

arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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Royal Commission Puts the Church in the Spotlight

The wrap-up of the responses made by the Catholic Church to the sexual abuse of children was heard in the Royal Commission over three weeks, culminating on the 24th February with the perspectives of five of our most senior clerics. I watched all the sessions on each day and was very impressed with the professionalism of the Commissioners, the Council assisting them, and several witnesses who had particular expertise in psychology. Taking into account the horrendous extent of the abuse perpetrated by clergy and religious, much of which has been known for some time, it was disconcerting to find out that so little has been done to this point by Church authorities to address the major issues. It seemed that the clerics and heads of religious groups, in contrast with the professional preparation of their questioners, were either now caught out for answers or frightened to give the appropriate answers that were required. Surely this was not lost on the very perceptive Commissioner Justice Peter McClellan.

Clericalism was identified as a major factor in the abuse and it was very clear that the archbishops, in particular, are so steeped in the culture of clericalism that they eschew that they cannot even recognise it. They appeared so frightened of saying anything that could draw the attention of the Vatican that they stumbled for words constantly. They could not even answer the question about what they would do to change that culture. Commissioner McClellan asked what it meant that a priest was 'ontologically changed' at ordination. Archbishop Coleridge went into a lengthy repetitive round of gobbledygook. The Commissioner, a very intelligent man, who usually thanks those from whom he requests a detailed

explanation, was left just staring blankly. None of the other four Archbishops dared to come to the rescue. If they couldn't admit that the whole concept is nonsense then they might have said that it was a way of thinking that is no longer applied, in order to save some credibility. Was the sacking of Bishop Morris too much on their minds?

It was also quite evident that any structures that are established to monitor the arrangements made to prevent the sexual abuse of children must be independent of the Church hierarchy. After two lengthy Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015 the Vatican report arising from these only stated that some sexual abuse occurred. The Irish woman Marie

continued over

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Collins, who was the last remaining survivor of sexual abuse to resign from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, has just done so because of resistance to change by the Roman Curia. The power of Rome is heavy in the consciousness of our hierarchy and we can expect that they will attempt to use their own discretion rather than follow the direction of any regulatory body if the Vatican does not support it. If the Royal Commission wants to ensure that the Church overcomes its obvious structural deficiencies and always follows certain procedures to guarantee the protection of children, then it seems that it will have to recommend some legislation to cover it.

John Buggy

Letters

While I think of it, I must thank you for the newsletter which I do appreciate as I do all the activities of ARC. Life is just so hectic even at 80 and not helped by the bolshie bones etc that are par for the course for many people, but I do hope to renew my sub. when I get through other jobs waiting in this ever more chaotic house. (I am still a hospital and ex-service chaplain etc.)

It does give me joy to know of the very existence of such groups as ARC as my own Diocese becomes ever more intolerant. The Archbishop recently banned Keith Mascord, a very fine priest, working as a parole officer from even officiating in his local church because of his 'un-Anglican' views, i.e. fairly normal views of the Scriptures, expressed notably in his book, *A Restless Faith: Leaving Fundamentalism in a Quest for God*. And one by one, the light of moderation in the few remaining parish churches of a moderate catholic tradition is being extinguished.

Pope Francis continues to give one hope even if he does not support some reforms that would be very welcome. It is good for the future to see him appointing good men as cardinals. I was rather dismayed, however, to see Cardinal Pell's name among a group who have openly criticised him, especially as Pell received his important and necessary job from Pope Francis.

I encountered a nice part of the Church on Saturday, staying for the first time at Mary Mackillop at North Sydney, excellent but inexpensive accommodation (a TV even in my non-ensuite room) and fine breakfast.

I was reminded of a very different Church when reading John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope* in a 2008 edition which includes his reply to those critics who have wanted to beatify the now 'Venerable' pontiff – a reply not mentioned in the very long Wikipedia article that generally takes a quite different view – and which readers are asked at present not to 'edit'.

Wishing you and ARC many blessings,

**Fr John Bunyan
Campbelltown**

Gravity of sex abuse still eludes prelate

(Letters, *Sydney Morning Herald* 27.2.17)

At the hearing on Friday, counsel assisting the royal commission into child sex abuse, Gail Furness, asked Archbishop Anthony Fisher about the Sydney archdiocese practice in relation to monitoring offenders ('Outrage over church's financial support for paedophile priests', *smb online*, February 24). I was disheartened, though unsurprised, when the Archbishop concluded his reply by saying 'I can't pretend we have remotely sufficient supervision for me to be assured that they are not misbehaving'.

I wish to highlight the use of the word 'misbehaving'. I cannot believe the Church is yet serious about the issue when one of its leaders can speak in terms of this crime as being 'misbehaviour'. In previous cases heard by the commission, this was a term repeatedly used by clergy to describe the criminal acts of child sex abuse perpetrated by priests and brothers. That the Archbishop of Sydney still considers it an appropriate description illustrates a serious deficit in understanding.

Helen Coles, Engadine

Business as usual (SMH Letters 28.2.27)

Helen Coles (Letters, February 27) needs to read an informative *Herald* article written in 2008 titled "Stop 'dwelling crankily' on sex abuse: bishop".

Anthony Fisher, then charged with organising World Youth Day, had less than appropriate things to say about Anthony Foster, whose daughters were raped by a Melbourne priest.

Foster appeared on the ABC program *Lateline*. The following day Fisher uttered the following: "Happily, I think most of Australia was enjoying [and] delighting in the beauty and goodness of those young people and the hope for us doing these sort of things better in the future, as we saw last night, rather than dwelling crankily, as a few people are doing, on old wounds."

I wonder if we can classify Fisher's comments on him "misbehaving".

This attitude doesn't seem to have put a halt to his career; he was later promoted to Bishop of Parramatta followed by his elevation to Archbishop of Sydney.

I am sorry, but the adage still stands regarding leopards and spots.

Neil Purcell, Matraville

The Catholic bishops don't understand their responsibility and accountability

John Menadue

Pearls & Irritations— 27 Feb 2017

In any other walk of life or area of public administration, admission of criminal neglect would be a prelude to the tendering of resignations. The criminally negligent are not fit and proper persons to hold senior administrative responsibilities. Not so in the Catholic Church because it's all someone else's responsibility.

