relationship with God, and the fulfilment of religious practices, duties, obligations, and commandments. It is a moment when one learns once and for all that relationship with God lies at a deeper level than external religious performance. They take comfort in discerning that a failure in externals is not necessarily a loss of faith. In fact, it points to growth in an adult mature faith.

The safe place is not to be found in the structures and systems we create. God dwells within us, not in our structures and systems. When we dwell with that, and discover God in our personal experiences, we are liberated from the binding and suffocating theologies and systems we create. From this point one develops a freedom to confront the questions and doubts that arise from within. It also extends to those exterior discussions about the meaning of life and creation, the nature of Eucharist, the meaning of female as well as male, the growing priest shortage, the recognition that the Catholic Church lacks celibate males, not vocations, etc., etc. The constant unveiling of the universe and the perpetual challenge to accept new images of God that flow from this cosmic revelation, makes life more a series of questions than a catechism of past obsolete answers.

Small faith communities explore a spiritual path which challenges members to question everything they have been taught about God. This does not come entirely from their collective initiative. Shared insights as well as the rewards flowing from the pursuit of writings from authors at the cutting edge of the Church, breaking new ground, help individuals make a quantum leap from believing in God, to experiencing God.

Members dedicated to, and at the service of individuals in small faith communities, tend to approach life by courageously trusting their own inner spiritual experiences and aspirations. They are out-going, and because they want to share their vision with others who think in the same vein, they are essentially communitarian in a true sense of the word. They are full of hope, enthusiasm, passionate about justice and equality, and experience what it means to enjoy the 'freedom of the daughters and sons of God'. They are beginning to glimpse, little by little, that the essence of life and God and themselves is *freedom*. □

The Catholic Church and Reform

Alan Clague

Reform has been an integral part of the Church's activity since its inception. The first great reform recorded in the Acts of the Apostles was to allow entry to those who were not Jews. Paul fought for this and won. It has taken even longer for the evolution of the Church's policy on the availability of salvation for unbaptised persons. Augustine's hard-line stance condemning them to hell was softened after a few centuries to the hypothetical limbo and even this has been dropped recently. The torture and burning of heretics was acceptable in the past, but has no role in the Church now.

Even within the last 50 years we have seen many practices changed. Fasting and abstinence are no longer major mandatory activities, nor is the indulgence value of our prayers stated in prayer books. The laity has greater involvement in Church activities. We no longer pray for the 'perfidious Jews', and our interactions with Protestants are not strongly discouraged. War is seen as a last resort, and enemies are not demonised by chaplains on both sides. These sorts of changes have been brought about by changing social values.

Advances in Science have also led to changes. We now know that the beginning of the universe occurred billions of years ago. We do not live in a geocentric universe. Humanity evolved from less intelligent primates and is independent of the story of Adam and Eve. Patriarchs could not have lived for hundreds of years. No flood could have taken Noah's ark up Mount Ararat, nor could he have fitted all the animals on board, nor did all races arise from his children. The bible is no longer considered an accurate historical and scientific treatise, and has been re-evaluated accordingly. Diseases are no longer thought to be caused by malign spirits or witches who need to be exposed and destroyed. Suicide is not always an unforgivable sin necessitating burial in unhallowed ground, but may be the result of mental illness. Miracles are much less common now because the Church has adopted stringent scientific criteria

for their acceptance. The extent of opposition by the Church to advances in science depended on how much the new discovery was in harmony with Church teaching, rather than the empirical evidence of its truth.

Churches are inherently conservative organisations and, for many members, the pace of change is too slow. Church hierarchy has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, just as the leaders of any human organisation are likely to be resistant to change. In science itself, the concept of resistance to 'paradigm shift' is well documented. For instance, we now accept the reality and fundamental importance of 'continental drift' but, when it was proposed less than 50 years ago by a non-professional geologist, it was laughed at by the professionals.

The last hundred years has seen changes in technology and society much faster than at any other time. Less than a hundred years ago, women in the UK and USA did not have the vote, now they have laws against gender discrimination. They had little control over their fertility, now pregnancy is an option. Married women usually had no financial independence, now they can leave a destructive marriage. By comparison with these secular changes, changes in the Church's treatment of women has been cosmetic.

