



# arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics  
March 2003  
Issue No. 7

## Message from the Committee

Why Did God Become Human?

Why Was Jesus Crucified?

**W**hat thought have you put into these two very fundamental questions?

Those of us who remain Catholic do so because we believe that **God became human** and chose to be victimised by other humans to the point of torture and death in order to assist humans to be good, to act with integrity and responsibility towards the rest of creation and to break any downward spiral of human nature towards cruelty, corruption, viciousness and self-righteousness. We believe that while on earth he instituted Baptism and the Eucharist to be well-springs of grace, and instituted a "church" to keep his teachings and memory as alive and clean as possible. Then when he left the historical moment, for the future, **HE GAVE US HIS SPIRIT TO DWELL IN EACH ONE OF US TO ASSIST US IN OUR DECISIONS.**

**Jesus was crucified** because he claimed to be the Messiah but **DID NOT RAISE AN ARMY** to overthrow the Romans. The Jews of his time expected someone more gung-ho, not one who mixed with the flotsam and jetsam of society and who advocated humility while condemning pride and hypocrisy. He was unacceptable!

The above is by way of starting a conversation, and, should you disagree, so much the better. Very pointedly it has not addressed the question of what is Church. That should be thrown wide open. If Australian Reforming Catholics is to be effective in reforming the Church we

must try to understand the mind of Jesus by talking and praying among ourselves. **IT WOULD ONLY TAKE THREE PEOPLE** to start a **CHAPTER** of ARC. It doesn't have to be a state or city or regional group, just friends with a common interest. Meet weekly, monthly or from time to time. One person could provide a short paper for the meeting followed by discussion. No conclusions have to be reached. Gradually a consensus will be approached by Chapters conversing around the country. In time the health of the Church will be restored. If you are meeting in the name of ARC just inform the Committee. If you would like a speaker or consultant at any time just say the word. **HOW ABOUT IT, FELLOW REFORMERS, START A CHAPTER TODAY!**

Following are a set of further questions, any of which could form the basis for a conversation:

Barbara Campbell, President

PS: We wish Jim Taverne a full recovery from the recent operation to his right hand.

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### A) CHRIST'S MESSAGE

1. JUSTICE AND PEACE is an integral part of Christ's message. What should we do about it?
2. What does MATTHEW 23 mean to you?
3. What CHURCH DOCTRINES would you like to see re-examined?
4. On what should we base our MORAL JUDGMENTS?
5. How important is a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST? What steps should be taken to develop it?

### B) REVELATION (i.e., God's self-revelation to humankind)

1. It is said that the SCRIPTURES (decided by a committee of men), once established, was the end of Revelation. Do you agree?
2. ARCHEOLOGY, HISTORICAL RESEARCH, LINGUISTICS, HERMENEUTICS and so on are all throwing light on what the scriptures actually do reveal to us today. Are you familiar with this light?
3. How important is DISCERNMENT (understood as the process of finding out what God wants for me)?

### C) RITES AND LITURGY

1. SACRAMENTS (only Baptism and Eucharist have foundation in Scripture). What is the SIGNIFICANCE of sacrament to you?
2. Do you agree with the current SEVEN SACRAMENTS?
3. Should BAPTISM be administered only when the person accepts Christianity?
4. May EUCHARIST be received by anyone regardless of age?
5. Should the Church develop RITES OF PASSAGE into adolescence and into adulthood (marriage would fall into this category)?

### D) STRUCTURE

1. PAPACY (arguably has scriptural authority; traditional from the early church).
  - Does the Pope have too much power?
  - Does the ROMAN CURIA have too much power?
  - What do you think of the concept of PAPAL INFALLIBILITY?
  - Do PAPAL Nuncios serve a useful purpose?
2. COLLEGE OF CARDINALS (nothing in scripture; dubious tradition – a relic of the imperial courtier system; no reference in the Catechism of the Catholic Church). What should be done about this institution?
3. EPISCOPACY (arguably has scriptural authority; traditional from the beginning).
  - Should DIOCESES be the basic structural unit of the Church?
  - Is the power of Bishops adequate or not?
  - Is the current method of APPOINTING bishops appropriate at the present time?
4. PRIESTS
  - What do you consider to be the FUNCTION of priests?
  - Do you consider it feasible for a priest to hold ANOTHER TRADE OR PROFESSION?
  - How do you think PARISHES should best be organised?
  - Should there be any restriction on the GENDER or MARITAL STATUS of priests?

### E) ANY OTHER MATTERS WHICH YOU FEEL ARE IMPORTANT FOR INDIVIDUAL AND CHURCH REFORM

# Ecumenism: Progress and Problems

*Gideon Goosen*

In recent times some have been talking about the ecumenical movement going through the season of winter. Michael Hurley, who was the founder of the Irish School of Ecumenics, had as the subtitle to his 1998 book, *Christian Unity*, the rhetorical question, *An Ecumenical Second Spring?* Behind this question was the feeling among many that the ecumenical movement has run out of steam. In attempting to answer this question, a number of other questions arise: what country are we talking about? what level of ecumenism? (among bishops, theologians, or lay people?), from whose point of view? (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox), etc. So the question is not an easy one to answer.

