



# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics  
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## Editorial

When people ask us to spell out what we stand for, it is not really enough to hand them a brochure. We must be able to be more specific in the knowledge that other members of ARC would be on the same wavelength.

The survey held in September last year – the results are on our website – was a step forwards to the formulation of position statements.

It is important that our spokesman, John Buggy, does indeed speak to the media on behalf of all Australian Reforming Catholics on matters of Church structures, practices and teachings.

Alan Clague has again proposed a position statement: *Women and Church Leadership*. Margaret Knowlden's *Women speak out about the Church* and the song by Sr. Helen Kearins fit in very well after that.

Kerry Gonzales encourages us to overcome our fears and hesitations and join in God's dance. The world famous Benedictine nun, Joan Chittister, shed all the fear she may have had to produce a huge body of literature on the new discipleship of equals and spiritual vision for today's world.

The Dutch philosopher, Ria van den Brandt, writes with great originality about those who cannot identify anymore with 'The Christian Tradition' but design their own religious mosaic.

I think that the article about election of bishops by George Ripon contributes to the formulation of a position statement by ARC. One of the proposals of the survey of last September was *It is important that the people elect their own bishop*. The replies were: 2/3 in favour and another 1/4 in favour with some reservations.

Election of bishops has happened in the past, e.g. Saint Ambrose was elected bishop of Milan in 374 at the age of 35. He had been governor of Aemilia-Liguria for four years. He changed from an unbaptised layman to a bishop in eight days. Later he became – for better or for worse? – the mentor of St Augustine of Hippo.

May I draw your attention to the notice about our Conference 2006 on page 9 (book now!), and on the back page *Can you help?* and *Have your say!*

For those members who have not yet paid for their membership 2006/7 we have enclosed a form to use for that purpose.

*Jim Taverne*

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# Being part of the dance

**Kerry Gonzales**

*'And when you have the chance to sit it out or dance  
I hope you dance.... I hope you dance'  
(Lee Ann Womack – I Hope You Dance)*

The Easter season for me is about hope. For hope, no matter how hopeless the cause, always seems to reappear, even if it is only a flicker. The Easter images of the egg, new life and re-birth are powerful symbols that call the 'people of God' to reach out to others and really live the mission of Jesus in our own time and journeys. By and large the 'people of God' do this and do it well.

Easter is also a time of celebrating the conquering of death so that each of us can, on a daily basis, conquer the deficiencies and insularity of our own spiritual and secular existence to live as mature and constantly growing individuals.

Yet how many people within the Catholic Church today 'sit it out' instead of taking the chance to dance? Having viewed the Compass Program about Fr Ted Kennedy this week, I know that he danced. He certainly didn't dance a popular dance, but he stepped out of the crowd and learned a new dance that took him to places he could never have envisaged. And he didn't dance alone. Ted Kennedy danced with some of the most disenfranchised 'people of God'.

Within the Church today, I get the feeling that there are a lot of closet Ted's, both clergy and laity, who can feel the beat of the music and whose feet may even be tapping along. Yet they choose to sit it out and watch others dance. This is no doubt driven, in part, by fear; a fear generated by an

oppressive and formula-driven hierarchy that is not very big on dancing.

## The Power Within

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. *(Nelson Mandela – 1994 Inaugural Speech)*

Certainly we cannot all dance like Mandela, but if it is our fear of retribution or our fear of our own potential that hold us back, then we can at least heed his words. For there is no doubt that we all have the power to dance; all have the skills to be a part of the larger dance that takes us out of our comfort zone to new and challenging places. Maybe that is the major problem with the Catholic Church today. They are perhaps bound by the fear that if they allow the 'people of God' to dance, they will not be able to control the dance and who knows what would happen then. For me, however, it doesn't matter where the dance leads, as long as I dance. For another Easter song tells us that:

'Dance then wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance said he. I'll lead you all wherever you may be, I will lead you all in the dance said he' – *(Lord of the Dance, Sydney Carter - London: Stainer & Bell Ltd).*

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**KERRY GONZALES** is a primary teacher librarian by profession and has completed a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS). She has recently joined the ARC Secretariat.

## Letter to the Editor

I refer to John Kinkel's and Kevin Gallagher's articles in *ARCvoice No.19* on the death of our Church and the emergence of small group communities.

I participated in a small group community during Lent, a group which had a multi-denominational composition. We basically discussed the readings for the Sunday gospels during Lent.

I enjoyed myself in this setting. There were six of us. Each person felt comfortable enough to share deep experiences and I felt this was therapeutic for each in a supportive atmosphere. I feel this was a very valuable experience and we hope to repeat it next year. We had a party on the last night.

