



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
March 2004
Issue No. 11

Message from the Secretariat

In this issue of *ARCvoice* we are featuring an important article on violence in the Church written with considerable experience and authority by Camilo Macisse. The types of violence he describes as occurring now are centralism, patriarchal authoritarianism, delations, dogmatism and the repression of scholarship and new theologies. In a nutshell, a powerful clique with its thought-police controls our Church through fear, having lost sight of Jesus' message of love and freedom.

A couple of millennia earlier the mother of the Bar Zebedee brothers had sought high places for her sons in the earthly kingdom which she confidently anticipated Jesus was going to set up. However, we should not scorn her in the light of our hindsight because all Jews assumed that the Messiah would set up an all-conquering earthly kingdom. We might hope, though, that she might have embarrassed her sons. The other ten disciples are reported to have been indignant at James and John but we cannot assume that they were entirely without earthly ambition – they might have wished that their own mothers had got in first! At this point Jesus stepped in and scotched the whole earthly kingdom idea. He pointed out that whereas pagan rulers lorded it over their people, and their great men made their authority felt, this was not to happen with respect to his disciples. Whoever wanted to be great had to serve just as he himself served even to the point of redeeming by his own death the debt owed to divine justice by humanity's misdeeds. (Mt 20:24-28)

Historically we know that the Church did become an earthly kingdom and its rulers did lord it over their subjects, and still do. However, we can be thankful for the golden thread of goodness which has always run through the Church in spite of the Princes. Those of us who understand that the kingdom of god is benignly within and not oppressively without are bound to try to remove all vestiges of power exercised for power's sake.

As a companion piece to Violence in the Church we are also publishing Paul Collins' reaction to the Pope's warning to the Australian bishops against (among other things) egalitarianism in Australia. Dear members, those of you who have ARC's brochure handy will notice that in the November 2000 Declaration the 7th theme which we list as important to us reads: "Australian egalitarianism as a Gospel ideal".

At our Campfire 2004 at Mary Mackillop Place, North Sydney, on 23-24 October we shall be giving the opportunity for several specific reforms or practices to be spoken about and promoted. **KEEP THIS WEEKEND FREE!** We shall be continuing the theme, **Conversations Around Jesus Christ, Our Friend**, and the dialogue we shall have will be without fear as we remember Jesus' words,

*If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples,
You will learn the truth and the truth will make you free (Jn 8:32)*

The ARC Secretariat wishes you all renewed hope as we celebrate the approaching Easter season.

Barbara Campbell

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Violence in the Church

Camilo Macisse

A Mexican Carmelite priest has close experience of what he calls the 'violence' of the Vatican. He pleads for a change in the culture of the Roman Curia

To speak of violence in the Church might seem nonsensical. Violence is the application of physical, moral or psychological force to impose or coerce, and this should be unthinkable in the community of believers founded by Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who came to free us from all slavery and oppression, built his Church on love of God and neighbour, and commanded us to love even our enemies.

But the Church is a pilgrim, a poor and imperfect sign on earth of the Kingdom of God. Violence has been used by the Church both inside its own ranks and outside, to resolve conflicts which inevitably arise between the hierarchy and the grass roots, between the institutional and charismatic dimensions of the Church, between traditional and novel understandings of the faith, theologians and the teaching authority, and Church and society. Violence has not been exercised in exceptional, isolated cases, but has been part of the culture of church authority down the ages, a culture which has fallen well short of the

Gospel way of exercising authority (Mt 20: 24-28). These days, the Church no longer employs physical coercion. But the other forms of violence – moral and psychological – continue, in an exercise of power which ignores both legitimate diversity in the Church and the Gospel insistence on dialogue. **I have had intimate knowledge of this violence, above all as exercised by a number of Roman departments.** It comes in many forms.

One of those forms is **centralism**, which seeks to concentrate decision-making powers in a church bureaucracy distant from the life of believers in different circumstances. Incapable of accepting pluralism, it is a way of treating believers at all levels, from bishops' conferences to groups of lay people, as children in need of protection who must be disciplined according to short-sighted criteria.