It's very rare that an emperor tells us he has no clothes. But hats off to one that does. That's almost what the Australian bishops have just done after being driven to their knees by the scale and reach of sex abuse in the Church. It was revealed in their 'wrap-up' before the Royal Commission.

Of course these emperors don't admit that THEY have no clothes. It's their predecessors who are shown to be naked before the truth. Their predecessors were '*scandalously inefficient, ... hopelessly inadequate ... just totally wrong*' They were even found by one of their number with a law degree – Anthony Fisher of Sydney – to have been '*criminally negligent*'.

'Negligent and criminally so' indeed! If they were still alive, a former archbishop and two former bishops would certainly face charges and in all likelihood have been sent to gaol.

In any other walk of life or area of public administration, admission of criminal neglect would be a prelude to the tendering of resignations. The criminally negligent are not fit and proper persons to hold senior administrative responsibilities.

Not so in the Catholic Church because it's all someone else's responsibility. It's as if the world Donald Trump is creating in the USA has always been alive and well in the way the Catholic Church runs its affairs.

After the three-week Catholic 'wrap up' at the Royal Commission into child abuse in institutions, the President of the Australian bishops, Denis Hart made this promise:

As the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference I make this commitment to the survivors of child sexual abuse, the Catholic and broader community: I will do all within my power to ensure the abuse of the past never happens again, that the reforms my fellow bishops and religious leaders have endorsed over the past years will be implemented. I reiterate that the Catholic Church in Australia will continue to support the survivors of child sexual abuse.

The only things missing from this promise and all the other sentiments expressed in his press release is any ownership of responsibility and accountability for *creating* the destructive mess in the first place or any commitment to addressing the structural causes of the problem in the way the church organises its life and administration. For example, all the bishops were appointed through a rigged system that excludes the people of the Church. Beneficiaries of such a system are hardly likely to want to change it.

Parishes have no say in the appointment and supervision of parish priests.

Some Australian bishops have been held to account for their activities and removed from office. Take the way Rome, urged on by Cardinal Pell and others, dealt summarily with Bishop William Morris over trivialities involved in the administration of the sacraments or mentioning the unmentionable (women priests). It was never made clear what he was sacked for.

When it comes to the big things that matter in life – like really taking responsibility for how bad the governance, culture and exercise of power in the Church is, especially when it comes to protecting the innocent – the Australian bishops have yet to show they get it.

Power and its abuse are at the heart of the problem as Bishop Geoffrey Robinson made very clear over two decades ago. Anything else is just talk. Fellow bishops quickly rejected what Bishop Robinson was saying and shunted him aside. See link to my previous post '[How the Australian Bishops and Rome ignored the warnings](#)'.

Protocols, commitments to victims and regulatory bodies will all fail in their purpose if the real cancer eating away at the institution is not diagnosed and treated.

Power, like sex, is a human constant. Power in human affairs can and should never be eliminated. Structuring it with proper checks and balances is the challenge. Its abuse will not be touched and treated as long as no one takes personal responsibility for maladministration.

This allows the causes of the abuse of power (and sex) in the life and fabric of the institution to escape detection and treatment. □

The final day: more productive than perhaps many expected

Brian Coyne

Catholica—24.2.2017

In some ways the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse might be likened in its tsunami-like impact on the Church in Australia to the impact of the Second Vatican Council. I think it true to say it has had more impact on my life than any other event I can think of since that **Council** albeit nowhere near as positive in impact as the Council had.

On Friday 24 February, the Royal Commission concluded its public hearings into the Catholic Church. Thursday and Friday in particular were probably the first time in the entire history of this nation when all of the nation's Metropolitan Archbishops appeared under oath at the public hearing to account for the way the Church had been governed. These hearings concluded three weeks of hearings where a total of over 65 personnel were called to testify, some of them on a number of occasions.

The hearings were split into a total of 17 panels which examined the following subjects:

- Structure, governance and culture (three separate panels)
- Church discipline and secrecy
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation
- International safeguarding
- Formation of priests and church personnel (two panels)
- Professional support and supervision
- Community services
- Catholic education offices and governance
- Child safety, complaint handling and risk management
- Catholic Professional Standards Limited (The new company being established by the Bishops and Catholic religious to oversee Professional Standards)
- Examination of four Bishops & two Non-Metropolitan Archbishops
- Examination of Leaders of religious institutes

Examination of three Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

Examination of the five Metropolitan Archbishops

Catastrophic...

As Bishops and Archbishops themselves have admitted this scandal and tragedy has been 'catastrophic' for the Church. It has been catastrophic in terms of the damage done to so many victims and their families. (This hearing, for the first time, has published comprehensive statistics on the full extent of the abuse and the costs.) It has been catastrophic for the morale of virtually everyone in the institution except for those who have plugged their ears for decades. It has had a massive financial impact — and there is a lot more of that to come. It has more than probably had a further catastrophic impact on Mass and Sacramental participation figures. (The participation rate of adult Catholics across this nation was already down at about 12.8% in the last official count before this Royal Commission commenced and those who follow these matters closely expect the publicity coming out of the Royal Commission has more than probably now reduced the participation rate below 10%.)

A slight glimmer of hope...

On the second last day of this hearing three members of the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors agreed to appear before the Commission. The earlier evidence given to the Commissioners was that they would not be appearing but merely providing written statements. From the questioning they were subjected to it appears there is going to be some movement on the question of mandatory reporting at the international level. It is a subject for their next meeting in March. The Vatican has already received some criticism internationally on this matter as the Holy See has previously been asked to move on this matter by two committees of the United Nations. Collectively Bishops in Australia, the United States and Ireland have been requesting this for many years. Cardinal O'Malley in a recent press statement indicated that this would be implemented and there was some consternation when there was no mention of the subject in a later statement from Pope Francis. It is acknowledged as a difficult subject for implementation in some countries but it now seems some action is going to happen at the level of the Vatican.

For the rest of this article, see *Catholica*

A Different Drum

Noelene Uren

Many years ago, when I was in charge of an Infants Department in a Primary School, there was a boy in Year 2 who was constantly disruptive in class. A child obviously doted upon by his mother, he had become a problem. So I asked her to come in for a chat. She was, however, totally unprepared to listen to any of my suggestions and merely said, ‘You don’t understand. He walks to the beat of a different drum.’

