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A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
December 2002
Issue No. 6

Greetings from the Committee

A happy, peaceful and loving Christmas to one and all! Our Inaugural Conference based on the theme, 'Conversations Around Jesus Christ, Our Friend', has come and gone and we are all the richer for it. ARC wishes to express its gratitude to Tissa Balasuriya OMI for his keynote address, 'Jesus, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', and also for his lessons: firstly in his singleness of purpose to think and act with Jesus' Spirit in all things, and, secondly, in the art of networking that was wondrous to behold! The full text of the address, as of all the other speakers, is available in *ARCpapers 1*. However we cannot resist mentioning here an interesting point which Tissa made, namely that Cardinal Ratzinger's opinions in his later years are very different from those which he held as a young priest in the 1960's and expressed in his book, *Introduction to Christianity* (reprinted in 1996). These earlier views would logically have had to have been at least censured by his later self if they had not already caused the younger Ratzinger's excommunication! Anyone capable of such a big change could doubtless change back again. This surely highlights the importance of conversation where opinions are expressed without fear or favour. Conversation is a basic human activity and a great way to learn and clarify one's mind. Indeed it is the only vehicle through which the *sensus fidelium* can function.

ARC also wishes to thank all the other speakers who gave so generously of their time: Therese Vassarotti, Veronica Brady IBVM, Brian Gore CF and Mark Yettica-

Paulson and also John Buggy who chaired the Conference so ably. The contribution of all those who led workshops was no less vital. Last, but by no means least, ARC wishes to record its appreciation of the high level of discussion by the participants to the Conference.

Two other events must be mentioned and those responsible thanked: David Orr OSB for planning and leading the Liturgy of the Eucharistic Meal, and Rev Dr Ray Williamson, General Secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council, for planning the Ecumenical Service.

The Eucharistic Meal was pioneering in that most of us had never before experienced incorporating the Liturgy into a feast for a large number of people. David's deep understanding of liturgical requirements and his sense of reverence has shown that it can be done most beautifully. For those who were not present, I should explain that after the Grace, all being seated, we were all called to participate. The readings were heard, reflected upon and discussed at our tables. The Consecration occurred at a table near the centre and the bread was broken. A representative from each table came forward to receive a plate of bread and a glass of wine. The Communion was completed. The Kiss of Peace sealed the formalities and we were then ready to feast.

The Ecumenical service most appropriately closed the Conference in an Anglican girls' school, Abbotsleigh, which is to be congratulated for being prepared to accommodate a Catholic conference in the spirit of ecumenism. The participants appreciated the facilities and had the sense of being involved in something of moment. And that moment is upon us now!

To proceed into the future the AGM decided to recommend to Members that they form Chapters either regionally or according to some other criterion of common interest [see page 6]. Next year we shall not have a Conference but instead strive to settle on our Structure. At the same time we can consider the Structure of the Church itself. Above all, we shall continue to converse around and with Jesus Christ to understand his teaching anew.

On behalf of the Interim Committee,

Barbara Campbell, President

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The following article was a reaction to Alan Holroyd's beautiful Conference logo, an explanation of which is given by Alan in *Arcpapers 1*.

The Circle

Eugene Stockton

The circle, single or concentric, is one of the most sacred and widespread symbols in Aboriginal iconography. Nancy Munn's studies (1973) among the Walbiri of Central Australia established a range of meanings which include nest or camp (*ngurra*), waterhole, woman's breast, womb, sacred or totemic site (where an Ancestral Spirit entered or emerged from the ground), cyclic movement. In sand drawings or paintings (e.g. those illustrating Dreaming stories), circles occur in stylized maps linked by lines denoting a path taken between camps or special sites. The circle also stands in relation to the straight line as feminine to masculine. The circle, as camp, also denotes the domestic sphere, "the vital activities of eating, sleeping (dreaming) and sexuality of the domestic camp" (p. 214), hence it is further a symbol of female fecundity and nurturance. (See also Morphy, 1980) (It is also worth reflecting how readily we speak in our own culture of the 'family circle').