Since the Second Vatican Council the shift towards **decentralisation by enhancing episcopal collegiality – the government of the Church by the college of bishops with and under the pope – has gradually been undermined.** Even the bishops' synods called together every few years are heavily controlled by the Roman Curia, which determines both the process of

discussion and the documents which result. In most of these synods there have been bishops who have deplored the violence of this control applied by neo-conservatives steeped in an abstract and anachronistic theology. When some dare to criticise

these authorities out of love of the Church and always in communion with it, they are threatened and condemned, accused of practising a parallel teaching authority, a parallel pastoral action, or even of trying to create a parallel Church.

Such centralism results in large part from distrust and fear. How else to account for the delay of three or more years in approving translations of liturgical texts carried out by experts and unanimously approved by local bishops' conferences?

This same **fear of losing control** lay behind the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's proposal – first made at the Synod on Consecrated Life – that the Vatican should confirm the election of general superiors elected by their respective congregations. Faced with an overwhelmingly negative response, the CDF wrote to theologians it trusted asking them to

When the accused defends himself, and shows that the accusations are false, he never receives a letter absolving him of the calumnies directed against him.

CAMILO MACISSE was president of the Union of Superiors General for six years until 2000, and until recently superior general of the Discalced Carmelites.

This is an abridged translation of an article published in the 15 November issue of *Testimonio*, the magazine of the Chilean Conference of Religious. *ARCvoice* is reproducing the article as it appeared in the November 22 issue of *The Tablet* with the addition of highlighted text.

support this idea in their articles, so as to create a climate receptive to the idea.

The Curia's centralism also blocks groups entitled to direct communication with the Pope. The heads of the Union of (Male) Superiors General (USG) and the International Union of (Female) Religious Superiors (UISG) have been trying, without success, to have an audience with John Paul II since 1995. While other, lesser groups, including many individuals outside the faith and the Church have been granted this access, the representatives of more than 1 million consecrated religious, engaged in the most varied pastoral work on the frontiers of evangelism, have been consistently blocked.

Another form of violence is patriarchal authoritarianism which excludes women from participation at all levels of the Church. It is astonishing, for example, that contemplative women religious were never consulted during the preparation of the document on enclosure, *Verbi Sponsa*. Not one of the 49 associations or federations of Discalced Carmelites – which bring together 755 convents and more than 11,000 nuns – was consulted, and other large contemplative orders were similarly excluded; only the opinion of a small number of traditionalist convents was sought. The resulting legislation, drawn up by men whose knowledge of female religious life is entirely theoretical, demands of women what it does not demand of men, and is an example of the discriminatory violence directed at consecrated contemplative women. As in former times, they are viewed as children incapable of fidelity to their cloistered identity without male supervision.

Other forms of authoritarian violence have become habitual. For example, those who send delations to Rome are guaranteed anonymity, because they are generally people of conservative temperament. When the accused is called to the tribunals of a number of Roman dicasteries, he is not allowed witnesses who can speak on his behalf. Letters are written by accusers who have never first sought dialogue with the accused. When the accused defends himself, and shows that the accusations are false, he never receives a letter absolving him of the calumnies directed against him.

The curial officials who act in this way cloak themselves in a sacred power. They cannot be accused of slander and defamation. They demand blind obedience, and insist that such matters fall under the “exclusive competence of the Holy See”.

Another kind of church violence is a dogmatism which refuses to admit that in a pluralist world it is not possible to continue to assume just one religious, cultural and theological standpoint. Failing to distinguish between what is essential in Christian faith and its relative theological expressions, dogmatism insists on a single theological perspective, that of traditionalism, which starts from philosophical and cultural assumptions which belong to a previous age. The Church often seeks to impose these views without taking into account the pluralism of today's societies.