The Church with its patriarchal superstructure does not have a couple of centuries to wait until matters are clarified because, if changes are needed in areas of Church practice such as this, they must come quickly. The Church is not a democratic institution, but the widespread existence of democracy in secular society has resulted in a greater desire of all Church members to be listened to. This is not new in the Church. In its early days, the power of the Church members in their community was much greater than now.

Australian Reforming Catholics is a group of committed Catholics who see the need for accelerated change in the Church, and we believe that the Church must welcome and encourage input from all its members to properly discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit in these matters. Critical to all issues is the extent to which our Church leadership is deficient in responding to change and the manner in which it uses authority inappropriately to prevent the discussion of and implementation of needed change. We shall be outlining some areas where we consider the need for re-evaluation of current Church policy is most important and our reasons for believing that change is needed. □

Invalid but real

Prof. Anton Houtepen, a foundation member of the Mariëburgvereniging, at an interview with its magazine December 2005

The religious celebration which touched me most was not a church celebration but certainly an extraordinary experience.

We were in a group of a few hundred people together on a garbage heap in Lima. These are the very poor who made a living from digging away the garbage heap of the city. Every morning, the local priest of the St Ana Parish in Callao comes to the garbage heap and I met him there.

The priest said: 'Let us do what Jesus did', then he said the words of the consecration and recited the Our Father. The people shared their pieces of bread and their chicha (a red corn drink). And all called out *venceremos* (we will overcome)!

I will never forget this experience. The hope and courage that shone out of these people's eyes still move me deeply. This is the way to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The Future of the Church

Rev. Bernard Thorogood

(retired Minister of the Uniting Church)

The word CHURCH has many shades of meaning, and we may confuse the discussion unless we clarify which we are using.

In the broadest sense it may mean the whole company of the disciples of Christ from the earliest days until now, the church both triumphant and militant.

It often means the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church as desired by God and given life by Christ.

It may mean the actual organised form of church in our histories' traditions, like the Russian Orthodox Church or the Uniting Church.

It may mean the local church, which we understand as a congregation, or a building which is a place of worship.

In this discussion we are most often speaking of the Church in a more general way, the whole variety of church life in Australia, and from that we may become more local and think of our immediate responsibility and hope.

We are thinking of challenge and change. There have been moments of radical change in the story of the church, for example: the shift from a Jewish to a Gentile community during the time of the Acts of the Apostles, the Reformation, the Evangelical Movement of Whitefield and Wesley. But change in church life has been more often evolution than revolution. Can we see what today's development is called to be?

These challenges help us to identify the nature of the change that is likely/needed/prayed for/resisted. I see the direction of change like this:

- from the static institution towards a pilgrim movement
- from a culture of guilt towards a culture of grace
- from faith as security towards faith as risk
- from a body of doctrine towards moments of disclosure
- from an exclusive body towards an inclusive welcome
- from individualist salvation towards a rescued planet

The first part of those statements will not suddenly be lost, but the second part seems to be where growth and liveliness increasingly occur in our divided and dangerous world.



Concordia

Ted Lambert

On taking down my NRSV Exhaustive Concordance one morning early in October an implosion of ideas happened. The occasion was a request made to me to suggest two Scripture readings for the Sunday Mass liturgy at the Annual Campfire/Conference of Australian Reforming Catholics in Sydney. The theme was friendship. So John 15 seemed apposite: 'I have called you my friends'. The thought occurred that the word 'concordance' is from the Latin, meaning 'same heart with' or 'hearts together'. The Collins Concise gives the primary meaning of concord as 'agreement or harmony'. Harmony is one of the five attributes of God. In music a concord is a harmonious sequence. Sounds very much like true friendship.

St Thomas Aquinas, that man of splendid economy of language, defines *Amicitia* or the truest form of love as 'manifest mutual good-willing between two persons' - (*Mutua benevolentia inter duo non latens*). Not like Viola in Twelfth Night - 'A blank, my lord. She never told her love' - true friends acknowledge each other openly. And the traffic is self-giving: each wills the good of the other. This is not merely the male thing on the footy field but applies even more correctly to true marriage. It is at the peak of human relationships and, as Jesus has declared, even of divine and human relationships. The Incarnation, the Cross and the Eucharist are sublime instances of this tryst, however reluctant we may present ourselves to the commitment. The Trinity is a mystery, but my bet is that the relationships within are of this same definition.