I suppose the first thing to say is that all human endeavours and enterprises tend to have peaks and troughs in their timelines. Often there is great enthusiasm at the beginning and then things flatten out. It requires enormous energy and perseverance to continue at a high level of enthusiasm. It is a bit like social justice groups: they can be enthusiastic at the beginning and take on the injustices of the world only to experience burn-out twelve months later when the world has not changed. Ecumenism can be a bit like this. It is a hard slog with occasional breakthroughs. What is certain is that if it is from God it will succeed; if it is of man it will wither on the vine.

At the level of theological discussions breakthroughs can be clearly seen and rewarding. For example the joint statement of Catholics and Lutherans regarding justification would be one such 'high'. Teams on both sides set to clarify the theology and after many years the agreement was finally signed. This is a real achievement and the ecumenical movement needs them from time to time.

What concerns me more is the attitudinal change that we strive for at the local, parish level. I write from the Catholic perspective. In my experience at this level, the progress is not very encouraging. I find that 95% of Catholics are complacent about their religion. They are unmoved about the need to change their ways. They see no reason why they

should pray with other Christians (let alone other faiths!), why they should actively do something to improve relationships. It strikes me that the church (that is us) has not been able to give good reasons why anyone should not be satisfied with old (pre-Vatican II) attitudes and do something about ecumenism. We have failed in providing a convincing theology of ecumenism. The traditional attitude is: 'I go to church, give money in the plate, try to be charitable and do the right thing. I cannot see why I should be bothered with the Protestants.' People with this attitude are untouched by the scandal of disunity. They are comfortable in their prejudices. This is the attitude that we have largely been unable to change.

Part of the problem is that leadership at the local level has not been strong. Few sermons are ever preached on the scandal of disunity. Polite mention of ecumenical events are made without any passion and sense of scandal of disunity. Sad to say, one of the greatest obstacles to ecumenism is the local ordained minister of whatever denomination. I say this as a matter of fact, not in any anti-clerical spirit. That pastors are an obstacle to ecumenism might be more an unconscious reaction than deliberate ill-will.

Let me expand on that. There are a number of reasons why ecumenism is threatening for pastors from a sociological or political viewpoint. If the minister gives too much encouragement to mixing and praying with other churches, they might lose membership of their congregation (and money, especially money). If one works towards amalgamation of churches, they might lose out on being the minister in charge of the new entity. (This is particularly acute if one is a bishop who might lose status in a new church). Some ministers are just too busy and focused on their own parish or congregation and do not have time for activities that seem to distract their flocks from the main game. What is missing in all this is a vision of Christian unity.

What is also still missing at the local level among churches, is the implementation of the Lund principle (articulated by the Faith and Order meeting in Lund): that Christians should do everything together unless their conscience does not allow it. The application of this principle to the local level seem to me to be largely neglected. In fact the opposite seems to apply. However the investigation of this lacuna is for another time. □

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**GIDEON GOOSEN** teaches theology at Australian Catholic University. His most recent book is *Bringing Churches Together: A Popular Introduction to Ecumenism* (Geneva: WCC, 2001).

# Ordination of Catholic Women Conference

Jane Franklin Hall, Hobart

November 2002

The conference held at Jane Franklin Hall (Hobart) in November 2002 was considered by all delegates to have been a success in that we enjoyed being in the company of like-minded people, the speakers were interesting, the venue comfortable, the weather good and the arrangements went off without a hitch.

The conference was opened on the Friday evening by **Soline Vatinel** of BASIC (Brothers and Sisters in Christ) who had travelled from Ireland. She urged the participants not to wait any longer but to act now. She illustrated this by asking what would have happened if Mary had replied to the Angel Gabriel: 'Excuse me Gabriel but I need to consult the religious authorities for permission to say yes...they may have other plans'. Using Sister Irene McCormack as an example, she reminded us that Roman Catholic women all over the world are already ministering in ways which are considered illegal and invalid by the hierarchy. Soline, who believes that she herself is called to be a priest, already presides at the Eucharist and has said 'YES' to God.

We started with our keynote speaker, **John (Hans) Wijngaards**, who played out a dramatic representation of the ancient rite of the ordination of women deacons used by the Church in the early centuries. The role of the deacon was played by **Angelika Fromm** who had recently finished her diaconal training in Germany. The aim of this drama was to illustrate that women did receive a valid 'sacramental' ordination to the diaconate in the first

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*What would have happened if Mary had replied to the Angel Gabriel: 'Excuse me Gabriel but I need to consult the religious authorities for permission to say yes...they may have other plans'.*

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millennium; if the Church had the authority to do so then, it must also be able to do so now.

The delegates had found this dramatisation both moving and convincing and welcomed our visitor from Germany, Angelika. Here we had a woman who not only was convinced she is called to be a priest but who has already gone through an arduous training for the diaconate; she is already acting in this capacity in her own country, even though she is not officially recognised by the hierarchy and is receiving little support from the male deacons who have completed a similar training.