Now I knew the Thoreau quote: **‘If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music that he hears, however measured and far away.’** But this mother had interpreted it as meaning that he could do what he liked when he liked.

It seems to me that there are many in our society now who also believe this. They are not only marching to their own drum, they are positively banging it, failing, as that mother did, to understand that marching to your own drum also means that you respect other’s rights to do the same. Fear of the different and unknown elements among us has led to a society that is so angry, confrontational, so ready to take offence. People no longer listen to what is being said; all they are doing is waiting to jump in with their own opinion of what is right.

So what can we do about it? Here’s a revolutionary thought. Why should the priest or deacon always be the one to give the homily? Why not draw from the vast bank of talented, experienced men and women of the parish, many of whom in their daily work have to address groups, and do it with wit and wisdom. We need to face this



problem of ‘the world revolves around me’, and lead, especially the young, to understand that yes, there is no-one in the world quite like me, but that applies to each and every human. Each has a right to be themselves, but in a society we also have a duty to try to rub along together. Seeing others as different from ourselves, we often conclude that these differences are bad and we have to fix it. As Henry Higgins wonders of Eliza in *My Fair Lady*, why couldn’t she simply, ‘be like me’!

Professor David Keirsey in his book, *Please Understand Me*, has this to say:

If you do not want what I want, try not to tell me that my want is wrong. If my beliefs are different from yours, at least pause before you set out to correct them. If my emotion seems less or more intense than yours, try not to ask me to feel other than I do. If I act, or fail to act, in a manner of your design for action, please let me be. You and I are fundamentally different and both of us have to march to our own drummer.

Indeed we need to recognise and value differences, to recognise the beauty of diversity, and to live together in faith and love. A tall order, but a message that needs to be spread and maybe the laity can do it.

NOELENE UREN is a retired primary school principal.

MacCulloch’s *A History of Christianity*, dealing with the period 1100-1300:

‘..... A problem remained: the clerically dominated structure of Latin Western Christianity had not exhausted the yearning of lay folk to show that they were active participants in the Body of Christ which was His Church.’

Meanwhile, 900 or more years later

Reformation – Right and Wrong ???

John Bunyan

The 500th anniversary Reformation commemoration I hope will not be one-sided. We can rejoice in true reforms with benefits then and more benefits for us all in the long term. However, we should not forget the tragic consequences of the divisions.

I think of the destruction of much beauty and the loss of monastic social services in England and elsewhere, the loss of much genuine spirituality, and the seeds of secularisation. Far worse, was mutual persecution and intolerance, the burning of witches especially in Calvinist territories, the massacre of Protestants in France, and religious elements added to wars in Europe and in Britain. I think of Sir Thomas More helping to hunt down Tyndale, and of the Marian Martyrs, but also of Margaret Clitheroe judicially crushed to death (horrifying Queen Elizabeth herself), of the burning of Servetus welcomed by Calvin and other leading Reformers, of simple Unitarian Bible Christians whom Cranmer, Coverdale and Ridley in court sentenced to death by burning, of young Quaker Mary Dyer hanged in Boston by the Puritans, of Edward Wightman, a Baptist burnt to death for heresy in England as late as 1612.

And, worst of all, I think of Luther's appalling verbal attacks upon the Jews that sowed more seeds of dreadful anti-Judaism, bearing evil fruit under the Nazis who happily quoted him. Archdeacon T.C. Hammond wrote of this long ago but Thomas Kaufmann's recent scholarly, balanced, meticulous study, *Luther's Jews: The Journey into Anti-Semitism* leaves Luther condemned. I should observe not Luther's action at Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517, but instead October 28th, fifty years earlier, the date of the birth of Erasmus, eirenic Roman Catholic priest and reformer. One could add the 18th October, when John Hus (opponent of indulgences long before Luther, later martyred) in 1412 affirmed Jesus as our supreme Judge.

Certainly any commemoration of the Reformation should not be without honest regret and shame – and some reconciliation, I hope, between Christians but also between Christians and our Lord's own people who have suffered so terribly at Christian hands before and during and since the Reformation.

JOHN REYNOLDS BUNYAN, is a deacon and priest of the Diocese of Sydney, a parishioner of St. John the Baptist's, Canberra, an adherent of St Stephen's Uniting Church, Sydney, and a member of the historic unitarian Christian church, King's Chapel, Boston, USA. He has served in Australia and England. In retirement, he is Honorary C. of E. Chaplain at Bankstown Hospital, and Honorary Chaplain of the Macarthur-Ingleburn National Servicemen's Association and of the Australian Intelligence Corps Association.



In 1517 Martin Luther penned a document attacking the selling of indulgences. His 95 Theses were to spark the Reformation and the split with the Catholic Church. Germany is celebrating the 500th anniversary of this act.

Summary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses

Martin Luther wrote his 95 theses in 1517 as a protest against the selling of indulgences. After he sent a copy of the theses to Albert of Mainz (who sent a copy to Pope Leo), Luther continued to write, elaborating on the issues raised.

He makes three main points in his 95 Theses. (The following is translated from the original German)

1. Selling indulgences to finance the building of St. Peter's is wrong

The revenues of all Christendom are being sucked into this insatiable basilica. The Germans laugh at calling this the common treasure of Christendom. Before long, all the churches, palaces, walls and bridges of Rome will be built out of our money. First of all, we should rear living temples, not local churches, and only last of all St. Peter's, which is not necessary for us. We Germans cannot attend St. Peter's. Better that it should never be built than that our parochial churches should be despoiled. ... Why doesn't the pope build the basilica of St. Peter's out of his own money? He is richer than Croesus. He would do better to sell St. Peter's and give the money to the poor folk who are being fleeced by the hawkers of indulgences.

2. The pope has no power over Purgatory

Papal indulgences do not remove guilt. Beware of those who say that indulgences effect reconciliation with God. ... He who is contrite has plenary remission of guilt and penalty without indulgences. The pope can only remove those penalties which he himself has imposed on earth, for Christ did not say, 'Whatsoever I have bound in heaven you may loose on earth'.

Therefore I claim that the pope has no jurisdiction over Purgatory. ... If the pope does have power to release anyone from Purgatory, why in the name of love does he not abolish Purgatory by

letting everyone out? If for the sake of miserable money he released uncounted souls, why should he not for the sake of most holy love empty the place? To say that souls are liberated from Purgatory is audacious. To say they are released as soon as the coffer rings is to incite avarice. The pope would do better to give everything away without charge.'

