



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics
September 2003
Issue No. 9

Message from the Secretariat

With Jesus always in our hearts, let us briefly meet together in this issue of ARCvoice to consider in turn: a little Housekeeping; our Parish Project; Faith and Ecology.

Housekeeping: The great dancer, Margot Fonteyn, once revealed that, with respect to her work, she had two rules: first, that her audience deserved that she always give of her best and, second, that she never revealed the cost. This, of course, is specific to the performing arts but it can be applied wherever a larger number is enjoying the endeavours of the few. It is also a fact that where an obviously needed new enterprise is coming into existence the cost is great on those initiating it. This cost is threefold, consuming all of time, energy and money. It is borne gladly because those involved are generally passionate about it. But as with the dancer, there is a limit to what one can give.

Australian Reforming Catholics had to come into existence. The Spirit is moving among the grassroots everywhere. National reforming associations have long existed in the Americas and in Europe. It is beholden on Australian Catholics to converse with and about Jesus, to re-examine his life and times in the light of the huge increase in knowledge available to us today. It is beholden on Australian Catholics to take a good look at themselves and at the Church to which they have given their allegiance. It is beholden on Australian Catholics to give out of their own unique experience and out of what this great big land might say to us.

Dear friends, **this is all leading up to the fact that we need your money!** The yearly fee is \$30 (concession \$20). The financial year is July-June. If you are already members (or subscribers) and have not yet done so, do please renew your membership TODAY! If you are not already members do please give it serious thought. We have been sending *ARCvoices* to people we thought might be interested. Those in that category will receive the December issue but from then on we shall limit the mail-out to members (subscribers).

Parish Project: Under the inspiration and drive of Ted Lambert, and concurrently with this publication, ARC is recommending to parishes around Australia that:

- 1) all Catholics use and foster inclusive language in public and private worship and conversation;
- 2) at the Sunday Liturgies individual parishioners be admitted to the pulpit after the priest or deacon has given the homily to comment, add to or otherwise augment the word

Accompanying these recommendations are some brief reasons. Inclusive language hardly needs any because society in general is very aware of the need for it and, indeed, so do many parishes. However, ARC does stress also that God is without gender and that language referring to God should reflect this. Concerning the recommendation that Church members be given the opportunity to articulate their faith, ARC points out that considerable sacrifices have been made to educate Catholics in the Faith but that this knowledge, and that gained from life experiences, is then let wither on the vine.

Faith and Ecology: Several ARC members attended the Interfaith Forum on Ecology held at the ACU Strathfield campus in Sydney in June. It was an extremely enriching

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experience and very encouraging because of the degree of consensus about humans' responsibility for the earth. Also encouraging is the fact that the Australian Catholic hierarchy has now officially recognised this. In 2002 the Catholic Conference of Australian Bishops created Catholic Earthcare Australia. ARC welcomes and heartily supports this initiative. CEA has members of an Advisory Council in each state. Its office is at:

19 Mackenzie St North Sydney 2060

phone 02 9956 5800

website www.catholicearthcareoz.net.

Col Brown is the Executive. We wish also to endorse the work being done by the Columbans' Peace, Ecology and Justice Centre which was responsible for the above-mentioned Forum. Its website is www.columban.org.au

Dear friends, we also need your active participation, particularly in the **formation of Chapters**. The only criterion is that all participants should be members of ARC. Moral support is all that some people are able to give and we welcome that and respect it. However, where you feel the slightest movement towards a creative idea please run with it. If you can, encourage like-minded people to form a Chapter with you. Eugene Stockton, a retired priest now living in Lawson in the Blue Mountains, is keen to explore Mysticism in our time. If word could get around and acted upon a new and helpful understanding of Mysticism could be developed. We can all be performers if we are passionately Christian and we can all be the audience to the ideas of others. Then we shall be as perfect as we can be and the cost will be as nothing.

Barbara Campbell



PS In the June issue you were introduced to Herman the Homuncle. We have found a picture of him for you!