Stanner (1966), from his research at Port Keats, connects the physical arrangements of ceremonies there to the symbolism of the circle:

The circle as a spatial form ... permits an intimacy of face-to-face relations that no other formation can... Thus, the circle reduces to a minimum the social as well as the physical separation of those who make it up: for a time it makes inappropriate, indeed obliterates, all other social categories; it concentrates a unified totality around a centre. In these ways it makes possible a unison toward a dominating object. (p. 61)

Peter Sutton (1988), reviewing the findings of these and other anthropological researches, states:

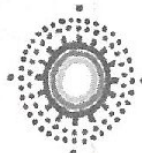
The circle, an almost universal motif in Aboriginal art, reflects the intimacy and egalitarian spatial symbolism of the arrangement of people around a single campfire ~ an image possessing logical, social,

and aesthetic reverberations that are intermingled in this form... The non-figurative character of the circle makes it available for a vast number of associations. But most of these meanings are variations about a core shape or structure that suggests roundness, inclusion, enclosure, centrality, and unhierarchic order (p. 163)

From this rich range of references the concentric circle could well be adopted as a symbol of Mother Church, and indeed of any Christian grouping like our own "where two or three are gathered" around their Invisible Lord. Besides being nurturing Mother, the Church (or our community) is home, waterhole (wellspring) from which emerges the Holy Spirit, a sacred place. I have argued elsewhere that, by contrast to the hierarchic world view of the West, the Aboriginal world view is that of the family, where all are equal as they sit around the campfire, where each is in a mutually reciprocal relation to each other and where each is at a different degree of dependence and seniority (1995: 46-7). I further contend that this was the revolutionary world view - the Kingdom of God - that Jesus was introducing to his band of followers, only to be overtaken by the hierarchical world view, which slipped back in with St Paul (1995: 136-7). This ideal of Jesus could well be renewed in our time and find its iconic symbol in the Aboriginal circle.

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ARC Inaugural Conference

Reflections from the Conference Chairperson

These are some thoughts I have reflected on in an attempt to think about the way forward. Perhaps it was a bit ambitious to try to develop firm strategies on the Sunday afternoon of the conference for the following reasons:

- The high quality of input had exhausted many of the participants by this stage, as there was so much to think about and discuss
- Lengthy discussion on the need to object to the impending plans for invasion of Iraq may have confused some about the focus of the conference
- Many participants were really only learning about and coming to grips with the nature of the input and had not time to digest it
- Many were unsure whether they wanted to identify with ARC as a member after such a short exposure to the issues
- The number of participants had reduced to less than 40 after lunch.

However, the main reason why I consider it would have been difficult to draw conclusions about the way forward, even if the above factors were not present, was because there was not enough time to categorise the types of issues for reform or areas of desired change. Had we broken into groups concentrating on a few main ones, we may have been able to see that very different strategies would be associated with the different issues or areas of need. I would like to try to categorise the issues or the areas of concern that we dealt with in the following way:

Issues of Equity

- Male domination of agenda and structures
- Women's role in the Church
- Ordination of Women
- Participation of Indigenous Australians

These issues involve changing the structures of the Church and require a strong united focus in order to make any feasible headway. Here the strategy required appears to be one of speaking out and emphasising the inherent inequality when compared with the rights that are granted in the rest of the community through a raft of equal opportunity legislation. Showing the inherent fallacy of the arguments in theological terms is required to even make a dint in the entrenched structures.

We would have to illustrate first to some extent the irrelevancy of many of the practices held by some parishes where women are not even allowed to read or distribute the Eucharist. This could be done by finding out and highlighting parishes or communities where gender is not an issue and illustrating the extent of existing services provided by women. This may help to build up the groundswell so that the inequity becomes more evident.

It appears that a strategy of vocal action would be difficult for ARC to engage in by itself at this stage, and if it were to be followed, it would require linkage with another group that had the particular issue as its sole focus. The credibility of this other group would be an important consideration in any action that ARC might take.

Issues of Faith and Dogma

- Inclusive language
- Relevant and meaningful liturgy
- Modern biblical interpretation

Although there was a lot of interest in these topics by the participants, I am not sure that there was any consensus on the approach that should be taken. It appears that some people were very inspired by the fact that so many others shared their views on some topics, but there was a reluctance to take this too far. People are still hesitant to throw off many of the beliefs that they have felt obliged to hold on to for most of their lives.