I don't believe the Church is dying. It has me and I'm very much alive.

MARGARET McLELLAN, CARDIFF

## Easter Visit

*Jim Taverne*

On Easter Sunday, we visited Olivia at the Castlebrook Lawn Cemetery on our way to the Easter brunch with her parents and siblings and other family members.

Olivia lost her life on 22 May 1994 as the result of a traffic accident. She was 4½ months old.

Why do I say ‘she lost her life’? Did we not visit her at her own little piece of ground, even 12 years after her death?

We brought her some bright flowers and one of the hard-boiled beautifully painted eggs, which Margot prepares every year on the day before Easter. The eggs are hidden in the garden by the Easter Hare and found by eager children – and adults.

Why did we bring presents to Olivia who died 12 years ago?

We were not by any means the only ones who went to the Castlebrook Lawn Cemetery. The lawns were full of families who brought Easter gifts to the little children they had lost and there was no silence.

I saw a little girl playing with a musical toy that she had probably selected herself to place at a sibling’s tombstone.

A strong big man was cleaning another memorial stone, surrounded by at least a dozen persons of all ages giving him their advice in rapid Italian.

A little further, a group of Chinese people had just unloaded the back of a station wagon and carried large bunches of flowers and many parcels over the grass to the spot where their darling had been buried.

What makes all these visitors come to the cemetery?

Why did we do that and why did we bring flowers and an Easter egg?

I do believe in an afterlife. But surely not a life there at a cemetery?

No, I don’t believe that Olivia will be there to receive the flowers and the Easter egg

What made us visit that cemetery and bring material gifts?

Is it because ‘everybody does that’? Or because it is still part of our culture so strong that it does not matter that it is irrational?

Margot and I believe it is indeed a cultural matter which we cannot explain logically and we are quite content we can’t.

## The Ministry of Irritation

*Joan Chittister*

Extract from her book  
*In the Heart of the Temple*

Why does a woman like you stay in the church?” a woman asked me from the depths of a dark audience years ago. “Because,” I answered, “every time I thought about leaving, I found myself thinking of oysters.” “Oysters?” she said. “What do oysters have to do with it?” “Well,” I answered her in the darkness of the huge auditorium, “I realized that an oyster is an organism that defends itself by excreting a substance to protect itself against the sand of its spawning bed. The more sand in the oyster, the more chemical the oyster produces until finally, after layer upon layer of gel, the sand turns into a pearl. And the oyster itself becomes more valuable in the process. At that moment, I discovered the ministry of irritation.”

I stay in the church with all my challenge and despite its resistance, knowing that before this is over, both it and I will have become what we have the capacity to be – followers of the Christ who listened to women, taught them theology, and raised them from the dead.

Editor’s Suggestion:  
ARC Members are invited to form  
their own  
Ministry of Irritation !!!

## Quotable Quotes

Suffering is the best school for any person. Someone who suffers becomes intelligent, committed, caring, because he has to think about essential things.

(Metropolitan Vitaly, Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia)

Go with the times, but from time to time come back. Love your enemy; it may give you a bad name. Not everyone who knows too much knows that. Philosophers! Take care not to find the stone of wisdom – it may hang around your neck. Do you know the password to your inner self? All people are equal – after appropriate preparation.

(from new ungrooved thoughts of Stanislaw Jerzy Lec)

# Women and Church Leadership

Alan Clague

This DRAFT could form the basis of a proposed position statement for ARC on the topic.  
Comments on the text are invited from all ARC members prior to finalising it.

Paul ordered women to remain silent in church, and so it has remained to this day. Greek women had interpreted his egalitarian message literally, and began to participate in leadership activities. This was too much for the men in patriarchal Greek society, leading to dissension at assemblies. So he 'pulled the plug' lest the assemblies self-destruct. He made many other *ad hoc* pronouncements in his letters to solve local problems in the communities he founded. This spirit of suppression of women lived on in the patriarchal societies of the time, and often had an overtly misogynistic thrust. St John Chrysostom wrote: 'For what is a woman but an enemy of friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a domestic danger, delectable mischief, a fault in nature...' and 'the well-proportioned body is only a whitened sepulchre'.

Many of the Church Fathers had a hatred of sex and blamed women for the lust of men. Origen castrated himself. St Augustine, having repented of his own sexual sins, was vituperative towards women. Often their rationale was based on the mythical Eve leading Adam into sin. Much was made of the corruptness of menstruation, reminiscent of the Jewish idea of ritual uncleanness. Power structures seek to create taboos that can be used to control the masses and, for Christianity, sex became the predominant taboo, with women the temptresses. They were unsuited for the priesthood, along with various other undesirables. The Fathers also wanted women to stay at home and not involve themselves with outside activities.