Since the Second Vatican Council, violent repression has been unleashed against modern exegesis of Scripture, against new European theological perspectives, against liberation theology, against Asian and African theology, and against indigenous theology. The actions against theologians almost always proceed violently: the CDF first receives accusations from conservative or ultra-conservative people or

Another form of violence is patriarchal authoritarianism which excludes women from participation at all levels of the Church.

from personal enemies who know that they will enjoy the protection, confidentiality, and unconditional support of its staff. The CDF then hands the texts of the accused over to “experts” who also enjoy anonymity and will at no point need to face the accused, who must then respond to the accusations and attempt to prove their orthodoxy. The “experts” often base their accusations on phrases taken out of context – a few pages are enough to prove the suspicion of unorthodoxy. When the accused has responded by making clear his position, he almost never receives a letter acknowledging that the “expert” is wrong. Nor does the accuser receive a rebuke or canonical penalty for having lied. This violent dogmatism has the effect of stultifying legitimate research and study by exegetes and theologians, many of whom impose self-censorship out of fear.

The tensions and conflicts in the Church cannot be eliminated by centralist or dogmatic violence any more than they can be eliminated by rejecting church authority and the fundamental truths of Catholic faith and

morality. Rather, the need is to overcome the neo-conservative model of Christianity which has gained ground in the Church at the beginning of the third millennium, and to move towards the acceptance in practice of the model of the Church recovered by the Second Vatican Council – a Church of communion, a Church defined as the People of God and the sacrament of the Kingdom. In this model there must be room for dialogue and communication, for unity in diversity, and for a climate of liberty which expresses a loving acceptance of others, which in turn fosters communion both inside and outside the Church.

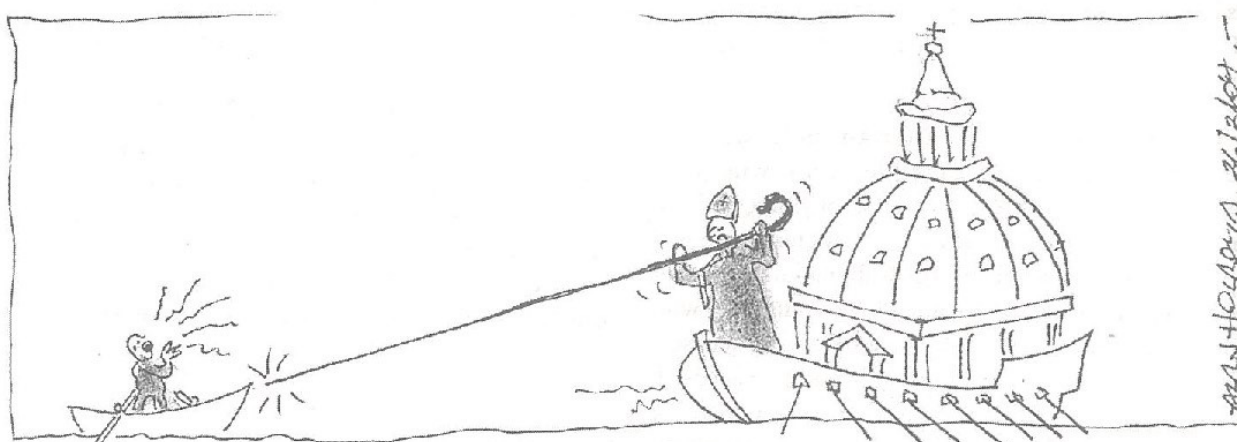
Above all, the Church needs an attitude of dialogue, one which seeks to listen and discern the truth in the light of the Gospel, both within the Church and in conversation with other Christian confessions, other religions, and society in general. This is what the Second Vatican Council calls for in its pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes* (92), which speaks of the Church's mission to shed the light of the Gospel on all humanity as "a sign of that brotherliness which allows honest dialogue and invigorates it". The pastoral constitution insists that "such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity". And it quotes St Augustine: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

This dialogue would serve to counteract the centralism and legalism of the Roman Curia, which is creating tensions and conflicts in an attempt to impose a rigid uniformity in the name of a false idea of unity. This violence must be overcome.

Along with dialogue we need a decentralisation of authority to allow for the challenges and problems both inside and outside the Church to be known directly. This will foster a sense of mutual responsibility and the practice of episcopal collegiality and will give less space to inquisitorial attitudes fed by cowardly accusers who throw stones while hiding their hands, who believe themselves to be in possession of "objective" truth, and who are afraid of direct confrontation. This fear is at bottom a fear of truth and authentic freedom, the truth that will make us free (Jn 8:32).