In John's Gospel, Jesus' commitment to friendship with us occurs immediately after he has revealed the commandment of love in 15, verse 12. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.' The one is the explanation of the other. This is how we are to do it. It comes very late in the revelation, at the end of the last Gospel. But how did we miss the earlier signs?

Throughout Matthew, Luke and John, Jesus uses the word 'friend' as a form of address. Luke 12, 14: 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' Follow this through and you begin to wonder whether it would be too far-fetched to hear 'mate'.

For a first Reading, the Epistle 3 John, verses 13-15 has a lot to offer. 'I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.' The Christian communities of the writer and of the recipient Gaius are both full of friends. The word is synonymous with 'Christians' or 'community members'. Moreover face-to-face converse is superior to writing. Conversation is high in the life of the Christian community, which might then be described as 'Jesus with his friends'. ARC has prophetically called its Campfire/Conferences 'Conversations with Jesus Christ our Friend'.

Once again, I call for the institution in Australia of the liturgical feast of Jesus Christ our Friend. □

Open letter to the German bishops ten years after the petition from the Catholic people

Munich, December 2005

Dear bishops,

In the autumn of 1995, 1,845,414 people, 1,483,340 of whom explicitly declared themselves to be Roman Catholic, put their signatures to the five assertions in the petition from the Catholic people. They did this on the basis of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church 'Lumen Gentium' art.37 and can.212.3 of the *Code of Canon Law*. This gives the faithful the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to inform the sacred Pastors of their views on matters which concern the good of the Church. They have the right also to make their views known to others of Christ's faithful, but in doing so they must always respect the integrity of faith and morals, show due reverence to the Pastors and take into account both the common good and the dignity of individuals.

During the past 10 years, members of the Catholic Peoples Movement have time and again turned to you as individual bishops as well as to the Bishops' Conference, without, however, any consequent real dialogue. This is all the more regrettable, since the signatures from the laity, priests and religious to the petitions from the Catholic People represent every time – and this is confirmed by analysis – the great majority of practising Catholics, who are dedicated to the development of reforms, which were initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the General Synod of the German Dioceses (1971-1975).

Ten years after the petition from the Catholic People in Germany we are bound to state:

1. At the discussion with the President of the German Bishops' Conference in December 1995 we started to engage in dialogue. Notwithstanding repeated attempts by the Catholic Peoples Movement, further dialogue either did not occur at all or was very hesitantly continued by him and many other bishops. The Central Committee of the German Catholics elected in 1991 recorded that the refusal to have any dialogue with the people of the Church continued.
2. The maintenance of superseded Church structures is making it very difficult or even impossible for more and more people to believe in the Church. Hundreds of thousands have already 'fled' from the Church. Millions have withdrawn into themselves. Women especially find it increasingly unbearable that patriarchal Church structures are restricting them in their vocation and their faith in the Church.
3. There are growing numbers of people and parishes, who are dedicating themselves to bringing about reforms in the Church, such as the ordination of women, the acceptance of 'viri probati', the abolition of obligatory celibacy, and the acceptance of remarried divorcees to the sacraments. The necessity for these reforms also becomes increasingly clear from the numerous recommendations from advisers, commissions, associations, synods and pastoral discussions.
4. As a result of the ever increasing shortage of priests, parish leadership is confronted with a revolutionary change, for which the Church has not been prepared. During the 26 years of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II the number of Catholics in the world increased by 40%, while the number of priests fell by 4%. Half the number of parishes in Germany will soon be without an ordained pastor and Eucharistic celebrations.
5. The current financial situation and crisis in confidence are signs of a serious spiritual and clerical crisis in many dioceses. The drastic budget reductions have been made without transparency and without more extensive cooperation. This pastoral and social contraction causes the Church to distance itself more and more from the people. Preoccupied by its own problems, the voice of the Church fails to be heard in the current social revolution and restructuring processes, as well as in respect of globalisation.
6. The profound interventions by the Vatican during recent years – for instance, the instruction to the laity through the apostolic letter *Ad Tuendam Fides* (On Protecting the Faith), the withdrawal of the pregnancy counselling service forced by Rome, the declaration *Dominus Jesus*, which put a strain on Ecumenism, the instruction on the Liturgy *Redemptionis Sacramentum* – have created an ever deeper chasm between the Church hierarchy and the people of the Church.
7. The messages from the recent World Synod of Bishops in Rome on the Eucharist show that the movement towards thematic reforms is not restricted to Germany. Especially, bishops from the 'Third World', the USA and the unified Orthodox Churches introduced such reforms for discussion. However, we fear that under Pope Benedict XVI the 'aggiornamento' of theological language and pastoral practice to the demands of the present time will not happen.