This contrasts with the liberation of women by Jesus. He was touched by the woman with the chronic vaginal haemorrhage, but did not consider himself ritually unclean. He had a serious discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well. He was deserted by his men at the crucifixion, but not by the women, and he first appeared to Mary of Magdala after his resurrection. His chosen twelve apostles were men, but they were symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel named after the sons of Jacob, and *had* to be men. It is unrealistic to extrapolate this to a permanent injunction against women adopting leadership roles in the Church.

Where are we today? In no other field of human activity are we using the thoughts of people from the distant past, reflecting the knowledge and mores of their times, to be our absolute guide to present behaviour. We have changed many of the norms of society since then. We are less tolerant of war, and are not likely to set out on any more crusades. We do not accept the divine right of kings or allow slavery or (in most countries) execution and torture. These were the norms of those past times. Cardinal Pell has spoken of the dangers of relativism. Yet it is the Church that persists with the relativistic assessment – originating from those times, and possibly pragmatic for those times – that women are unsuitable to become clergy. This assessment belongs to the age of witches and temple prostitutes, not to today's age of equality, which is the equality desired and practised by Jesus Christ.



Da Vinci's drawing is based on the Roman architect Vitruvius, a proponent of the Sacred Geometry of Pythagoras who designed temples based on the proportions of the human body, believing them to be perfectly proportioned to fit into both the circle and the square. The circle represents the spiritual realm while the square, the material existence. The human body represents the marriage of matter and spirit. All of this in the male body of course – that, in reality, has differences to the woman throughout. Excepting that all of the parts of a woman work whereas not so with the man. And so the question by Da Vinci. Why? Like it or not, man has these womanly body bits that really beg the question to the creationist and the intelligent designer.

Alan Holroyd

# Women speak out about the Church

## *And the Dance goes on*

From 1996-1999, the Australian Catholic Bishops conducted a research project on 'The participation of women in the Catholic Church'. Their report, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*, provided many tantalising glimpses into the vitality of faith in the lives of Catholic women.

*And the Dance goes on*, An anthology of Australian Catholic Women's Stories, recently-released by the Commission for Australian Catholic Women (published by John Garratt), grew from a desire to hear more of the stories of women and to ensure that the female tale of encounter with the Eternal Lover continues to be told. In practical terms, this means pursuing the example of the women who, through time, have endeavoured to follow Jesus' lead to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and to love your neighbour as you love yourself*. The stories in this anthology demonstrate that this call to love is lived out in many different ways. Many are openly critical of the Church – as it was, and as it continues to be.

### pre-Vatican II:

- Esmey Herscovitch: 'Our religiosity was pious and often joyless, emphasising sorrow, suffering, self-denial and "sacrifice".'
- Moira Gordon: 'God was remote rather than close, judgmental rather than tender.'

### post-Vatican II

- Annie Marsh: The Church is 'authoritarian, dogmatic, male-supremacist and exclusive' with readings included in the liturgy which sanction 'religious intolerance, deep misogyny and endemic violence'.
- Nance Millar is concerned by: 'the lack of recognition of women and their place in the Church, pastoral needs that were not being addressed, and lack of consultation.'
- Stephanie Kent is concerned by 'the backsliding our church is doing with regard to some of the decisions which were made at Vatican II' and also for the way the Church is alienating so many, especially the young.
- Noelene Bangal became disillusioned 'because of all the contradictions in the readings and the liturgy' and walked away from the Church.
- Maureen Flood spent five years in Rome but found: 'It was all so male. I had become a real feminist. I thought if I stay here I am going to lose my faith'.
- Kathleen McPhillips no longer attends weekly Mass: 'Once a place of deep spiritual nourishment, it has become now the expression of a language that is imperialist, triumphalist and deeply masculinist. There is no place in the liturgy of the Mass for my developing spirituality.'

Margaret Knowlden

## Moments

**Helen Kearins rsm**

Extract from: *Walk the Edges*  
printed with permission

### REFRAIN

*Remember who you are  
And sing your song,  
Let your "No" re-echo  
Making every woman strong  
Speak your truth  
And bring your brothers home*

1. Too many years in silence  
Seen but never heard.  
A language formed to keep us  
On the fringe without a word.  
Listen to the silence  
Hear your sisters cry,  
As each one tells her story  
The others learn to fly.