John Paul II in his 1995 ecumenical encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* refers to "the whole body of bishops" as "also 'vicars and ambassadors of Christ'." He goes on to affirm that "the Bishop of Rome is a member of the 'college' and the bishops are his brothers in the ministry".

These new forms in the structure of services in the Church are not just necessary in the ecumenical field but are also urgently needed within the Catholic Church. The Pope should be assisted in his ministry more directly by the bishops' conferences than by the Roman Curia, whose decision-making powers have become excessive. This is why leaders in the Church are calling ever more strongly for the Pope's advisers to be the presidents of the bishops' conferences. Dialogue with them would give the Pope a clearer idea of the challenges which the Church faces in diverse ecclesial, social and cultural spheres.



I'M SORRY
WE CAN'T HEAR YOU!

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Aussie Ethos embodies the spirit of Catholic Teaching

Paul Collins

I must say that I am tired of people who keep repeating the boring tautology, 'the Catholic Church is not a democracy'. Of course it's not and never has been, for a democracy is essentially the rule of a simple majority operating through the 'one-person-one-vote' system.

But neither is the Catholic Church an absolute monarchy, nor a dictatorship, nor the reincarnation of the Roman Empire. The problem is that all these definitions use models drawn from political science to define Catholicism.

Essentially, the church is a theological reality. To express it in one sentence: It is a community of people called together by the spirit of God to live in communion with Christ and with each other.

Certainly there is a problem with this type of definition: it is too esoteric to understand easily, so we fall back on political and social models to try to bring theological talk down to earth.

In his address to the Australian bishops at the end of the Oceania Synod of 1998, Pope John Paul II warned about the 'dangers' of Australian egalitarianism. Clearly he mentioned this because a small minority of Australian bishops had complained to him and the Roman Curia that this was a problem here.

Obviously these bishops were concerned about the perceived tendency of some parish councils to think that they had a right to a say in the running of their parish, and of the widespread habit in Australia of assuming equality between priests and people. I call this the 'Hardly anyone ever calls me 'T'ather' nowadays' syndrome.

Frankly, I think these bishops are wrong. There is little to worry about in Australian egalitarianism. In fact, I would be prepared to argue that the Australian notion of communal equality is a good bit closer to the early church's theology and even to that which Jesus intended than is highly centralised hierarchical clericalism. Of course, this is not to pretend that our social mores are in perfect ethical shape. The appalling treatment of

Aborigines and the total failure of the Federal Government and many Australians to confront the terrible history of racial oppression is just one example of a profound ethical vacuum in our nation.

But it is easy to forget that the church was perceived as a communion long before it was seen as a hierarchy.

And one essential characteristic of communion is equality. By communion I don't mean some type of ugly soviet socialism but a situation where distinctions between men and women, rich and poor, powerful and weak are dissolved, and where real racial and social equality prevails.

For instance, the communities that St Paul founded in first generation Christianity were, as biblical scholar Wayne Meeks says: 'Intense spiritual families' that stood in contrast to the rigid hierarchical structure of Roman society. Certainly bishops appeared early in the development of the church, but they acted in an essentially collegial way, both in their interactions with their communities and in their relationships with each other. The development of a hierarchical church is a later development as Christianity absorbed models of government prevalent in the late Roman and early medieval world.

Today, the danger for highly centralised churches such as Catholicism is that it fails to hear, let alone give expression to, grassroots experience. That's why I was so proud of most of the Australian Bishops: at the Synod for Oceania many of them spoke vividly of the tough issues facing the Australian church – things like the admission of divorced remarried Catholics to communion, the role and equality of women, and pastoral care for people in marginalised groups. They spoke also of the modern search for spirituality and for an ethic governing human life, of the attempt to articulate a sense of meaning in existence.