The strategy of education through the ARC Voice is very appropriate in order to increase the comfort level of those who want to push forward, particularly if we can flush out more authoritative sources to back up the ideas and research that we might like to put forward.

The strategy of engaging higher profile people of like mind is also important. We need to flush out clerics and religious who would say more if they knew there was some groundswell to support them. Even some bishops should be approached, given that some are concerned at the decreasing numbers attending Mass. I consider that this is where the conservatives are most vulnerable, because there is plenty of evidence that literal interpretations of scripture and dogma are now no longer tenable. We need to show evidence that all the expenditure on Catholic schools, for example, does not necessarily produce more Christian attitudes and certainly does not appear to be ensuring that the recipients of this education will be church-goers or even identify with the Church.

I consider that members of ARC should seek to speak with some of the bishops who may be concerned with the lack of church participation and the dwindling number of priests and religious. Without some level of dialogue in this direction, ARC will be pushing against too strong a tide.

Issues of Morality

- Acceptance of migrants and refugees
- Responses to terrorism and violence
- Treatment of indigenous Australians

The problem of morality and its close link to the social issues of our time is that politics becomes entwined with peoples' viewpoints. For every argument put up in favour of change to the order established by governments on these issues, there are responses of preservation of lifestyle and xenophobia. The issue of supporting the USA unconditionally in its campaign against Iraq is a case in point. The debate that ensued on the Saturday afternoon after Brian Gore's address served to illustrate this. Here we had a group of people at the conference that we might have expected to move quickly from agreement on the issue to how we can take some action, but instead there were questions that showed doubt about challenge to the government's policy.

If ARC has the reform of the Church as its main agenda, I consider that the focus will soon be lost if we chase the socio-political issues. Many of these are important, but they are not about reform of the Church itself. We may influence some individuals by the position that we take, but many will see it in the domain of opinion only.

Moral or social issues taken up by ARC need to centre on truth being withheld or ignored by the Church itself.

This can be done in relation to the situation of indigenous Australians. It can also be done in relation to the official treatment of divorcees and sacramental participation and the hypocrisy of solving such situations through "so called" annulments. There are many areas here that the Church hierarchy would prefer to ignore.

The strategy here is to find cases where injustice is clearly evident or hardship is produced through the Church not attending to its principles or being hypocritical. These are the opportunities to "wear away the stone". The strategy is one of exposure or the holding up of a mirror.

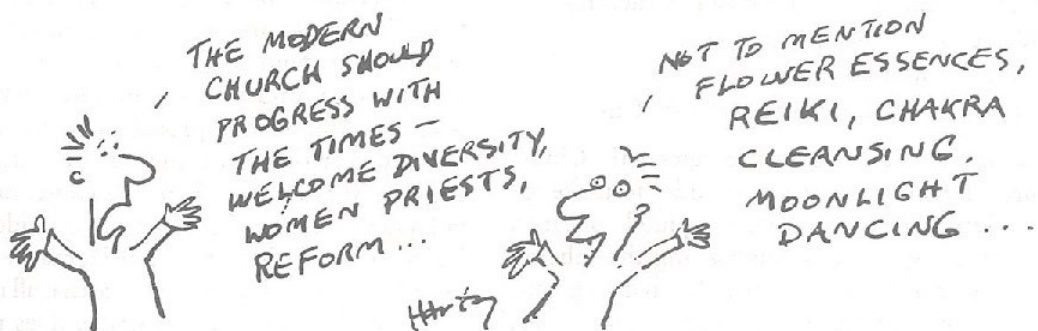
My conclusion

These points merely serve to illustrate that there are very different strategies needing to be considered for each range of issues, depending on how they are defined.

If our general focus was on the *sensus fidelium*, then we have to go some way yet to even achieve a feeling for the "sensus" of the people who have taken the step to become a member of ARC. Apart from a few, the majority who have joined are still on the quest for information. I do not get the sense that there is any urgency for action. Somehow we have to create this urgency.