3. Buying indulgences gives people a false sense of security and endangers their salvation

Indulgences are positively harmful to the recipient because they impede salvation by diverting charity and inducing a false sense of security. Christians should be taught that he who gives to the poor is better than he who receives a pardon. He who spends money on indulgences instead of relieving want receives not the indulgence of the pope but the indignation of God. ...

Indulgences are most pernicious because they induce complacency and thereby imperil salvation. Those persons are damned who think that letters of indulgence make them certain of salvation. God works by contraries so that a man feels himself to be lost in the very moment when he is on the point of being saved. ... Man must first cry out that there is no health in him. He must be consumed with horror. This is the pain of Purgatory. ...

In this disturbance salvation begins. When man believes himself to be utterly lost, light breaks. Peace comes in the word of Christ through faith. He who does not have this is lost even though he be absolved a million times by the pope, and he who does have it may not wish to be released from Purgatory, for true contrition seeks penalty. Christians should be encouraged to bear the cross.



The Sale of Indulgences

A house built partly on sand

Alan Clague

Jesus' well-known parable of the man who built his house on sand, only to see it washed away when storms came (Matt 7:24-27) should have resonance for today's Western Catholic Church, which is being buffeted by the storms of 21st century Western culture and science, and has entered a period of numerical decline. The Church has been built on the rock of the word of God, as expressed in the Bible, and many traditions built up over the centuries. Sadly, however, some of these traditions have been shown by the more intense scrutiny of today to be built on sand, and must be extirpated to ensure the future integrity of our beloved house, the Church.

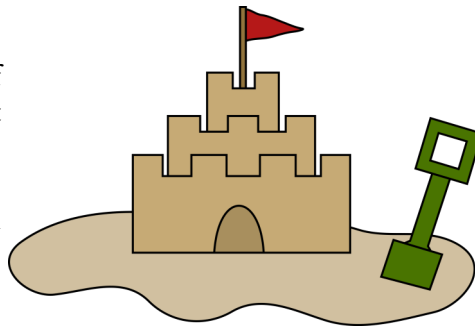
The successful acceptance, expansion and predominance of the Western Church in the past has been based on alliances of the Church with secular rulers, starting with Constantine and ending, perhaps, with the 1929 Concordat with Mussolini. Countries were converted when their ruler was converted. This led to a succession of unholy deals with despots and, until recently, a suspicion of democracy. In today's Western world, this huge chunk of history is viewed as evidence of the unholiness of Christianity. The power obtained by secular alliances was matched by creation of a rigid power structure within the Catholic Church, having the Pope at its apex. Jesus rebuked the apostles arguing about who was the greatest, and told them the leader must be like one who serves (Luke 22:24-27). Throughout the ages, scandalous conduct by powerful figures within the Church hierarchy has damaged the reputation of the Church, and even today conservative elitist forces within the Church are attempting to derail the structural reforms of Pope Francis. These pillars of secular and internal power structures were built of sand.

The Bishop of Rome has always been the 'first among equals', but the main players in the early Church Councils were Eastern Christians. These Church Councils were considered the pre-eminent

bodies for decision-making. Church leaders were chosen with diocesan processes, not by Roman decree. This is now effectively controlled by Rome. Would George Pell have been chosen as Archbishop of Sydney by an Archdiocesan approval process? Disregard of local sentiment coupled with centralisation of power is another sandy pillar that is troubling not only the Church but also Western democracies. The Church should return to its roots.

The reluctance of the Church to come to terms with modern science, best exemplified by its treatment of Galileo and his refutation of a geocentric universe, is well known to most. Much of this reluctance was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Bible, which was thought to be a historical and scientific document. Thus the extreme age of the world and the evolution of humanity from other forms of life was viewed with great suspicion. In the 20th century, St Pius X attempted to destroy 'Modernism' within the Church, and it was only in 1943 that Catholic biblical scholars were authorised to study the Bible scientifically in its original Hebrew and Greek. Paradoxically, it has been the scientific study of the Bible that has allowed us to dispel the misinterpretations of the past and confirm its rightful place as the central rock of Christianity.

The role of women in the early Church is hotly disputed. The grouping of apostles as twelve males is now thought to be primarily symbolical of the twelve tribes of Israel. Paul's Church leaders were both male and female; he stated men and women were one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28), and he authorised women to prophesy (1 Cor 11:5). Biblical scholars now accept that his instruction for women to remain silent in Church (1 Cor 14: 34-35) was a fraudulent addendum inserted long after Paul's death, possibly by the author of the Pastoral epistles, which express similar sentiments. For a time there appear to have been women priests and deacons, but the custom was suppressed and the suppressed role of women in typical Greco-Roman custom of the time became adopted. In our own generation the role of women in secular society has changed dramatically and is approaching the authentic Pauline ideal. Yet the Church still clings on to the sand pillar of a fundamental difference between men and women that makes them unsuitable to be



priests. While this sand pillar was supported by the suppression of women in secular society, there was no storm of gender equality to undermine it. This has now changed and the failure to maintain the egalitarian early Church by adoption of the secular mores of that time has resulted in the Catholic Church becoming a standard-bearer of a discredited past.

Equally galling is the related issue of a married priesthood. This was acceptable for the first thousand years of the Western Church's existence, but obligatory celibacy was introduced in an attempt to limit clerical corruption. The call to celibacy so that one can devote one's entire energy to the service of God is a wonderful gift, as is the call to the priesthood. To claim that the two must coexist to be authentic is a gross disrespect to those with the call to priesthood alone. The extent of the role of inauthentic priesthood celibacy in the scandal of sexual exploitation by priests is unclear, but most accept that it is a factor. It is also unclear how much this perversion, and its cover-up by Church authorities, is damaging the Church. But it is likely to be great. This was a pillar created only a thousand years ago. It was of dubious value then, has been a source of scandal in the ensuing thousand years, and its sand has now been completely eroded by the scouring flood of truth and exposure.

As reforming Catholics, we are trying to remove these eroded pillars of sand that seemed to be supporting the Church in former, less exacting times, but are now revealed as major hindrances to establishing the Church of Jesus Christ only on the solid rock of the Bible and the Church's many holy traditions.