Source: Helen A Curtis Biology 4th Edition (New York: Worth Publishers Inc., 1986).

Quotable Quotes

The people do not listen to me!

(Complaint by Cardinal Ad Simonis, Archbishop of Utrecht)

When a man stands behind the altar, the man changes.
When a woman stands behind the altar, the altar changes.

(Acht Mei Post Feb 2003)



Catholic Faith and Ecology

Charles Rue

Fr Rue speaks about how his faith deepened as his insights into ecology developed and how St Columban's Mission Society is working to make environmental issues mainstream in the church

In the last 30 or 40 years there have been many major changes with the Church and in our faith. The emphasis has moved from the catechism to Scripture; we have a greater appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit in our faith journey. The focus has moved from the Church itself to its service in the coming of God's Kingdom. These and other changes are major shifts. Another important shift that has emerged in the last 20 years is the connection between ecological insights and our faith.

Over the past 15 years, *The Far East* has presented what might be called some Greenie type articles about farm cooperatives in the Philippines such as those producing worms as an alternative source of fertiliser, about setting up marine parks in Jamaica to preserve fish stocks, on growing trees to counter salinity problems in Pakistan, about devotion to Mary as Mother of the Earth and other similar articles.

In 1990 Pope John Paul II published his New Year message on the environment entitled *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*. He said, 'Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past ... a "cosmos" endowed with its own integrity, its own internal dynamic balance. This order must be respected ... The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity ... St Francis invited all of creation - animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon - to give honour and praise to the Lord ... It is my hope that the inspiration of St Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of 'fraternity' with all the good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created.'

The Pope writes on both morality and spirituality, 'Morality invites us not only to use the land wisely for this generation and generations to come, but also respect it

for its own sake as a gift of God. Older farmers said, "look after the land and the land will look after you". Spirituality and the scripture readings at Mass invite us to be humble, to meditate on our intimate connection with all of creation as creatures ourselves, 'to forge a new solidarity' as the Pope says; 'a communion with God's creatures' as St Francis says. We all know the doctrine of the Incarnation that God is revealed to us through Jesus taking on flesh. The earth and all its creatures are an extension of that revelation and help mediate our spiritual connection with God.

It is in this context of morality and spirituality that the Columban society committed itself to help make ecological issues mainstream in the Church. Our starting point was concern for the poor. They always suffer first if there is an ecological disaster. I know from my missionary experience in Jamaica that wealthy people could buy their own electric generator and water filtration plant to protect themselves but poor people could not afford these luxuries. The Columbans have grown in their understating of these experiences so that care for the earth is part of our missionary message.

At a personal level, I am convinced of the importance of ecological insights to our Catholic faith from my own experience, not just because someone else says so.

I was brought up on a farm at Canowindra, NSW. It was a time of rabbit plagues when you could round them up like sheep. It was also the time of pasture improvement and contour banks. For me as a farmer I saw examples of good farmers and mismanaged farms. Life on the farm also brought experiences of God for me. I remember ploughing at night, not another person within *cooe*, the stars so bright I felt I could reach out and touch them and, most of all, the smell of the newly ploughed earth. I had a closeness with the earth and it was some sort of spiritual experience of God's presence.

After working as a missionary in Korea for many years I visited some of our Columban priests in the Philippines and saw first-hand the dire results of clear-felling the forests on the land and the people. Farmers in the mountains lost their homes and fishermen downstream lost their livelihood as silt killed the reefs.

I then arrived back in Canowindra to discover agro-business firms had taken over many of the farms. I saw the deforestation on the slopes of Mt Canoblas; a new

CHARLES RUE, a Columban priest, is a member of the Advisory Council of Catholic Earthcare Australia and a member of the Peace, Ecology and Justice Centre of the Columban Mission Institute. He is presently researching the history of St Columban's Mission Society in Australia and New Zealand and is a member of the Peace, Ecology and Justice Centre at the Columban Mission Institute, North Turrumurra. www.columban.org.au.

gold mine was filling up dams with cyanide waste and salinity was eating away at the edges of roads. I discovered that Australian environmental practices were no better than the Philippines.

