



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
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Message from the Committee

Herman The Homuncle Seeing is Believing - or is it?

Human beings have always tried to make sense of the world around them by looking at it. They have done it both in trivial matters such as what the neighbour is up to, and in the most profound matters such as how the universe works, what the meaning of life is and what a human's place is in it.

At the trivial level our experience is often that we put two and two together and come up with five, or three. If we are decent people we will correct our mistakes and make amends if any harm has been done by our hasty conclusions. At the more profound level human conjecturing may be wrong but been done with the best of intentions based on the evidence before our eyes at the time. The earliest conclusions of our ancestors often became myth and legend which were, and still are, enacted and danced in order to keep the thoughts alive. As knowledge grew the theories began to find their way into written bodies of works. Individual thinkers began to develop reputations and authority. Everything would have been fine if we had always recognised that we could not be dogmatic about most of these 'truths' because they were in fact really only theories. It was especially pernicious when the Church dogmatised some of the theories and stultified the search for knowledge. It was even more reprehensible when these dogmas were also responsible for gross injustices.

Let us consider a couple of examples. It matters little to the rank and file of humans whether the sun goes round the earth or the earth goes round the sun. Unfortunately the Church took up as a tenet of faith that the sun went round the earth because man (sic) was the centre of the universe and anyone involved in the disproving of this theory was a heretic. It was the courageous and few thinkers who suffered the gross injustice in this case. Galileo in the early 17th century, with the aid of the telescope which he had made, was able to demonstrate the truth of Copernicus' theory developed 100 years earlier without a telescope, namely that the earth did indeed revolve around the sun. Galileo had to perjure himself

to avoid death but three and a half centuries later in 1992 Pope John Paul II finally admitted that Galileo had been right all along and apologised (it is never too late to apologise but what of those scientists such as Giordano Bruno who were burned at the stake because of their theories and enquiries?).

Much more important with respect to justice for the masses, however, were the theories concocted with respect to the embryology of mammals. Half of humankind, women, have been severely disadvantaged, even to this day, because of them. Aristotle propounded the theory which we can call **preformation**. Thomas Aquinas accepted and promoted it. Men were thought to hold the seed of life which they planted in the woman who was a kind of flowerpot. The woman was not considered to be fully human because she was not fully equipped to be human. As a consequence, women either consciously or unconsciously felt themselves to be inferior and men treated them as such, and laws and practices reinforced the inferiority.

Contemporary with Galileo, early in the 17th century, William Harvey – he of blood-circulation fame – was working on embryology and inclined to the **epigenetic theory** which assumed that life began with a formless mass and gradually evolved into a being with differentiated organs (and could more easily assume a contribution from the female). However he died before he could conclude his studies. Later in the century two Dutchmen, with the use of

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the microscope, finally did at least establish the existence of the male spermatozoa. Antony van Leeuwenhoek made the discovery and a couple of years later Niklaas Hartsoeker published pictures showing what he supposedly saw in the spermatozoa, tiny preformed men ('*homunculi*! These little chaps (our **HERMAN THE HOMUNCLES**) gradually put on weight until ready to be born, and presumably some turned into women along the way by losing some important parts. This theory of *preformation* prevailed even then because *epigenesis* seemed to require an occult change from formless matter into an organised creature and this, in the spirit of the times, seemed to be devilish. More than another century had to go by before the record was set straight in 1828.

In 1828 Karl Ernst von Baer gave the first description of the ovum (egg) of mammals and it was finally recognised that females contributed equally to their offspring and a woman was fully human! Since then women, consciously and unconsciously, have insisted on having equal status with men, and, although great advances have been made, there is still a long way to go.

In the 19th century 'western' countries made huge advances in medical knowledge. Hygiene and treatment improved so much that the death rate fell dramatically. Population grew. However then the birthrate somehow automatically fell also and population stabilised. Family size decreased and sexual activity was perceived to have meaning beyond procreation. For this reason and with the correct understanding of how babies were formed (embryologically speaking) came the concept of sexuality. Virginity and celibacy were still valued at the time and same-sex liaisons were still abhorred.