2. A word demanding answers  
Keeps happening in my mind;  
Trouble-making questions  
Seek truth, so hard to find;  
And in the new awareness  
Of the way that things have been  
Comes an anger at oppression  
That can still remain unseen.

3. The dawning of a new day  
Means dying to the old  
To images and patterns  
That can never make me whole.

Take time to curse the darkness,  
Mourn each others' pain.  
And in the power of grieving  
Resolve to live again.

4. Hands no longer holding  
Dreams of yesterday,  
Are free to hold another's  
And to show a different way  
Power once unknown  
At the bottom of the pile  
In the bonding of a circle  
Will reform the single file.

5. The bonding power of woman  
Brings new hope upon the earth;  
The hollowness of empires  
The timelessness of birth.  
Begin the celebrations  
Give image to the real  
Full consciousness of Being  
Only woman can reveal.

# Religion at the periphery

An ineradicable natural longing

*Ria van den Brandt*

For their religious doubts and longings people seek new words and sources of inspiration. They are happy to have faith, but how and in what? Those who want to observe all that flowers in the field of religion should certainly not restrict themselves to the established religions.

Imagine that one day it really happens: the Martians land on Earth and conquer the planet. To get a grip on everything, they have to make a solid inventory of their new possession. Forthwith, several committees are established. One of these occupies itself with the number of flowers and it sends off a little man to count all the species.

The little man is somewhat confused, because coming from Mars he does not really know what flowers are. He consults earthlings and, strengthened with some useful definitions and a calculator, he departs. It does not take long before he gets totally frustrated. Every time that he thinks that all flowers have been counted, he discovers new ones which are not very conspicuous because they grow alone and aside. But their beauty does not seem to be any less. His searching, openness of mind makes him record all varieties. One day, the little man feels that he has not completed his task by a long shot but the battery of his calculator expires and he decides to return to Headquarters. There he reports on his findings, summing up with his greatest amazement: 'Flowers always flourish where you don't expect them'. The chairman of the flower committee calls the little Martian 'soft and incapable little Venus-man'. He tells the little man to adjust his definitions and to restrict himself to the large nurseries.

Relieved that he is not sent back to Mars, the little man begins his second inventory. This time it is a lot easier. Even before his second battery expires, he returns to Headquarters. He reports on all the known – cultivated – flowers and ventures the somewhat philosophical question: 'Why is it that so many flowers bloom at the periphery of the nurseries or far beyond, at spots where you don't expect them?'

Whoever occupies him/herself with religion should make the same journey beyond the periphery as the little Martian in his first research. He or she should resist the temptation to restrict research to the large nurseries... Is it not so that whoever wants to observe everything that flowers in the field of religion must also make his or her way to the peripheries of the established religions and far beyond? That's easier said than done. Batteries run out and it seems that nobody is interested. And when interests do play a role, then it often concerns a religion research by a large nursery with the most important question: How does our own species survive, is our own growth of flowers sufficiently vital for

the future and how should we relate to the religious 'wild growth'? This sort of concern causes blindness to present religious doubts and longings and leads to reservations in respect of individualisation of religion, the flowering at the periphery of the large nurseries... To appreciate these blossoms at the edges you have to work in a liberal fashion and operate with broad definitions, free from narrow-mindedness. Anxious questions about truth and fallacy must be avoided. Religion is not a collection of doctrines about the 'true Faith', but rather an expression of an ineradicable natural longing. An often used broad definition of religion is: 'religion is every form of devotion to something Higher'. I would like to add two descriptions to this definition.

The first is from the theologian, Erik Borgman. He says about the religious life of people: 'They entrust themselves to what – in their mind – is trustworthy, dedicate and offer themselves to what – for them – is holy. And they let themselves be led by what they consider the supporting, ultimately perhaps, divine power. This description comprises a central experience, which is typical for much religious life: the trust in a supporting power, even when it seems there is no reason for it.

The second description can be found in a passage in which the philosopher Arnold Burms talks about Einstein. The awesome order of the universe is for some people, as for Einstein, like a confrontation with one's own insignificance in a gigantic world. Einstein does not experience this as a negative, but as a positive. For him it is a religious experience.

Burms points out the 'cosmic religious feeling' of Einstein and he sees in this attitude to life the thought 'that the human being – so to speak – is freed from him or herself, when he/she direct attention to the objective coherence, which is far away from the sphere of his/her personal concerns and ambitions'.

What strikes us in the descriptions of Borgman and Burms is that religious experience obviously has to do with placing yourself in – or entrusting yourself to – a greater totality. The ways in which that happens may vary greatly. In the more theological definition of Borgman the supporting power can be a personal God, while the 'cosmic religious feeling' of Einstein is indeed inspired by the impersonal cosmos.