People who attend Mass and the sacraments are still very much tied to the influences they receive by having to relate to a largely conservative community within which the liturgy of the sacraments is set. I do not feel as if there would be much support if ARC came to be seen as some "radical" group. Our first task is to find out how many people identify with ARC. Only then can we see how many might be committed to following through with any of the strategies that are devised.

John Buggy



The Parable of the Bird

Claire Rawnsley

It was a Friday afternoon and, with the help of a useful map of the school grounds marking out the location of McCredie House, my taxi found the gate to the expansive property of Abbotsleigh Girls School at Wahroonga. This was where I was going to spend the next two nights. We stopped in front of a red brick building and I was met by three or four people looking rather perplexed holding balloons. This was my first encounter with Australia's Reforming Catholics.

After paying the taxi driver (who turned out to be a lame Korean) I was helped upstairs with my luggage by Rhonda, one of the ARC friends. She proved to be a real gem in more ways than one as we shall see. Halfway up the staircase trapped on the upper window high up was a crested pigeon. It made many attempts to escape but instead desperately hit its head against the solid glass window. Some attempts were made to free the bird but it was only the next day with the help of her husband who had more efficiency than WIRES that the bird was freed. My mind must have been in a reflective mode for was this a symbol of the church in its present crisis? Was the ARC group like Rhonda attempting to facilitate ways to assist the church to move from its present crisis?

The Conference began with a ceremony acknowledging the Garigal group's land. I found the introduction impressive for it seemed in one small way to contribute towards reconciliation and a silent recognition that we are living in the presence of those who had a profound sense of spirituality. The opening address was aptly given by Therese Vassarotti, 'The Church in Crisis'. She pointed to initiatives that the church is making but also noted that the church is constrained and change comes slowly. After questions, the first evening was over.

I was up early the next day and enjoyed watching the brightly coloured parrots picking the insects off the trees but recalled the trapped bird still inside the building, by now quite subdued by frequently banging its head in an effort to get out. After an excellent breakfast, the morning opened with an artist explaining the ARC banner which symbolised the unity between the Spirit and the world. The keynote address was delivered by Fr. Tissa Balasuriya who competently pointed to the trail of destruction wrought by colonialism and how Christianity which followed in its wake destroyed indigenous people's customs and lands. Following a lively discussion, Veronica Brady pertinently raised points on gender and the *Sensus fidelium*. She noted that although the Church is made up of male and female, the female part of the People of God is assigned as the silent majority. In the afternoon Brian Gore, drawing on his long experience of standing up for the poor in the Philippines, spoke of the strength of people power and how

those united with a common cause could make a change.

Energised by such vital speakers the conference divided into workshops to ponder on where the church is at today in the modern world and what we can do to make a change. There were three main points to consider in each workshop: the first was to decide on one insight, the next how this could be shared with others and thirdly, what could we do to make a difference. Do the present structures of the church prevent the Spirit moving to reveal the fullness of truth to the world?

On Sunday there was an impressive talk given by Mark Yettica-Paulson, an indigenous man from the Birri Gubba and Bunjalong peoples. He held the group spellbound as he outlined some of the main issues that affect relations between Aboriginals and Australians today. One of the most important needs for reconciliation is education and the need to understand each other.

One of the key strategies of the Conference was to emphasise the notion of the *Sensus fidelium*. That is, when the people of God have a supernatural sense of faith, it is manifested when 'the bishops down to the last members of the laity' show a universal agreement in matters of faith and morals (*Lumen Gentium 12*). The ARC conference in its own way bravely, I think, tried to blaze a trail to open the windows that had begun with Vatican II and which seem consigned to history. Pope John XXIII also wanted to open windows to release the church from antiquated rules, structures and outdated ideas so that the Spirit might move to refresh the earth and to reveal the fullness of truth.