In the 20th century the medical revolution occurred in countries with huge populations and their death rates went down without the decrease in the birth rates coming quickly

enough to prevent a population explosion. The stabilisation of the world's population on a finite planet became an issue especially since humans began to realise that other creatures, both plants and animals, had rights to their habitats and also that our very existence depended on biodiversity. India and China began to implement coercive policies to lessen the birth rate. India failed but China's ruthlessness has been effective. Australia, being part of the 'west' has been close to stabilisation (immigration is not being discussed here) and freedom of choice of family size has not been challenged, nor need be. What is clear, however, is that a study of sexuality must include a consideration of demography.

Today, in the 21st century, we have the so-called sexual revolution. It has so inverted cultural mores that to be a virgin is considered to be the greatest sin and peer pressure on young people is hard to resist. Sexual activity has to some extent become a sport and its procreational aspect has lost its awe and mystery – fortunate the baby who has been conceived as a pure act of love. On the other hand, there is slowly growing an awareness that a healthy bonding between couples of whatever adult configuration can be achieved for the greater happiness of both parties. Also the fact remains that there is no shame in being a virgin – or celibate – in fact, it can be quite an achievement.

Frank and honest discussion is needed, not with a view to finally dogmatising our attitude to sex but to help us understand ourselves and others and to make the world a better place. With this in mind, ARC wishes to draw attention to and support the work being done by The Humanita Foundation which is 'committed to investigate and promote a better understanding of human development and sexuality within a Christ-centred spirituality'. Further information can be found at www.humanitafoundation.org

Barbara Campbell

You don't have to believe in God to do what she expects you to do

In te speravi semper (in you I have always trusted)

This speaker was not born within your fold,
supported by your grace,
held fast, never to turn from you his face.

Hear the voice of those who in all honesty
feel bound to choose the cold
Outside your house.

Nevertheless, they still believe in you,
although they may not know it,
for are not you the truth?

And these people both speak it
and (in your own phrase) do it.

You are beauty
and pure eyes remaining childlike
still look wonderingly
on your earth's loveliness.

You are goodness and I find
you in people who do not confess you.
They lack your body
but speak your mind.

Helder Camara: *The Desert is Fertile*

Homosexuality:

Where is it condemned in Scripture?

Paul Denny

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2357) defines homosexuality as ‘relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex’. This definition is not in terms of a person’s quality or condition, yet that is the dictionary meaning – and the common acceptance – of the ending ‘-ity’. A definition with ‘relations’ as genus is bound to confuse. If the definition of homosexuality as ‘relations’ were to find acceptance, then any relationship between men or between women would fall under the Catechism’s condemnation of homosexual acts! To add to the confusion, the next paragraph speaks of the ‘homosexual condition’ (No. 2358)!

The Catechism also states that homosexual acts ‘do not proceed from a genuine affective *complementarity*’ (my emphasis). Many people, especially homosexuals, would challenge the validity of that statement. Many homosexuals are engaged in unions of genuine mutual affection, where they would see their affection as complementary. In fact, those homosexuals would point precisely to the primacy of love as justification for legitimate sexual relations in their union.

The magisterium of the Catholic Church has moved from a position of ‘procreation (ie, the begetting of children) first, love second’ forty years ago to a position of ‘procreation and love, equal primacy’ in heterosexual marriage (Vatican 2). Will it move to ‘love first, procreation second’ (there’s an abundance of biblical evidence for the primacy of love!)? In the absence of the possibility of procreation in a homosexual union, why wouldn’t love retain its primacy?