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of the ARC Secretariat

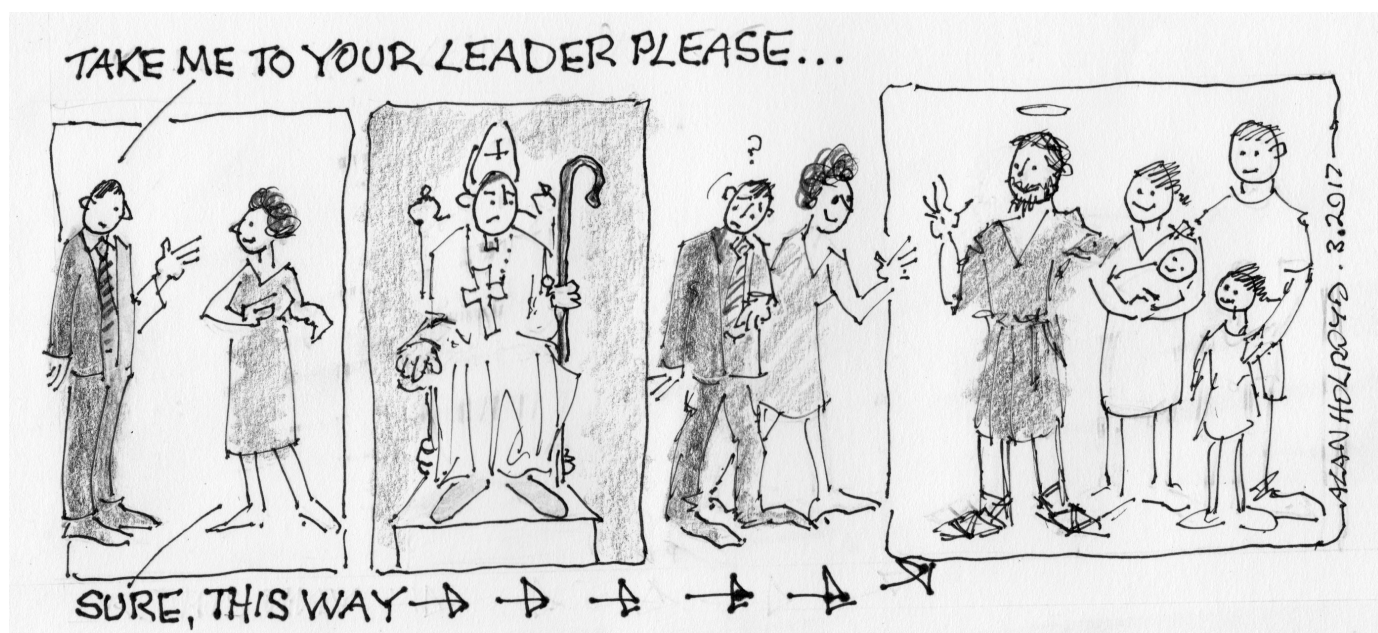
HOPE

I am not an optimist,
because I am not sure that everything ends well.
Nor am I a pessimist,
because I am not sure that everything ends badly.
I just carry hope in my heart.

Hope is not a feeling of certainty
that everything ends well.
Hope is just a feeling that life and work have a meaning.
It is not an estimate of the state of the world.
It is something that you either have or you don't
regardless of the state of the world that surrounds you.
It is a dimension of human existence.

Of course, you can also do without this dimension.
But life without hope
is an empty, boring and useless life.
I cannot imagine that I could live
and strive for something
If I did not carry hope in me.
I am thankful to God for this gift.
It is as big a gift as life itself.

Based on the thoughts of Vaclav Havel and Romans 5:3-5



Keeping Rural Parishes alive

The Catholic Leader

16.2.16

Father Jason Middleton was driving on a dirt road with a mobile phone that teased: 'No service'. He was heading to a cattle property on the remotest stretch of the Brisbane archdiocese. Roads of dirt, cattle grids and not one bar of mobile phone reception. From the property, Fr Jason would see the unremarkable point where the Brisbane, Rockhampton and Toowoomba dioceses met. What was a city boy doing here?

'I was invited by this lovely Catholic family to visit their property – I had only just started as the parish priest (of Gayndah) and it was quite a trip for someone like me', Fr Jason said. 'I must admit – I've never even changed a tyre. And they're not the roads you want to drive when you've never changed a tyre. But, luckily, everything held together that day. I went somewhere I had never expected to visit. But that's life out here. That trip revealed to me the size of this parish and its unique nature.'

Gayndah is one of Queensland's oldest Catholic communities. It was well established by the time Archbishop James Duhig dedicated St Joseph's Church three days after the Anzacs landed in Gallipoli. The parish now takes in Eidsvold, Mundubbera and surrounds. And Fr Jason says the community owes a lot to the Clergy Sustentation Trust Fund. Without the fund, Fr Jason knows that his life in the parish would be different.

'We're a relatively small parish but we're so large

in area. In the 2011 census, our parish included 873 registered Catholics,' Fr Jason said. 'Add to that statistic the reality that many of the families of our parish are farmers, orchardists and graziers. Such work is unpredictable at best and in the previous years we have suffered through two floods. 'Yet, the people of this parish deserve a priest and a living parish like any parish that has more resources and more people.

'So the Clergy Sustentation Trust Fund helps to ensure that this parish can maintain a fulltime priest and have other services that city parishioners are used to.' The Trust Fund is supported by parishioners across the Archdiocese – its only source of income is a levy of three per cent of all Mass collections. The Fund's chair, Fr Mark Franklin from Noosa District, said: 'Parishes that demonstrate they are not able to totally fund the sustentation needs of their priests are able to seek financial support from the Fund'. The Fund, which operates on behalf of Archbishop Mark Coleridge, also supports chaplains in ethnic communities, tertiary institutions, hospitals and prisons.

'I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all who make it possible to continue these ministries through Mass contributions,' Fr Mark said. The Gayndah parish is a lively example of the benefits of the Trust Fund.

As Fr Jason sits outside the 100-year-old church on a warm afternoon, locals wave as they walk along Meson St past the well-presented St Joseph's primary school. They stop for a chat beneath the trees that shade the entrance to the loved church. The conversations are diverse – comings and goings in the community, who went where for summer holidays, hopes for 2016 – but they all have one important link: the ability to engage with a fulltime priest.