The images of religion are very diverse and cannot be outlined and reduced to one highly specific image. Flowers need space to grow and so does religion. The water-lily requires a lot of water and the cactus prefers not to have water, but both plants need light. The biotope, the living

space, may differ, the bloom is the same. This also applies to religion. Those who understand the biotope already possess more understanding of the image of religion. Since the breeding ground of the large nurseries appears to be exhausted, other living spaces are sought. At first sight this 'shopping' would appear to be a fashion-phenomenon, but at second sight it is dealing with a generally experienced religious impasse. It would appear that masses of people have decided to settle at the peripheries of the large nurseries or beyond.

Looking at the situation in religious Holland makes it clear that many of the faithful cannot identify any more with the Christian tradition in which they grew up. They do not comprehend the somewhat worn-out language anymore; often they do not know how to reconcile the contrasts and contradictions. They feel alienated from the traditional religious thoughts. They want to believe, but how and in what? Many people let go of the too concrete images of their tradition. Many pictures – what to think about concepts such as 'heaven', 'hell', 'purgatory' and 'limbo' – are in the way. They are pictures that confuse, indeed even evoke aversion and misunderstanding. Often having originated in the distant past, they have lost their force for the present society. They can pinch off prematurely religious longings and genuine questions of life. But the giving up of the too concrete images can also provide space for what people consider as a religious centre-piece of traditional faith. For instance: after the abandonment of the ballast it is decided that the person of Jesus – whether divine or not divine – is still worth following. What he said and the way he lived is worth-while! Thus, people create for themselves a new, slimmed-down outlook on life, which often lacks definitions, but in which the desire to entrust themselves to something greater than themselves is certainly present. In this process there grows often interest in other sources of inspiration, interest for testimonies from outside the nurseries, of the periphery...

The twentieth century is chock-a-block with testimonies which have arisen outside the greenhouses, at unexpected spots. They are from people who – whether or not driven by a crisis – want to seek anew for what is of value to them. They move between or at the peripheries of large religious traditions, consider themselves often religious, but usually do not confess one specific faith or belong to one specific church. These testimonies, often diaries or letters, are points of orientation for many readers. A journey of search, which is often referred to, is the one of the Jewish diary writer Etty Hillesum (1914-1943). She described how she is searching for the 'ever valid words' and therefore she reads everything indiscriminately. Very diverse fragments of text inspire her and she writes them down for herself. One of the keywords that she encountered is 'love'. Old words get a new meaning in her search: 'For some time I have experienced that once in a while a sentence from the Bible becomes clear to me with a clear, new significance, rich in meaning – God created the human being in his image – love your neighbour as yourself.'

Another, lesser known exploration is that of the Jewish-German poetess Nelly Sachs (1891-1970). Also from her letters a search for words appears, which are forceful enough to help the poetess to survive the black period – the persecution and murder of the Jewish population during the Hitler regime. All the terror contributes to Nelly Sachs' critical stand towards institutionalised religions and dogmas of faith. She equates tradition with 'the taking over of what has once been decided' and in this respect she considers herself as an outsider of tradition. Institutionalisations are in her eyes 'restrictions contrived by humans'. These restrictions can, as dogmatic and historic moments, divide what has been bound together by love and unity. Nelly Sachs herself wants to restore the fluidity of what had been solidified. For her the divine is the 'unbounded, the flowingness, the ever-possible'. The divine is in all places where there is love. Her poems are like beautiful flowers which have sprung up at the edge of the Christian and Jewish traditions.

Texts such as those from Nelly Sachs and Etty Hillesum show us how religious longings find a new expression in personal mosaics of old and new words and changes in definitions. Both Jewish women relate so freely to the Christian and Jewish traditions that they can ask questions on the outlook on life in an open-minded and honest manner. One observes in both in the letting go of the old traditional images, also an increase in trust in words and images which for them have 'validity forever'.

This 'letting go' and return to the religious centre is recognised by many people at present. The testimonies and search-journeys of others like Hillesum and Sachs can act as mirrors for those who realise their own ignorance and want to search for new words and images. Doubts and religious longings need new vocabularies. It does not concern so much a complicated story that drowns out one's own uncertainties, but it concerns words which correspond with the deepest notions about life.

Thekla Reuten expressed such a deep notion: 'I base myself on the existence of something higher, call that God, call it love'. This testimony represents what lives among many people and it shows spiritual honesty: nothing more is said than is considered possible at that moment. It is a quote that – by way of speaking – could also have come from Hillesum or Sachs. In the same way as Hillesum had her exercise book, so do many contemporary people on the periphery have their own – imaginary – exercise book with words, sentences and stories, which are collected as precious stones. With these little stones that serve as road signs people design their own religious mosaics. Thus they shape their own religious intuitions.