The Second Vatican Council assured the bishops that they work on their own authority for the good of their faithful, indeed for the entire Church (L.G.22). If they want to be real shepherds of their dioceses, in solidarity with their needs

and hopes, they don't need to assume the role of chief shepherds imposing their will, a role often forced upon them by Rome. Their apostolic succession offers them the opportunity – within the framework of Canon Law – to present their position emphatically, even to the Pope.

Therefore, we appeal to you: show courage in Christian confidence! Instead of resignation and frustration we need again an open, loving and fraternal Church.

- * Consider the shortage of priests as an opportunity for the realisation of co-responsibility within the parish!
- * Strengthen the so-called laity in their commitment to passing on the faith and to building up the parish in collaboration and to leadership of the parish!
- * See in the longing of women the sign of identification with the Church! Indeed the visions on the part of women for a renewed priestly ministry offer opportunities for the pastoral practices of the future!
- * Provide youth and young adults with opportunities for creative development and self-responsibility, as that is the only way to achieve their home-coming in the Church!

- * Recognise the commitment particularly of the critical Catholics as a clear sign of love for the Church and as the alternative to actual or inner withdrawal!
- * Understand our special responsibility for Ecumenism and issue a clear declaration of the common faith and about a second Ecumenical Congress in the year 2010!
- * Be now, at last, prepared to engage in serious dialogue! Just now, in this radically changing time, intensive collaboration of the people of the Church is required in all structural decisions in both the theological and the pastoral sense.

The Roman Catholic Church in Germany, in Europe and world-wide is confronted by dramatic changes and challenges, which can only be dealt with by the people of the Church and bishops together. In this situation, we ask you, as bishops – ten years after the petition from the people of the Church – to act in the sense of the apostle Paul 'not as Lord over the faith, but as servant of our happiness' (2 Cor: 1.24).

Eva-Marie Kiklas Christian Weisner

For the Association Team of the Movement of the people of the Church We are Church

International Observations

Jim Taverne

The Mariënbuurgvereniging (MV) in The Netherlands holds its annual conference on the last Saturday in October. The location is Amersfoort, to where no one in The Netherlands needs more than two hours to reach by train or motorcar. The chair of the conference made some strong points in her opening address:

- We want to save and protect the inheritance of Vatican II and pass it on to future generations.
- We want to pass on the experience of a Church which – at a moment in history – was capable and prepared to be a liberating community, so that this liberation can some time – who knows when – become reality.
- We want to fan the fire under the dying embers, under the ashes, to keep it burning.
- For that we need a strong, long breath. That's why we are here today: to stop for breath.
- We go public regularly in the hope that we can keep the fire burning.
- We have a message of perspective, hope and future.
- What we do and want to achieve is important, certainly in a secular society.
- We want to challenge others to join us on our path. It is interesting to note how *Wir sind Kirche* expresses itself:

- The first ten years of work by *Wir sind Kirche* has already been rewarded.
- The voice of the people of God can no longer be ignored.
- However, also in the next ten years we need a long breath and the support of many in order to keep the fire of Vatican II burning.

In the paper of MV-NU (year 22, issue 5, Dec.05) the editor comments on the Synod on the Eucharist. The editor observes that the conclusions of the Synod show that John Paul II keeps the world Church still in his conservative grip. But some prelates have given careful comments which show a little disappointment:

- Cardinal Danneels feels that communion must never be refused;
- Cardinal Walter Kasper feels that in specific circumstances we must be open to the hypothesis of married priests and communion for everybody;
- Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta expressed optimism by asserting that the discussions will continue.

There is perhaps some light at the end of the tunnel!

Can you help?

We are looking for new members to join the ARC Secretariat. If you have talents and gifts to share and would like to make a personal, positive contribution towards reforming the Catholic Church, then we would love to hear from you. (NB: Internet connection essential.) Please contact:

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Although ARC is based in New South Wales, we are a national organisation and so are particularly interested in having more interstate members on our Secretariat - or as ad hoc members sharing talents and giving help in other ways

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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

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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,

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