'It is a great community here, people really do rally around one another, support one another and



actually get to know one another,' Fr Jason said. 'It's a unique feeling and it's the same across the parish.' Fr Jason sees plenty of the parish. Like other priests, his weekend is planned around Masses in different towns. The weekend begins in St Patrick's, Eidsvold, with a 4.30pm Mass on Saturday.

Fr Jason ends the liturgy in time to return to Mundubbera for a 6.30pm Mass. Sunday morning Mass is at Gayndah followed by baptisms. Then it's off to the nursing home for visitations and to bring the Catholic residents Holy Communion. 'I also travel to Mundubbera regularly on a Wednesday for an evening mass before which I do visitations there also,' he said.

Archbishop Coleridge accompanied Fr Jason on the weekend journey last year as Gayndah celebrated the 100th anniversary of its church. 'We fluctuate with the numbers of people at different times of year. We get a lot of fruit pickers through the towns, both in Mundubbera and Gayndah and some in Eidsvold,' Fr Jason said. 'This is a living example of a rural parish in a modern age.' Gayndah was to be anything but rural – the town was established in 1849 and its post office set up the

following year. There was talk of Gayndah becoming the state's capital, with the promise of the Burnett River and its agricultural and grazing benefits luring European settlers away from the Brisbane convict colony. Brisbane won out but Gayndah remains rich in heritage-listed sites that underline the town's important historical role.

Fr Jason is approaching his third anniversary in the parish and says the experience has meant much to a priest raised in Brisbane. 'There are different expectations on the priest in a parish like this,' Fr Jason said. 'They are much closer to the people because there aren't the support staff that are often found in city parishes. So you do find yourself doing a lot of things around the parish. It's a great time because you get to understand all of the things that go into making pastoral ministry viable and fruitful. And it's a wonderful experience to encounter people in different lifestyles.'

Those people whose weekly donations go into the Clergy Sustentation Trust Fund should know that their generosity helps to keep parishes like Gayndah alive and vibrant. □

Food for thought

In the Gospel, Jesus uses the example of Noah to call for deep discernment, courageous re-imagination and prophetic action in transition times. Noah is a leader who has the ability to know what is round the bend and be ready for it. The rest instead, just continue on their merry way, completely oblivious to the writing on the wall. We may not be eating and getting into drunken orgies like the Romans in Paul's time. However, the lesson of seeing, judging and acting prophetically is very poignant to us as we face uncertain times ahead.

As I see it, Pope Francis is the new Noah. He has seen the writing on the wall for the church and has called us to a whole new way of living the Gospel to correspond with the signs of the times, of the needs of people. Instead of holding on to the *status quo*, he champions an attitudinal change from domination to partnership, from clericalism to service, from self-reference to openness, from splendour to simplicity, from triumphalism to humility, from top down obedience to collegiality and collaboration, from siege mentality to engagement, from confronting to listening, from culture warfare to dialogue, from imposing rules to accompanying with love.

Bishop Vincent Long @ MSC Diaconate ordination in 2016

Irish priest warns of depression among overworked clerics

Sarah MacDonald

Dec. 1, 2016

Irish priests' ever-increasing workload is threatening to turn this aging, demoralized and declining group into 'sacrament-dispensing machines' who find pastoral work less and less satisfying, a co-founder of Ireland's Association of Catholic Priests has warned. In his address to the association's annual general meeting in Athlone on Nov. 16, Fr. Brendan Hoban highlighted how suicide is on the rise among Irish priests, a group he said was also increasingly prone to depression.

With the vast majority of Irish priests now age 70 or over, elderly diocesan priests are living increasingly isolated and lonely lives and are constantly 'reminded that we no longer really matter, that at best we're now little more than a ceremonial presence on the sidelines of life,' he said.

The 68-year-old parish priest said that though 'we feel we've done our best to carry the good news,' an 'avalanche of criticism in the media' meant they were 'ritually presented as bad news people, controlling, oppressing, limiting, obsessing.'

More than 150 of the 1,000 priest members that the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) represents heard Hoban explain how the 'implosion of our church' in the wake of the abuse scandals had made them realise that they were, in author Fr. Donald Cozzens' words, 'the last priests in Ireland'.

Stark statistics were cited, such as the plight of 'two very prestigious dioceses in Ireland, Dublin and Killala,' both of which have just one diocesan priest under 40 years of age. In 20 years' time, both dioceses will have one or maybe a few priests under age 60 to cover 199 parishes in Dublin and 22 rural parishes spread over a distance in Killala.

Acknowledging that diocesan priesthood in Ireland is 'a lost tribe,' Hoban said priests need to

find a voice and the courage to name their truth. 'As the last priests in Ireland, we have a right to consideration, acknowledgement, support, encouragement and, above all, respect,' Hoban continued. 'Priests who have served the church for so long deserve no less and it's time to start a reasonable conversation about this.' Recalling the years after he was ordained in 1973, he said the churches were full, there were plenty of priests, supportive parishioners, and the church was 'a confident, respected and influential presence in Irish society'. Today, among this cohort of aging clergy, there is 'a growing sense almost of desperation when we realise how little care, esteem or affection may be in our lives,' he noted.

He also highlighted how many priests are struggling at a pastoral level with issues beyond their training and competence, such as how to minister to parents of same-sex couples who may be upset or confused, how to respond to an invitation to a same-sex marriage of parishioners, and what does pastoral care mean in these situations?

Hoban, who has authored books such as *Where Do We Go From Here?: The Crisis in Irish Catholicism*, warned that the level of distrust between priests and bishops in Ireland is such that a build-up of resentment and anger is increasingly obvious in some dioceses where some bishops are using their positions to 'force their personal authority on priests'.

The Association of Catholic Priests is now six years in existence and it has made a number of attempts to engage with the Irish bishops. Last May, the first official meeting between representatives of the bishops and the association's leadership took place. While Bishop Ray Browne of Kerry recently wrote to the association about the issues raised during the meeting, according to censured priest Fr. Tony Flannery, the letter was 'clearly a 'sugar-coated' push-off for the ACP,' as the bishops indicated that they would continue to talk to the chairpersons of priests' councils, but not to the association.