These are the issues Catholics and the rest of the community face, but I have the feeling that in Rome they are better at giving answers to old questions than hearing new ones. So perhaps a dose of Australian egalitarianism is not a bad thing. It reminds Catholics of the tradition of community that is easily neglected in a highly centralised church. □

Apology

In days past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in days to come he will confer glory on the Way of the Sea on the far side of Jordan, province of the nations. (Isaiah 8:23 Matthew 4:14-16)

It has come to my attention that the words introducing Fr Vince Doyle's article in ARCvoice 10, PARISHIONER REFLECTIONS, (Can any good come out of Byron Bay?) offended some people from the Byron Bay area. Since I was the one who dreamed it up I am solely responsible and offer my sincere apology to those I have offended.

However, I believe that it might be useful to explain that I thought I was paying the region a sublime compliment. "Can any good come out of Galilee?" was a current expression at the time of Jesus. This was because Assyrian and Chaldean invasions of the northern regions of Palestine had left in their wake a mixed population whose people were identifiable by their accent. They were looked down upon by other Jews (Mt 26:73, Jn 1:46, Jn 7:52).

Australia is a kind of Galilee (the seed of which realisation was planted in me as a very young child in England in the 1930's) and I have sometimes asked the question, Can any good come out of Australia? Likewise, the question lends itself to the reputedly hedonistic northern beaches of Sydney where I live.

In the scheme of things, to give hope and courage to those on the outside or not in the mainstream or of doubtful reputation, Jesus had to have been born a Galilean Jew. I am very happy indeed to be a Galilean.

Barbara Campbell

Safety and risk

Two friends meet at an airport:

'I thought you weren't going to travel by air again after you heard that there was one chance in 10,000 that there would be a bomb on the plane?'

'Ah yes, but I found a way around that.'

'How did you do it?'

'I worked out that the chance of two bombs on a plane would be only one in 100 million!'

'Well?'

'So I brought a bomb with me!'

Half Your Luck by Peter Mason, Penguin Books 1996, p26

Quotable Quotes

- √ Conformism means death for any community; a loyal opposition is a necessity in any community. (Karol Wojtyla, 1969)
- √ When the Church lacks the courage to reform its own structures, she will never have the moral strength to criticise the structures of civil society. (Dom Helder Camara 1972)
- √ Orthodoxy is by definition an idea that has run out of ideas. (David Ramson in the *New Internationalist* of May 2003, talking about neo-liberalism in the global economy)
- √ People do not question because they reject the church. They question the church because they love it. (Sr Joan Chittister OSB quoted in *NCR* 24 Aug.2001)
- √ How long new native churches will tolerate Western formulations, Western interpretations, Western norms, and Western theological analysis is anybody's guess. (Sr Joan Chittister OSB in *NCR* 24 Aug. 2001)

Deliver Me From Those Who Know

Dear God, deliver me from those who know the inmost secrets of eternal mind, and with consummate ease can show each detail of your plan for humankind. The mock humility of the elect in contrast to the one Incarnate Word shows less of love and little of respect, keeps you informed in case you hadn't heard. The cock that crowed when Peter fell from grace was nothing like so sure as those who stand foursquare upon a fundamental base and hold God in the hollow of their hand. Prisoner of hope for what we cannot see faith struggles still for truth that sets men free.

Kenneth Wadsworth
in *The Hebrew Christian* spring 1986

Editor's Note

Readers may have noted a recent change in cartoonists. Most editions of *ARCvoice* have been skilfully illustrated by Jane Harty whose incisive pen helped to deflate many a hierarchical ego and to debunk many of the church's mysteries! Sadly, through pressure of work, Jane is no longer able to contribute to our newsletter. But the good news is that we have been able to call on another very talented cartoonist. Alan Holroyd has been a supporter of ARC since its inception and we are indeed privileged that he is willing to share his considerable talent with us. Thank you Alan.

Margaret Knowlden

International Observations

Jim Taverne

Voice of the Faithful

This lay-led, church-reform organisation which was born in the wake of the Boston sex abuse scandal got 1500 people together on 25 October last year at the Rose Hill campus of the Jesuit-run Fordham University in the Bronx. The conference was titled 'Being Catholic in the 21st Century: Crisis, Challenge and Opportunity'.