Building on *Sheep, Wool and Pasture* studies I did as a youth, I went to Macquarie University and did a Masters in Environmental Planning. I wanted to have some more background in the area and did not want to be written off as another 'do-gooder' priest.

I believe a good starting point is to think about environmental issues in terms of Good News. Ecological insights invite us to change the way we use the earth's resources and to widen our belief. It is not that we started out to exploit the earth out of spite or ill will. Most people thought they were doing the right thing. Now, science tells us differently.

I come back to the central message of Christianity, Good News. Jesus came that we have life and have it to the full. God is on our side. He is not trying to catch us out. So when we are asked to begin making connections between ecology and our faith, it is not meant to be a burden or another obligation we have to carry out. Let's think of it in terms of Good News.

It is not easy to change our ideas and our ways. A few years ago Columban Fr Brian Gore was verbally abused by a union leader for speaking against the destruction of old growth forests in Gippsland when he said, 'God was the first genuine Greenie'. The union official said that jobs were the only thing that mattered. The relationship between jobs and the environment is more complicated than that. There is a whole bag of rights and justices involved. While we remain sensitive to the hurt of people caught up in changes we need to care for the earth and, as the Pope says, 'There are times to change'.

I would recommend two things. Firstly, to get involved with an environmental group, and secondly, get together with a group of Catholics to make connections between environmental issues and our faith.

I have been involved in an environmental group, Landcare, for several years. It is a great movement where groups of farmers and concerned citizens work together

to face ecological problems which cut across their fence lines. Those involved show courage by doing this just when farm incomes are declining, but the results are worthwhile. Community spirit is built up in places where it is dying. This is a sign of hope at a practical level. When we get involved with a group like Landcare, Ocean Watch or Bush Re-Generation, bit-by-bit we increase our knowledge of ecological issues as the group progresses.

As Catholics, we also have something to offer. I have taken the opportunity to meet with other Catholics, not only to tease out the implications of ecological insights for us but also to discover what we can offer the environmental movement. In the long run, environmental groups need a moral and spiritual basis for their judgements and we can join with them in discovering what is needed.

In 2002 our Catholic Bishops launched *Catholic Earthcare Australia*. They indicated its importance by giving it equal status with *Caritas*. They connected the cry of the poor with the cry of the land.

I believe that we will benefit from making environmental issues mainstream within the Church. We will not only broaden our practice of morality and spirituality but we can bring new direction and new energy to our church communities. The Columbans ran an Interfaith Forum on ecology in Sydney in June 2003. The response of Aboriginal, Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Uniting Church people was the focus of the meeting. They explored how they could cooperate to offer motivation to care for the earth and have their own faith grow in the process. There will always be difficulties and opposition, even from church people, but as in all our church activities, let's put it in the context of Good News. God is blessing us and inviting us to find new ways of knowing God and serving our neighbour. It's up to us to choose. But when we choose to do it, the Spirit is by our side trusting us, and we discover God in new ways. It is exciting. It is Good News. ■

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The Far East Columban magazine
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Eremos Institute presents Bishop Spong Returns

This event will be held at 7:30 pm on Wednesday 15 October 2003 in the Greenhalgh Auditorium, UTS, Kuring-gai Campus, Eton Road, Lindfield. Cost: \$15 if purchased by 1 October or \$20 at the door. NOTE: Please post or fax your registration for Spong. Phone bookings not accepted. All sales are final for Spong tickets. No refunds for cancellation. In what may be his last visit to Australia, Bishop Spong will present his vision of Christianity that is inclusive, dynamic and vibrant and addresses the issues concerning people today.

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International Observations

Jim Taverne

The Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of 17 April 2003, in which the Pope warns against eucharistic sharing with non-Catholics, did not prevent the joint ecumenical Kirkentag in Berlin from 28 May to 1 June from being a successful gathering of over 200,000 participants. *The Tablet* of 7 June gives its report (p.31/32) the heading: 'Berlin festival shows how the Church could be'.