These cautious formulations and fragmentary search journeys flower as inconspicuous blossoms at the peripheries of the large nurseries. You can find them at spots where you don't expect them. And whoever has an eye for it, sees how religious longings will time and time again seek a path to travel. □

# Elected Bishops?

*George Ripon*

The Catholic Church is not a democracy. How often have we heard that said? Often with the inference 'end of story – no more discussion'. But why not? Certainly the basics of our Faith are not negotiable. We start with the Ten Commandments further enriched by the teaching and example of Jesus in the Gospels. These are the rocks on which our Faith is founded. Over the centuries the Church has added to the teachings with directives for the faithful to observe. Many of these have changed or disappeared. Where now is Friday abstinence; compulsory Mass attendance on Sundays or Holy days of obligation; fasting in Lent and before Holy Communion; Easter duty; indulgences and many others? Much has changed but in my view more, much more must change.

There are areas where the involvement of the 'People of God' in a democratic process would be advantageous in this day and age. I will get to these shortly, but firstly, a few words about where I come from. Now enjoying retirement, I am the product of an Irish Catholic upbringing and education from the 1930's and 40's. Life, compared to today, was simple and authority reigned. At home we did as we were told, likewise at school. The Government told everyone what to do and the Church reigned supreme. In our small town, three or four Priests (led by a mighty Canon) lived in the Parish House. The Bishop was not far away and half a dozen Maynooth-trained Priests taught us at the secondary college. There was no shortage of clergy.

So much for the past, what about today? Whether we like it or not, change is in the air. The traditional male celibate priesthood, which has served us well over the years, is running out – fast. Unlike my early experience, church teaching no longer has automatic acceptance as people now need to be convinced of the merit and value of what is on offer. Many indeed have given away the tradition of regular Mass attendance and reception of the Sacraments. So what is our future? How can we revive our Church?

What would Jesus do? He promised that His Church would survive. Should we rely on this and hope to muddle through? I suspect that He would want us to use our brains with prayer and discernment to map out our future. In the Beatitudes, He indicated the personal qualities for which we should aim. In His account of the Last Judgement, He warned us that we would be accountable for the way we had treated others, particularly the needy and disadvantaged. He set up Peter to be in charge of the Sheep and the Lambs; to feed them – not to Lord it over them. Roughly translated this gave us, in today's terms, a three-tiered structure of Bishops, Priests and People.

The Pope as Bishop of Rome is the Head Bishop but *Primus Inter Pares* if we accept Vatican II's promotion of 'collegiality'. Next come the clergy and at the base of the triangle, the people (of God?). It is in the selection of Bishops and parish clergy that the present processes must change to give the faithful the right to democratic involvement. We could benefit at the present time by following our Anglican friends as they agonise over selecting their next Archbishop of Melbourne. This, to my mind, is the starting point for real change – allowing the faithful to elect our local Bishops. The secret and mysterious process from which new Bishops emerge must go. Can we imagine the impact of popularly elected Bishops going to Rome, seeking answers and action for our many problems? It might be a shock to the system, but one 'that we have to have'. How do we do it? We could start with the Deanery concept. In the 1980's Archbishop Little set up the Melbourne Deaneries. Each one has about 12 adjoining parishes. He then instructed the local clergy and the people to sit down together and reflect on the future of the Church. Everything was on the agenda with no directives from on high. A new way of the faithful doing things should be devised by the faithful. Without the parishioners in the pews we have no church. The people should be involved and heard on processes of change.

Catholics would be encouraged to register to vote. Names would go on a database with appropriate privacy protection. When an Episcopal vacancy occurred, all those living in the region involved, or the Diocese, would be entitled to vote. A committee of lay people and local clergy would draw up a short list of local clergy willing to nominate. Voting would be by mail and supervised by a reputable accounting body. The process would need to be worked out but the principle would remain, the 'People of God' electing the new local Bishop. Rome would be advised of the new appointment.

The threefold order to which I referred above has changed in recent times. We now have the Vatican bureaucracy very much in control. It also controls the appointment of Bishops who form the second tier of the structure. At the lower end, the laity are joined with the parish clergy. The effect is that the people and the parish clergy are out numbered by two to one. Others have written about the quality of some of the Vatican-appointed Bishops: conservative and 'safe' with no rocking of the boat. Elected Bishops would go to Rome, backed by the people at home. Instead of working to a pre-arranged agenda to report that the locals were still 'paying, praying and obeying', they could demand answers and action for the grassroots problems

facing the local churches. Top priority would be where we find the next generation of Priests, and all the other problems regularly documented by commentators.