Flannery also criticised Browne's letter for reducing 'the care of priests' to a matter of 'safeguarding'. 'Can they not see that the situation of Irish priests is drastic and urgent?' Flannery asked. His view is backed by Hoban, who claims that the burden on Irish priests is complicated by bishops willing to manipulate their elderly clergy into

postponing retirement beyond 75.

The distrust between rank-and-file priests and the leadership of the Irish church is ‘exacerbated,’ according to Hoban, by the selection policies pursued by the present nuncio, Archbishop Charles Brown, which have resulted in ‘unhappy’ and sometimes ‘bizarre’ choices of bishop.

The policy of bishops automatically reporting any anonymous accusations of child abuse against priests to the police authorities was roundly condemned by the leader of the priests’ association, who said the practice would be ‘unconscionable’ and much resisted if applied to teachers, lawyers, police or any other professional group. ‘The reputation and peace of mind of priests, it now seems, can be damaged forever by someone with a grievance, a sheet of paper and a ... stamp,’ Hoban warned.

In an interview with national television in Ireland broadcast following the association meeting, Brown, the apostolic nuncio to Ireland, spoke about the extent of the falling away of belief among the Irish people. He admitted to Gay Byrne, host of the television program ‘The Meaning of Life,’ that the ‘fall off in vocations – especially to the priesthood – is a huge challenge.’

However, he said the number of priests working today in Ireland is ‘almost sufficient for our needs,’ although many of these priests, he acknowledged, were in their 70s. ‘So, in 10 years we are going to be looking at a completely different situation here,’ he said, adding that ‘it is a big practical problem.’

But he also underlined that globally, since the year 2000, the number of priests around the world is getting bigger every year. ‘We have more and more and more every year. In Ireland or in France – no. But overall, yes. So, I think we have to recognise one element in this question will be non-Irish priests coming to work in Ireland.’

On the issue of mandatory celibacy, Brown, who is a native of New York, defended the church’s understanding of a celibate priesthood. However, another member of the association leadership, Redemptorist Fr. Gerry O’Connor, told *NCR* that he believed that a strategy such as that proposed by Brown of importing priests is likely to be ‘counterproductive and lead to further alienation of church members who are holding on by the fingernails’. Describing mission as integral to church

life, he said the association is disturbed by the appointment of overseas priests without any mission preparation or orientation about Irish society, the Irish church and Irish culture.

‘Priests from overseas is potentially a partial solution, but without appropriate training, preparation, learning and reflection, it will bring more problems than solutions’, the Dublin-based priest said. It would ‘bandage church wounds rather than heal them’, and was ‘another act of a church not listening to its members and supporters’.

‘That the bishops and the nuncio don’t want to engage in a structured way with the ACP is symbolic of a church adrift, a church stuck, a church in denial, a church with 26 kingdoms, an Irish church on a parallel path to that which Pope Francis speaks about, an Irish church attached and addicted to an ecclesial vision that is at variance to what Pope Francis is trying to build,’ he continued.

He said the association would work toward a national synod for the Irish church. O’Connor also explained that during the general meeting, members had committed themselves to developing lay ministry; welcoming back to ministry married priests; opening up priesthood to married men; and the female diaconate.

‘These are all practical and achievable solutions to the current crisis and workload,’ he said.

While the sense of isolation is not as acute among religious priests as among diocesan priests, according to O’Connor, ‘religious are as confused and demoralised as diocesan priests about how to be priest in the modern world, and feel the scorn and ridicule of an entrenched secular outlook that pervades modern-day Ireland’.

‘Depression is very much part of the lived life in religious communities,’ he said. ‘The absence of a next generation of religious in most congregations means hope and energy are missing, and there is a gap in theology and ecclesiology between many newer recruits and the older generation, with the older generation sensing that the church will move to the past rather than embrace courageously an uncertain future.’

Sarah Mac Donald is a freelance journalist based in Dublin

Celtic Dreamtime

Tony Griffiths

I recently came across one of those historical episodes that makes one think ‘if only’: if only something from our past had taken a different path, where might we be now; would our lives, or the world, be a better place? Was an opportunity lost, or not?

The inspiration for this article came from some novels, works of historical fiction written by Irish-born Peter Tremayne, pen-name of noted Celtic historian, Peter Beresford Ellis – look him up on Wikipedia, he’s no lightweight historian just writing popular novels.

His ‘Sister Fidelma’ series of mystery crime novels are set in seventh-century Ireland; his heroine is an ex-nun, he calls her a ‘religieuse’, a sort of ecclesiastical Celtic Hercule Poirot/Rottweiler cross; she doesn’t let go. The stories are well told and interesting, despite the utterly unpronounceable Irish words the author sprinkles throughout the text to trip the Anglo-Saxon tongue. But the inspiration for this article came not from the various plots, but from the author’s Historical Notes that put each story into context.

The Notes describe the religious and legal atmosphere of seventh-century Ireland at a time when the Church in Rome was attempting to force its concepts on the Celtic Church and Law. From these Notes, I learned that Ireland in the seventh century AD was governed by a legal code called the Brehon Laws, first established in about 714BC, refined over the years and eventually produced in written form in AD441, with regular revisions every few years thereafter. When the British finally forcibly imposed their legal system in the seventeenth century, they made owning a copy of Brehon Law a potentially capital offence.

The place of women under Brehon law was superior to those under laws then current elsewhere in Europe, and even to those under laws in many modern countries – perhaps even our own. Women and men had equal rights to all positions in all arts and professions, even the right to command the military in battle. We still lag behind their laws against sexual harassment and discrimination. Women had the right to inherit assets – many

elsewhere did not – and to an equal share of assets in divorce settlements, implying that divorce was evidently legal then – in Catholic Ireland, would you believe! It seems a golden age for women’s rights, even compared to now.

It was a time when Ireland was a beacon of learning shining alone in Europe’s Dark Ages; its Church sent missionaries throughout Europe to encourage a return to Christian principles. But Rome and Ireland were in conflict over attitudes, interpretations of scripture, appropriate liturgy, and even the date of Easter. Both the Celtic and Eastern Orthodox Churches resisted Rome’s views. Ultimately, at least in Ireland, Rome prevailed.