Angelika described the three-year program based on liturgy, preaching and service, including many hours of

practical voluntary service. The fact that Rome does not accept their ordination because they are 'not the same as male Deacons' does not appear to be a theologically convincing argument.

**Kim Power** gave a Power-Point presentation in her usual erudite, courageous and amusing way which made us realise how lucky we are to have her as a member of

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*Women did receive a valid 'sacramental' ordination to the diaconate in the first millennium.*

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OCW and aware that she is in danger of being targeted by the hierarchy for her views.

Kim carefully and convincingly explained how psychology and anthropology provide the barriers to women's ordination in a Church where gender is the deciding factor. As the characteristics of a good priest such as nurturing, sensitivity and pastoral care are often identified with the feminine, clerical men have become increasingly vulnerable and have reinforced the boundaries to protect their masculinity.

After lunch, **John Collins** had the unenviable task of maintaining our interest and concentration. He concentrated on the linguistics of 'diakonia', an inclusive word in relation to ministry whereas the English equivalent is associated with social service. The danger is that women deacons could be seen as subservient to male clerics. John however insisted that women should lay legitimate claims to participate in a renewed diaconate on the basis that they already carry out the duties of the non-ordained.

**Val Graydon** rounded the day off by giving us an interesting account of her own journey to the priesthood in the Anglican Church. She cautioned us that ordination is not the end of the journey - there are still many hurdles to be overcome - and that the role of both deacon and priest needs to be discussed and defined; the future will not necessarily imitate the past. This reaffirms the views of OCW that admission of women to ordination in the Roman Catholic Church will inevitably lead to a renewed ministry; perhaps here the experience of women in other churches will be invaluable.

The Sunday programme included the AGM followed by a Eucharist concelebrated by a priest from Sydney and two members of OCW hoping for ordination. During the liturgy, a re-enactment of the story of the Samaritan Woman (the first woman theologian?) was staged.

We ended our Sunday session by inviting delegates to record those issues they considered needed further discussion; these have now been passed to the executive. The question of promoting a training course for women deacons was shelved, not due to lack of interest but because it was deemed necessary to investigate this issue of the Diaconate fully before acting. However, the position of those women who have already trained as deacons was acknowledged and agreement was reached that they must receive acknowledgement from the Church.

The delegates unanimously passed a resolution that the Australian Catholic Bishops should work towards the

lifting of the ban on discussion of Women's Ordination and that letters to this effect should be sent to the Vatican.

Altogether the conference illustrated the huge groundswell of opinion within the community that women are ready and qualified to participate fully within their church. It only needs the boundaries to collapse for this energy to be released. Rather than feeling frustrated at the apparent lack of support by the hierarchy, we came away buoyed by the knowledge that we are not alone and can make a difference.

*Ann T. Ryan  
Associate Convenor, OCW*

## International Observation

contributed by Margaret Knowlden

*Letter to the Editor, Daily Telegraph, UK:*

### Catholic Church must listen to women

SIR — Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor is a patently good man (leading article, Jan. 20). As a Roman Catholic, my heart went out to him as he stumbled through the minefield when he first took up his post as Archbishop of Westminster. Yet that minefield was not laid by pagans. It was the ground bristling with the mines that the Catholic Church has been adeptly stepping around for years to avoid causing scandal.

Paedophile priests are mercifully few and far between, but their victims in the Western world are legion. In placing the blame for recent revelations squarely on the media, the cardinal made a crucial error. He was apparently advised to do so: if so, his advisers deserve their marching orders.

It is immensely encouraging to observe the archbishop on a genuine learning curve. However, did it really need persistent media attention to bring home to a Catholic prelate that no priest who sexually assaults even one child should ever be allowed to continue in ministry? Any intelligent Catholic woman could have told him that 50 years ago.

The terrible truth about the Catholic Church is that its institutional male culture has allowed all kinds of deviant sexual behaviour to continue in secrecy. When it did emerge, the truth was suppressed to avoid scandal. Catholics now have every reason to hope that other issues will start all our bishops on their own learning curves.

Another major issue that bishops have to face is the continued marginalisation of

intelligent Catholic women who wish to have a part in the ministry and administration of the Church.

Enough historical evidence is now available about the presence of sacramentally ordained women deacons in the first nine centuries of the Church, yet the Vatican has arrogantly forbidden all further open or internal discussion about women's ordination. If the Church is to have any impact on a pagan culture, it needs to cauterise the infected parts and root out antiquated notions.

As long as women are regarded as optional extras, the Church will be perceived as an antediluvian institution with nothing to say of any relevance to the West. To tell a female professional that she is "unsuitable" for ministry in the ordained permanent diaconate is no longer acceptable.

*Moya St Leger  
London W14*



THE POPE BRINGS HIS MESSAGE  
TO THE SUBURBS...

## 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

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## Michael Morwood

Author of **TOMORROW'S CATHOLICS**

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