So much for the next generation of Bishops, but how about the local clergy? In my inter-church wanderings I have seen the process adopted by the Anglican and Uniting Churches on the appointment of new Priests and Ministers. It's more like a job application, where the applicant fronts up before a group of parishioners. He (or she) is put under the microscope as to suitability. With reasonable numbers still coming through their seminaries, there are often quite a few applicants. How different from our tradition where if he has one available, the new PP is sent by the Bishop with

no local consultation. Sadly, we are so short of Priests that any reform here will have to wait.

However if we could get to a situation where our Bishops were elected by us and not beholden to Rome, I believe we could see great changes initiated. Meanwhile we wait in 'joyful hope.'

**GEORGE RIPON** is a parishoner of St. Patrick's Church Murrumbena in the Archdiocese of Melbourne interested in Church Reform, Ecumenism and Christian Meditation. This article first appeared in ONLINE CATHOLICS Saturday 18 March, 2006. It is published with their permission. □



## Australian Reforming Catholics Annual Conference

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# In the Heart of the Temple

*My Spiritual Vision for Today's World*

Joan Chittister

Edited extract from the chapter entitled 'Vision'

1. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: The church, the Council declared, is 'the people of God' – the focus shifts to being carriers of faith. BUT then the tensions multiply ... People who do not 'belong' to a church but who 'are' the church begin to take that focus seriously and in ways that alter past patterns and beliefs. They begin to make clear that they want their church open to women, open to homosexuals, open to married priests, open to women priests and preachers, open to lay consultation. In other words, they want their wings.
2. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*: The place of scripture in Catholic formation re-energized literary exegesis and historical scholarship. BUT if scripture, for instance, has nothing at all to say about the ordination of women, on what basis do we use Jesus as our right to obstruct it? It is the question of the place of scripture, the model of Jesus, in the development of doctrine that must give us all new wings.
3. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: The institution of the vernacular as an 'official' language of consecration was a great breakthrough for Christian community. BUT the liturgy became a battleground where bread recipes, the gender, dress and geography of altar servers and ministers became theologically central, and the translations of pronouns were centers of conflict and control. If we do not get beyond this, there will be no Eucharistic wings on which to fly.
4. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: The church turned squarely from an insular perspective to the consideration of the essential connectedness of the sacred and the secular. BUT the tensions are clear. Someone must still ask, How much involvement is too much involvement of church in politics? When does advocacy become control? The answers are slow in coming but on them lies the very existence of wings.
5. *Decree on Ecumenism*: This statement affirms the diversity of gifts – liturgical, spiritual, and theological – that make up the whole church of Christ in all its denominations. BUT the challenge is to move Christian ecumenism beyond ecclesiastical get-togethers to the recognition of the single mission and the common table of the total Christian church. Vatican II and its outreach to the entire Christian dispensation is the root that gives the faith wings.
6. *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church*: The bishop's role is to enable the church, to be in touch with issues and ideas, to create a national identity. BUT the question of international control of the newly heightened local church is the high water to be negotiated now. Without resolving this, pastoral paralysis will surely set in as bishops are turned into altar boys. It is to tie the wings we have been given.
7. *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* and the *Decree on Priestly Formation*: Clericalism dies an official death – the priest is to be spiritual catalyst, not parish potentate. BUT the role revision sounds a great deal easier in theory than it is in practice.
8. *The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life*: Vatican II called religious life to turn to the gospels, the initiating intent of their founders and the social realities of the times, not to church law or episcopal control, for their criteria and direction. BUT are women religious to be the good sisters, the darling daughters of the church, or the dangerous women sent from the tomb with a message on their minds and a gospel in their hands? The struggle between control and charism is getting stronger every day as religious use their roots to justify their wings.
9. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*: The lay state began to be described as a 'vocation.' – participation rather than passivity became a factor of lay commitment. BUT, if the laity really are gifted for the sake of the Christian community, does this mean lay women, too, or only lay men? And if it does mean women, why are they not being generally, wholly, totally accepted in worship or administration, in the diaconate, at least, for which we have centuries of women deacons as models? The preparation of the laity guarantees that the church will always have the wings it needs.
10. *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, Missionaries are to be more presence than proselytizers. They are to become inculturated, and, as quickly as possible, enable the new church to become a native church ... Western ecclesiastical imperialism is finally over. BUT this growing shift in the center of the church has done little or nothing to dislodge Roman curial control. Tension is inherent here. How long new native churches will tolerate Western formulations, Western interpretations, Western liturgical forms, and Western theological analysis is anybody's guess.
11. *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*: As Christians, we must accept 'all that is true and holy' in non-Christian religions, and the church officially condemns any persecution or discrimination based on race, color, condition of life, or religion. BUT gays and lesbians are yet to be seen more as normal than 'disordered', and women are still considered outside the pale of a God who parts the seas, draws water from a rock, and raises the dead

to life, but cannot and will not work through a woman. Apparently femaleness is the only substance before which God goes impotent.