Celtic and Roman attitudes to married clergy were vastly different to one-another and to modern practice. Many monasteries were co-ed, to use a current term, with religious couples raising their children in-house. Celtic women could be ordained priests at this time: St Brigid is said to have been ordained as bishop by St Patrick’s nephew. Rome was not happy with women saying Mass.

Another major legal conflict developed over the Roman Church’s concept of earthly physical punishment for alleged misconduct – often quite brutal by our standards, and subject to the whims of local authorities – and the Celtic legal custom of compensation paid by the perpetrator according to the social standing of the person transgressed against. Under Rome’s ideas, you suffered both here and now as well as in the hereafter if you sinned – according to its definition of sin.

My feeling after reading the Historical Notes – of which this is only a brief summary – is that modern Christianity might have been a more meaningful and less troubled religion had it followed Celtic rather than Roman practice.

There is much, indeed most, about the seventh century that would appeal me, but perhaps Celtic attitudes to religion and law might have proved an attractive path to follow, possibly an opportunity lost.

TONY GRIFFITHS’ retirement has been taken over by an urge to explore and sometimes write about various aspects of history - sometimes purely Australian themes, at other times matters which have influenced his upbringing and life. His forty-three years at St. Anthony’s Parish, Terrey Hills, have opened his eyes to a wider vision of the Church.

Mobiles come to Emmaus

Alan Holroyd

No doubt readers of *ARCVoice* will have noticed the somewhat alarming use and reliance of the mobile phone within the community. From early childhood, to yes, late adulthood, the hand-held mobile and the so called 'tablet' or 'notebook' is ever present as a medium of personal communication. Although, that can be challenged! More so, non-personal communication in fact.

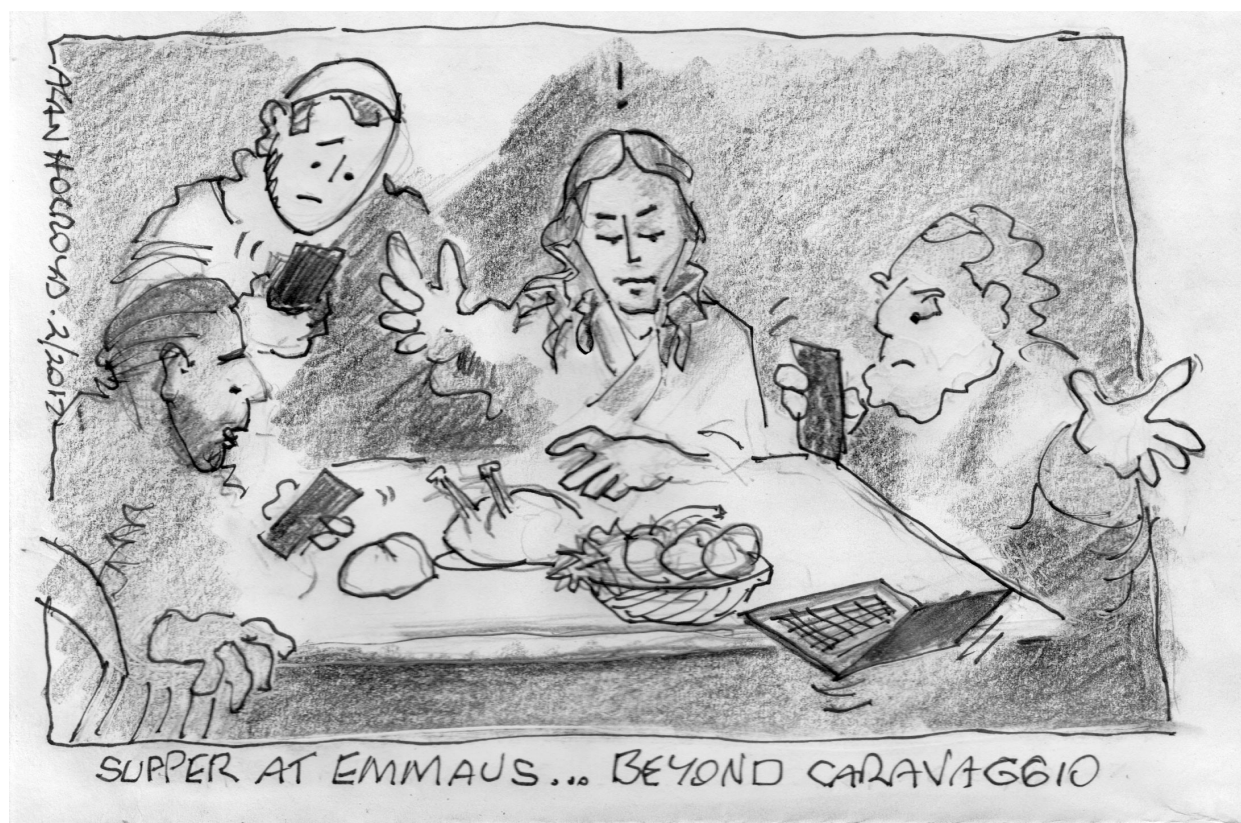
Visiting family in London recently I took the pleasure of visiting the 'Beyond Caravaggio' exhibition at the National Gallery where once again, along with many, I stood and gazed into the magnetically compelling oil painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) called, 'Supper at Emmaus, 1606.' This magnificent painting has resonance with the spirituality of the Gospel of Luke 24: 30-31) where Jesus reveals himself to his unwary disciples.

Readers are advised to Google 'Supper at Emmaus' and select any of the websites which expand on my brief introduction and subsequent illustration. The best site for viewing the painting – which has been digitally enhanced and gives greater reproduction of the original painting of 1601, is noted below*.

Those interested in religious art can find many messages conveyed by Caravaggio in his Baroque classic, one being the portrayal of a younger, beardless Jesus, his right hand reaching out of the painting to the viewer, (message being, the viewer is at the table), the magnetic attention of the three men toward Jesus...and the basket of food teetering perilously over the edge of the table.

With apologies to Caravaggio, my sketch revises his work, bringing it to this modern era of personal communication and where the more-so 'unsocial' media is impacting on the social relationship of personal spiritual communication within the Catholic Church today.

*Websites to view, simply Google, *Supper at Emmaus*, and numerous sites appear. For the best sighting of the painting choose '*Supper at Emmaus (Caravaggio) Milan. Wikipedia.*'



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