Perhaps the symbol of the little bird trapped by the mirage of the window - wanting to be free to fly where it will - is apt. Are the antiquated structures of the church to be likened to the thick glass window preventing the bird to fly? The Spirit, often likened to a dove and ready to inspire the People of God, is however constantly restrained by the cage of structures, rules and language that has become irrelevant in the modern church today? We are reminded that the People of God are also the Church; they want to own the Church; they recognise that Church is not just those who are in authority, it belongs to all. We need to recall Paul's symbol of the Church. As Body of Christ, Christ is the Head and we are the members. It is important that we all work together to make up the Whole Christ. The smallest members and the role they play in the church are vital to build up the whole.

We should congratulate those who made the Conference happen. It took courage to step out and to own the church. Hopefully this first tentative step will be followed by confident strides in the future. Like the bird that was finally freed, this Conference signifies an opening to allow the Spirit to renew the face of the earth. □

You are invited to form Chapters . . .

The AGM considered how best to encourage activity at the local level. Rather than have regional or state committees (they may well come into existence further down the line) or encourage Think Tanks (which would be purely for intellectual pursuits), the concept of Chapters was deemed to be the most appropriate for our purposes. Members may come together on a geographic basis or according to some other criterion of common interest. They may organise themselves in a way most suited to themselves. They may apply at any time to the ARC Executive for a Speaker or a Consultant. The following is suggested as a Charter of goals/interests:

Charter for Chapters

The Chapters may function around all or any of the following:

PRAYER
STUDY
WORK
RECREATION
HOSPITALITY

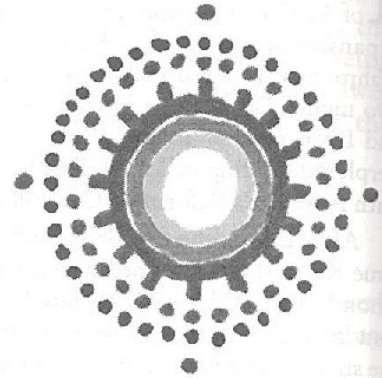
PRAYER will involve the Chapters initiating the form/s of prayer with which its members feel most comfortable or to which they are most drawn.

STUDY will involve thinking through our beliefs at a meaningful level both for our own growth and self-enrichment and also with a view to being able to show others, especially those who have left the Church, that they really can find truth within the Church.

WORK will involve actively working to introduce people to Jesus Christ, our friend, by writing, speaking and counselling, and/or actively working for peace and justice at a practical level in the spirit of Christ, and/or by helping with the clerical work which supports these endeavours.

RECREATION will involve relaxing in the beauty of creation both for the sake of members' re-energising, and, by intelligent stewardship, for the sake of the earth itself.

HOSPITALITY will involve facilitating the cross connections of ARC members and invited Speakers both from a financial point of view and from the great benefits which arise from getting to know members from other parts of the country in an informal setting.



A Polish story

Four tailors lived and worked in the same street of a Polish town.

One tailor had a sign on his window, reading:

I am the best tailor in town.

The second tailor had a sign with:

I am the best tailor in Poland.

The third one announced proudly:

I am the best tailor in the world.

The fourth tailor's window showed a sign:

I am the best tailor in this street.

(Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor,
Archbishop of Westminster)

International Observations

contributed by Jim Taverne

Various organisations in several countries have conducted research and 'opinion polls' of Catholics in respect of policies and doctrines and actions (or lack of them) by the hierarchy in the last few years.

A research project undertaken for the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference into the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia was launched by Cardinal Clancy on 21 August 1996. The report was presented to the Bishops' Conference on 12 April 1999 under the title *Woman and Man, One in Christ Jesus*. It showed clearly wide-spread dissatisfaction among women and men about the very limited participation by women, other than as religious and members of altar societies or the Catholic Women's League and so on. One bishop told me that the protesting women were much more vocal than those who live in liberating obedience, so that the results of the project were biased in favour of the former.

Cardinal Ratzinger was not pleased with the report on the project, which displeasure he voiced in no uncertain terms in his letter of 12 October 1999 to Cardinal Clancy. He was particularly upset by the statement on page 384, that 'the question of the ordination of women has not been received by the faithful as expressive of their Catholic belief'. The teaching of the non-ordination of women to the priesthood was accepted by only 42 percent of church attendees. He recommended education and referred to *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, *Responsum ad dubium*, *Donum Veritatis* and *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

In connection with this year's World Youth Day in Toronto, an 'opinion poll' was held in Canada. This showed that an overwhelming majority of the Canadian Catholics wanted reforms.