The *Acht Mei Post* of June (p.6) calls the Encyclical Letter 'a Sacrament as weapon' and declares it an encyclical for the pile of Vatican papers which together form the Church's historic 'book of oblivion'. The author of the article quotes a well-known priest of over 80 who admitted recently that **he compared the whole hierarchy of the Church with the orchestra on the Titanic**. Is it not so that the Church, the Barque of Peter shipwrecked already a long time ago on the iceberg of the modern world, but that the pope and the bishops still act as if nothing has happened? **Undauntedly they keep harping on doctrines and instructions from the days of yore**.

The Tablet of 2 August published the whole text of 'Considerations regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons' (available on the Vatican Website - English version). That issue and *The Tablet* every week since are full of comments, most of them critical of the text and basis of the document.

The *National Catholic Reporter* dated 15 August quoted Fr. Angel Rodriguez Luño, a moral theologian at the Opus Dei-run University of the Holy Cross in Rome: 'In no case is it possible to legislate against the Creator, whose intentions on this issue [of homosexual union] are manifest and undeniable, based on incontrovertible biological, anthropological and social data'.

The editor of *Volzin* of 15 August (p.5) has a different view. He points out that the hierarchy rightly states that homosexual persons should not be discriminated against. But then it – wrongly – asserts that homosexual relations are a threat to society. Without any investigation or proof the document denies that homosexuals and same-sex unions provide their own positive contributions to society. There is no evidence whatever that the adoption of children by homosexuals would be a form of abuse: ask the children themselves! According to the document, Catholic politicians, who vote in favour of a law that – against the common good – recognises homosexual unions, commit a gravely immoral act. The Catholic MP, Ger Koopmans, who recently exchanged vows with his Eugene, can put that in his pocket!

If the Church wants to appeal to the conscience of catholic politicians She must use good arguments, which have to refer to real life experiences of people. The Vatican document lacks such arguments.

Registered partnerships of priests and housemates and Canon Law Amidst the death notices in Dutch papers you find sometimes one in which the widow and children of a Catholic priest express their sorrow over the loss of husband and father. Such clandestine marriages are rare. But the registered partnership of priests and their housemates is fairly common. Such a partnership is formed and legally registered with the purpose to establish rights and obligations for the partners to look after each other.

Canon 1394 of the Code of Canon Law of 1983 proscribes attempts by a priest to marry even if only civilly. The penalty is *latae sententia* suspension, after a warning. The Code does not say anything about partnership registrations. (These did not exist yet). Therefore they are not punishable under the Code. Such partnership cannot be treated as if it were marriages.

Canon 18 states that the penal law must be strictly interpreted. Thus, many priests in The Netherlands used the legal form of registered partnership. The (conservative) bishops were encouraged by the Vatican to step in. This led to a *General Decree* dated 1 May 2001, forbidding the entering into a registered partnership by priests and unmarried deacons He who concludes a registered partnership after 1 June 2001 would automatically be suspended. Persistence by a priest or deacon would attract more sanctions. However dismissal from the clerical status cannot be such sanction, because canon 1317 states clearly that such dismissal cannot be imposed by a particular law.

Canon 9 forbids retroactive laws. Therefore, the bishops could proscribe future partnerships but not existing ones. On 1 December 2002 the bishops issued a new *General Decree* for the determination of the consequences of the decree of 1 May 2001, including the prohibition to enter into a registered partnership. This document considers such partnership incompatible with celibacy. (This can only be verified by a thorough inspection of the bedroom). The decree also insists that persons who had registered their partnership agreement before 1 June 2001 (the date the previous decree became law) would have to terminate that partnership before 1 May 2003 (retroactive in contravention of Canon 9). (Source: *Acht Mei Post* April 2003). ■

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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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*.

Order by phone, email, fax or post from: Eremos Institute, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta 2151.

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