The Catechism bases its condemnation on Gen 19:1-29 (and three passages in Paul). That section of Genesis relates to the incident of all the townspeople ‘without exception’ (v 5) demanding that Lot give them intercourse

with his guests, two angels. Lot refused, claiming the ‘protection of my roof’ (v 8), that is, the inviolability of hospitality. This was the basis of his condemnation of their intentions as ‘wicked’ (v 7). Both homosexual and heterosexual acts were condemned on this basis. Further, it is clear from the context that love was entirely absent: it was simply lust. Both homosexual lust and heterosexual lust were being condemned in the context of a gross failure in hospitality.

(Since this incident was the prelude to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, are we to conclude that failure in hospitality was also the besetting sin of these cities?)

The Catechism also turns to Rom 1: 24-27 for backup. In this chapter, Paul stresses faith and strongly condemns, collectively, the gentile society that did not come to faith instinctively through the knowledge of God in their hearts. God punishes this society, says Paul, by abandoning it to almost every imaginable evil. Included in the list are the ‘filthy practices’ of men ‘dishonouring their own bodies’ with men in ‘unnatural practices’ (similarly with women).

For homosexual persons, what are the natural practices that honour their own bodies? Homosexual people would probably be the best people to decide. They have been asking for dialogue with the hierarchy (of several denominations) for decades.

The Catechism refers to 1 Cor 6: 9, 10. Here Paul lists people who do evil and who will not inherit the Kingdom. There is significant variation in translations:

‘...adulterers, homosexual perverts...’ (*Good News translation*)

‘...catamites, sodomites,...’ (*Jerusalem Bible translation*)

‘...the self-indulgent, sodomites,...’ (*New Jerusalem Bible*)

‘...male prostitutes, homosexual offenders...’ (*New International version*)

‘...male prostitutes, sodomites,...’ (*NRSV*)

‘...adulterers or homosexuals...’ (*Living Bible*)

Of all these different translations, only the last one given condemns homosexuals as such. Homosexual ‘perverts’ or ‘offenders’ are condemned. Of course! So might

PAUL DENNY, retired psychologist, lives with his wife and their two children in regional Victoria. While wearing a rainbow ribbon, he experienced the humiliation of being refused Communion by a priest who is now a bishop. Paul has several gay and lesbian friends.

heterosexual perverts or offenders!

Paul in 1 Tim 1:10 condemns 'homosexuals' as 'contrary to the sound teaching that accords with the gospel' (NJB). Again, translations vary: 'sexual perverts' (Good News Bible); 'perverts' (New International); 'sodomites' (NRSV); 'homosexuals' (Living Bible); 'those who are immoral with women or with boys or with men' (*Jerusalem Bible*).

Overall, it seems that the Bible lacks clear evidence for the condemnation of homosexuals. The evidence from Genesis seems to have been completely misread. Evidence from the other places in Scripture is, at best, unclear. The variety of translations probably reflects uncertainty about exactly what is under condemnation. Both the sacred writers at the time of writing and the translators at the time of translation were, no doubt, influenced by the prevailing social beliefs.

In the light of the magisterium's distinction between subjective evil and objective evil, wisdom would suggest abandoning condemnation of homosexuals, at least until the homosexual case has been presented and thoroughly examined in dialogue.



The Church of Christ must be
 An inviting Church
 A Church with open doors
 A warming, motherly Church
 A Church of all generations
 A Church of the dead, the living and the unborn
 A Church of those before us, those with us and those after us.
 A Church of understanding and sympathy, thinking with us, sharing our joy and sorrow.
 A Church that laughs with the people and cries with the people
 A Church that is not foreign and does not act that way
 A human Church, a Church for us
 A Church that like a mother can wait for her children
 A Church who looks for her children and follows them
 A Church that visits the people where they are, at work or at play,
 At the factory gate and at the football stadium, and within the four walls of the home
 A Church of those in the shadow, of those who weep, of those who grieve
 A Church of the worthy, but also of the unworthy, of the saints and of the sinners.
 A Church not of pious pronouncements, but of silent helping action.