- 82% favour abolition of the compulsory celibacy
- 80% favour the ordination of women to the priesthood
- 68% are in favour of the acceptance of contraception.

In 1995 more than 2.3 million German-speaking Catholics in Europe, most of whom were in Germany, signed the demand for lay participation in the governing of the Church, full equality of women, abolition of compulsory celibacy, election of bishops, positive attitudes towards sexuality, contraception, homosexuality, second marriages, cohabitation before marriage, and more attention to the subjects of peace, social justice and the environment. Also that the message of joy should replace the present message of strict obedience and threat.

Recently, the Voice of the Faithful was established in Boston, a result of the sex abuse scandals and the attitude of the Archbishop Cardinal Law. The VOTF has already thousands upon thousands of members. An online request harvested several thousand prompt answers, which showed:

- 72% are actively involved in their parish or another charitable organisation
- 42% say their financial support to their parish was affected by the sexual abuse crisis
- 54% have reached out to their priest or a priest they know to provide support
- 33% have acted to help support survivors
- 80% say that significant change is needed.

The VOTF is basically a 'one issue' movement but, like other 'one issue' movements, concludes that such issues are connected in the desire for a general, thorough, reform of the Church.

In his book *No Women in Holy Orders?* John Wijngaards notes (p 155) that polls at various times on the subject of priesthood for women show 54% in favour in the USA, 74% in Spain, 72% in Germany, 71% in Portugal, 67% in Ireland, 58% in Italy, 86% in The Netherlands (including 86% of parish clergy).

I cannot imagine that the same people would not realise that the ordination of women can only and should be part of overall reform.

Interim Committee

At the AGM held on 6 October 2002 at 8am during the Inaugural Conference it was decided to elect an Interim Committee until a formal Structure was finally adopted. The results were as follows:

President:	Barbara Campbell	[02] 9918 8892	barcam1@bigpond.com
Vice-Presidents:	Paul Denny	[03] 5174 0741	chewyd@net-tech.com.au
	Patricia Ryan	[07] 3374 1660	patriciaryan@hotmail.com
Secretary:	To be appointed		
Minutes Secretary:	Margaret McLellan	[02] 4954 8613	margmcl@hotmail.com
Treasurer:	Jim Taverne	[02] 9449 2923	jtaverne@ozemail.com.au
Editor ARCvoice	Margaret Knowlden	[02]9449 7275	knowlden1@bigpond.com
Webmaster	Ted Lambert	[08] 8287 6338	lambert@chariot.net.au

and everyone else present was considered a Consultative Member!

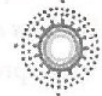
Have your say!

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

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Rome Has Spoken

Editors: Maureen Fiedler and Linda Rabben

is the recommended reference book for all ARC MEMBERS. Available from the Eremos Institute Bookshop for \$49.95. **Special deal to ARC Members: \$45 plus \$4 postage.** For those who are also Eremos Members, \$40 plus \$4 postage.

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Become a Member of ARC

Donations to assist in the running of ARC would be very much appreciated.

Name: _____ Tel _____

Address: _____ Fax _____

Post Code _____
 Email _____

Amount donated \$ _____ (Should the donation be at least \$20, you would be entitled to become a member of ARC – cheques payable to "ARC")

Yes! I would like to become a member of ARC [] Tick

Send to: Australian Reforming Catholics, Box 228 AVALON NSW 2107

[] PLEASE SEND ME AN ARC BROCHURE

Membership

At the AGM it was decided to make the financial year our official year. All current memberships, and those about to be taken up, will go through until 30 June 2003. Those who have had a good innings out of their current memberships might like to make a donation, but feel free. As of 1 July 2003, the yearly membership will be \$30 [concession \$20]. Those who do not wish to be listed as Members will pay the same and be noted in our files as Supporters.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS THE LAST ISSUE OF ARCvoice TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO NON-MEMBERS. DO NOT MISS OUT! JOIN NOW!