There was, naturally, emphasis on the matter of sexual abuse by priests and the conference called the church to accountability and openness, but Richard Sipe, former priest and a psychologist felt: 'crisis is the wrong word to describe the present status of the Catholic church. It is in an inevitable, irreversible and exorable transition. The sexual abuse of minors by clergy is the poster issue of the current transition, much as the sale of indulgences was the poster issue in the 16th century.'

National Catholic Reporter 14-11-03

The Mariëburgvereniging

A Catholic Reform Movement in The Netherlands

After two years of discussions by a fairly large number of priests and ordinary Catholics a declaration was formulated with the title *Witnessing to the Spirit who lives in us* (October 1983) in which the loyal opposition in the Church want to give voice

The under-title of this Declaration is *A call to all who want to share responsibility for the Catholic Church in The Netherlands*. The Declaration invites people to share their concerns so that a broad basis of a wider discussion can be built. After discussing the responsibilities of Christians to answer the call of God to live in His honour, according to His will, according to his rule, and the specific calling of our bishops, the Declaration deplores the way those callings are frustrated by the centralised decision-making by the Vatican in everything.

I quote:

1. 'In the first place, we ask ourselves whether the innate right to take initiatives by local or particular churches has not been lost sight of too much. Vatican II has seen the church as 'a band of love' of local churches. What is left of that if particularly through the Church of Rome and her centralised departments of government we have simply to carry out a policy outlined beforehand?

2. Secondly, it meanwhile occurs to us that many who carry responsibility, all too quickly appeal to faith to defend their policy, as if it is faith that makes them act as they do. Apparently it is faith which says that women are barred from ecclesiastical office; that there is no chance for a second marriage when the first fails; that gay and lesbian people cannot hold ecclesiastical office. Is it faith which says that mutual Eucharistic hospitality among Christian churches is severely restricted; that married men cannot be priests; that married people are denied the right to limit the size of their family according to their own honour and conscience; that sex before marriage and other relationships outside marriage are condemned; that changed ideas about human control of living and dying are rejected out of hand?.....
3. In the third place we are also concerned about the weakening momentum of the ecumenical movement.
4. Finally, we are concerned about the lack of missionary power of the Catholic community. The church is getting old and her pastors too. There are critical groups and basic communities, full of creative young people who try to find their own feet, but are continuously driven to the periphery of the church or just out of her.'

On the basis of these four concerns the writers of the Declaration appeal to 'all who feel themselves responsible, to give witness of the Spirit who lives within us and to seek ways to serve the vision of God in our human society'.

The Mariëburgers hold annual conferences, preferably in the centre of the country so that every Dutch participant can travel easily to and from the conference. There are a number of what we would call 'Chapters' in cities and towns.

The Conference of 25 October 2003 was on the subject of 'Small Churches' (Base Communities?). Such small churches may have, say, 15 members or 40 and they may celebrate in a church or a home or elsewhere. They may develop their own liturgy and they are in touch with other communities.

I became a member of the Mariëburgvereniging last November.

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 (Margaret Knowlden) nor of ARC

Please send material to:
Australian Reforming Catholics

BOX 228 Avalon NSW 2107

OR (preferably) email: knowlden1@bigpond.com

Tel/Fax: (02) 9449 7275

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Eremos Institute Bookshop is a good resource for many of the books mentioned in our publication. They often stock titles (or are able to get them in for you) such as *Rome Has Spoken* and John Wijngaards' *No Women in Holy Orders*.

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Tel: (02) 9683 5096, Fax: (02) 9683 6617

email: eremos@accsoft.com.au

website: www.eremos.org.au

Interim Secretariat

Barbara Campbell tel/fax: 02 9918 8892 barcam1@bigpond.com.au

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

Alan Holroyd tel: 9808 3192 landaholroyd@bigpond.com.au

Margaret Knowlden tel: 02 9449 7275 fax: 02 9449 5017
knowlden1@bigpond.com.au

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

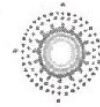
Margaret McLellan tel 02 4954 8613

Patricia Ryan tel: 07 3374 1660 patriciaryan@hotmail.com

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

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