Cardinal Franz König
 as quoted in the Advent calendar of *Wir sind Kirche – Jugend (We are Church – Youth)*
 on 8 December 2002
 Translation by Jim Taverne

International Observations

Jim Taverne

De Boskant

This new catholic spiritual centre in the middle of The Hague was established on 5 October 2002 in the church of the Anthony of Padua parish, for everyone from anywhere who wants to give content and form to his or her religious feelings and inspiration.

Its management is in the hands of Theo Wierema, parish priest, and Petra Prinsova, pastor (in The Netherlands a pastor is not necessarily a priest). Apart from a church – where the pews have been replaced by comfortable chairs – De Boskant comprises also a chapel, a bookshop and a meeting hall. The place is always open for a large range of – mostly planned – activities.

Every Wednesday from 9.00 to 17.00 anybody can have a conversation with a pastor about any sort of subject. There is also space for discussion groups as well as for spontaneous conversations.

'The old territorial parish is a thing of the past. That does not matter, if we create also new, acceptable, credible initiatives. One must dare to turn into new paths!' says Wierema. 'De Boskant is an experiment which we don't begrudge ourselves. We want to bring the best from the catholic tradition into a meaningful programme for everyone. It would be foolish to ignore 2000 years of wisdom.'

www.deboskant.nl. *And Volzin* 25 April 2003

The leaven for the Church in the 21st century

Three leaders of *Wir sind Kirche* expressed their determination to continue the struggle for change within the Catholic Church. Their main goals are: full equality for men and women in all respects, election of bishops, clergy free to marry, acceptance of the individual's conscience in matters of sexuality and 'Frohbotschaft statt Drohbotschaft' i.e, joyful news instead of threatening news.

They quote Karol Wojtyła, bishop of Krakau: 'Every large organisation needs a loyal opposition!' They point out that it requires great powers of endurance to reform a 2000-years-old world organisation from the ground up.

But it is possible. Despite all the highs and lows in its history the Roman Catholic Church – be it very often late – has itself renewed, pushed by both outside and inside initiatives. Movements for change must act as leaven inside the Church community.

Unity at any price?

From the early centuries the Church has highly valued unity. That is so for good reasons, biblical and sociological. An organisation that speaks with one voice has already authority because of that one voice. This authority cannot be weakened by the reference to the many who think differently.

But must everything give way to that principle?

Is it perhaps not so, that the rigorous adherence to the idea of unity in fact constitutes at best the worse of two evils? The more so as the unity within the Church is consistently taken as uniformity, which – moreover – is harshly enforced on the members of the organisation. Many feel that differences of opinion are also justified within the Church. Only, at least I think so, this opinion strikes against psychological obstacles. We happen to have grown up with the fixed conviction that unity comes first and that the top decides which form and content should be of that unity. We may not like to acknowledge that the reality is different; that we in fact do not agree at all about many points of doctrine. We may wish to avoid talking openly about them. A great deal of the preaching is restricted to non-controversial, therefore safe standpoints.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves which kind of unity we really want?

Prof. Bert Laeyendecker *Acht Mei Post [Eighth May Post]* April 2003

In the Country of the Reformation

The Ecumenical Conference of Protestants and Catholics in Germany from 28 May to 1 June offers an extraordinary opportunity (of Church and World importance) for the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reformation.

Many people are convinced that the time is ripe to overcome the still existing obstacles to unity and thus the end of the Reformation. Therefore it was appropriate to recognise each other's communion celebrations and the validity of each other's ordination of ministers.

While plans were being made for the three ecumenical services – a RC one with 'open communion', an evangelical one with 'communion for all' and an 'agape' service with communal food and wine – the 'Wir sind Kirche' (We are Church) movement heard in January that the Pope would personally intervene.

That happened through the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, signed on Holy Thursday, which stresses the obligation of Catholics to only receive communion from Catholic ordained priests and the general prohibition for non-Catholics to receive communion in a Catholic Church. In a press release, *Wir sind Kirche* opines that this encyclical represents a new low level in the ecumenical process in the Church.

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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