12. *Declaration on Religious Freedom*: Conscience must be the primary determinant of religious conviction. BUT what is

the line between church and state? What is the place for conscience in individuals? What does that have to do with the development of doctrine and the measure of our own Catholicity? People do not question because they reject the church. They question the church because they love the church.

**I**n Vatican II they taught a whole new way of being church – and we believed them. BUT being rooted in Vatican II is not enough to make yourself a Vatican II Catholic. It is just as necessary to develop Vatican II as it is to preserve it, to grow its wings as to prune its branches. And each of these documents of Vatican II cries out yet for wings by believers who are as committed to the present and dedicated to the future as they are rooted in the past. For the next 25 years it is not necessary to repeat the agenda of Vatican II, but to complete it. We are struggling now with silencing for thinkers and *mandatums* for theologians, and recipes for liturgy and a newly emerging authoritarian pastoring and a parallel priesthood independent of local bishops and more committed to some transcendent ideology than to the enculturation of the local church – a system to be reckoned with in the future.

**B**UT there are signs of great hope as well. There are lay theologians now who speak a bold truth. There are groups who know they are the new church in embryo: Dignity and the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church and Women's Ordination Conference. Quixote Center and Pax Christi and the Center of Concern and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Conference of Major Superiors of Men. And especially Call to Action, this great flowing movement of faithful hearts.\* There is, most of all, the Holy Spirit who refuses to give up on us. ... There are the wings that come from Vatican II itself to carry us – because of our roots – beyond our roots. The message of Vatican II at this moment is still: Go on! Fly, church, fly!

\* We could of course add Australian Reforming Catholics to this list!

*Editor*

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## International Observations

Jim Taverne

**I**n the early 1970's a General Synod of all the German Dioceses took place in Würzburg. At this Synod it was decided to establish Diocesan Lay Councils. Such a council operated successfully in the diocese of Regensburg (Bavaria) until the present bishop, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, decided in November 2005 to abolish it.

This, together with other measures taken by the bishop, caused an atmosphere of fear and anger in the diocese. One of the victims of Müller's decrees is Prof. Dr. Johannes Grabmeier who was very important in the Lay Council; another is Mr. Paul Winkler, the regional spokesperson of *Wir sind Kirche*, who, last European summer, lost his mission canonica for religious instruction in schools. Bishop Müller accuses *Wir sind Kirche* of being hostile to the Church.

Both men appealed to the Congregation for the Clergy, but their appeals were rejected in April 2006. There were no valid arguments given by the Congregation...

We were asked by one of the spokespersons of *Wir sind Kirche* (Mrs Sigrig Grabmeier) whether it is true that the Vatican higher court had declared a decree by the Congregation for the Clergy against a particular Australian rite invalid, when the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

had objected against that decree. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find any indication of this. Mrs Grabmeier wrote: '...Of course they keep it secret'.

*Wir sind Kirche* is extending their website by increasing the number of reports in English, French and Spanish, when their subjects are of international interest.

Professor Johannes' wife, Sigrig Grabmeier, reads *ARCvoice* (which she has been receiving for the last 1½ years) with interest and passes its contents on to others. She was happy to read our translations of *Wir sind Kirche*'s letter to the German bishops in *ARCvoice* 19.

The last sentence of Mrs. Grabmeier's letter is as follows:

Perhaps we can offer you our experiences with World-Youth-Day in Cologne (Köln) last year. You will be the next to experience it.

The first time Sigrig Grabmeier wrote to us was when Cardinal Pell intervened in our preparations for the ARC Conference in 2004. That caused me to include her name in the list of people who to whom we send *ARCvoice*.

In her recent letter she calls Bishop Müller 'a sort of twin of Cardinal Pell!'

### 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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4/1035 Pacific Highway

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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.

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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**

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 Brochure

This 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:

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Would you like to be part of ARC's on-line discussion group? Yes/No

Would you like to do share in the work for ARC in any way? Yes/No

If yes, please let us know what you would want to do.

Send to ARC  
c/. Jim Taverne  
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