

Into the Deep

Issue 9

Newsletter of the Confraternity of St Michael, Gippsland

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Traralgon's Answer to Hierarchy

Fr Peter Bickley, parish priest of Traralgon, gave his annual report during a recent 'Spiritual and pastoral visit by Bishop Coffey' in Traralgon.

Fr Bickley notes in his report, "that lasting change [in the Church] happens more quickly when it travels from the grass roots rather than down from the head."

He continues, "The Holy Spirit is clearly showing us that collaboration is the way of the future. This shift requires much rethinking, reforming of old ways and learning both by leaders and followers." His parish, he says, is "under some able and imaginative lay-leadership" and "we have made some headway in this direction."

Later, in congratulating his parish schools, he notes "I constantly keep in mind that the main channel for handing on our Catholic faith and tradition to the coming generations is through our Catholic schools." (Let's be serious here – this is *not* working!)

Fr Bickley quotes the parish 'vision statement' - "The family of St Michael's Parish, living Gospel Values, celebrates the rich diversity of its members. As a faith community, journeying with God, we welcome others along the way."

St Paul says that Christ is the head of the Church (Eph5:23). Yet the theme of Fr Bickley's report seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit has handed over the leadership of Christ in His Church, to the lay people.

The vision statement strikes one as a people-centred celebration-of-self, on a journey with no direction or goal (with God as a fellow parishioner maybe?) No! We journey *to* God our Father and Creator, *through* Christ Jesus. We have a clear leader in Christ, and in the Magisterium of the Church.

Crisis of Fidelity to the Truth

It is very important to remember that [in the Bible] the word 'crisis' has two meanings. The first is the familiar sense of the word: a 'crisis' is a cataclysmic upheaval, a breaking-up of what had seemed fixed and sure. But the world of the Bible also thinks of 'crisis' as opportunity: a moment ripe with the potential for deeper conversion.

If crisis-as-cataclysm is to become crisis-as-opportunity in the Catholic Church in America, then we must recognise that, at the bottom of the bottom line, today's crisis is a crisis of discipleship; a crisis of fidelity. And the only remedy for a crisis of fidelity is - fidelity.

The Gospel scene of Jesus and Peter on the Lake of Galilee can help us here. When Peter keeps his eyes fixed on the Lord, he can do what seems impossible, he can walk on water. When he averts his gaze from Christ and begins looking elsewhere for his security, he sinks. We, too, can do the seemingly impossible if we keep our gaze fixed on Christ. When we look elsewhere, we sink.

The Holy Father, speaking to the cardinals of the United States a year ago said that today's crisis grew out of a failure to live and teach the fullness of Catholic truth.

When we fail to teach the truth and live the truth, when we substitute what we imagine to be our truths for what Christ has revealed as the truth, the way, and the life, we do not live as the saints we are called to be - the saints we must be, if we are to live forever, happily with God.

Catholic Lite is Catholic mediocrity.

Rediscovering and embracing the adventure of orthodoxy, the high adventure of Christian fidelity, is the path from crisis to authentically Catholic reform.

From an address by George Weigel, author

Let Our Adoration Never Cease

The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offences and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease.

Para 1380, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Un-informed Responses: Everyone 'Knows' Except Those Involved

Following the Stop Press of last month's Into the Deep, a number of people around the diocese have given their opinions on the issue of Fr John Speekman, parish priest of Morwell being asked by Bishop Jeremiah Coffey to leave the diocese while refusing to give any reason.

Following are first-hand accounts of public statements that have been made regarding the issue.

Fr Gerard Coffey, of Drouin, in a homily: "It has nothing to do with the Bishop. Fr John has not been happy in the diocese for a long time." [In which case, why wouldn't Fr Speekman simply have resigned a long time ago?]

Colin Coomber, Media Officer at the Bishop's Office in Sale, confronted the protesters saying: "Fr Speekman knows the reason for his removal". [As if they'd travel to Sale to protest if Fr Speekman was able to give them an answer.]

Marian Lappin of Sale, in The Gippsland Times newspaper: 'pledged her support to the Bishop's decision' and 'wholeheartedly supported' it, even though she doesn't know the reason – unless she has information from the Bishop that he has not divulged to Fr Speekman yet. She notes, "It would have had to have been pretty drastic for him to make this decision." [Interesting that a woman from well outside the parish of Morwell, as spokesman for 'parishioners in the Sale area' can make such definitive comment on a decision affecting parishioners of Morwell.]

Hein Basten, of Morwell, in the Latrobe Valley Express newspaper: "The Catholic Church is governed by an autocracy and we as parishioners have all at some time been disappointed when a priest has been relocated to another parish, but have accepted the situation as it is without making headlines in the media." ['Autocracy' means a totalitarian government! And 'relocation' seems to miss the mark somehow.]

On the other hand, messages have been received by Into the Deep from around the world, with subscribers expressing their distress that such action can be taken by a bishop without explanation given to the parish priest concerned.

Tower of Babel

Fr Krotwaar, Sr Doreen, Liz Hanney - I vehemently disagree we are all equal leaders in our Church. Try telling Colonel Peter Cosgrove who so admirably leads his servicemen, they are all his equal. Your 'Knights of the round table' concept is a modern day tower of Babel. The solution is stronger positive leadership.

B. Axten, Morwell

Don't Advertise De Souza!

The following letter was sent from the Bishop's Office, dated 6th May 2003:

"To all parish priests, parish secretaries, school principals.

It has been drawn to my attention that a Raymond de Souza will be speaking in the Latrobe Valley on the evening of May 19.

I would like to point out that Mr de Souza has no authority to speak on the Catholic Church in this diocese and I urge you not to publicise this visit in any way in your newsletters or parish bulletins.

Every blessing

Yours sincerely



Monsignor D McCartan VG"

(Nice to see Mons McCartan reads Into the Deep, but we understand that a lay person speaking in a secular venue requires no authorisation from the diocese.)

Privilege to Protest for Priest

As one of the "protestors" outside the Cathedral last week may I say that is the first time I have ever protested for anything. It was a privilege to do so for our priest Fr Speekman, the best priest we have ever had in Morwell. I know everybody there felt very conspicuous, but I feel even if I am persecuted for it, it will have been worth it and will do it again if it will help.

R. Vanderzalm, Morwell

Fr Speekman Update

The following appeared in the Morwell parish bulletin on 18 May:

"A note from Fr Speekman:

This week I received a letter from Bishop Coffey formally requesting my resignation as parish priest of Morwell. He believes that I have an inability to work in a peaceful manner with my employees and that I have an abusive attitude towards those who disagree with me; and that this has caused division in the parish. Church law allows me two options: I can resign voluntarily, or I have the right to appeal the Bishop's decision. I am considering these options."

Parallel Church in Morwell

In the March issue of *Into the Deep*, the letter “What do teachers really believe?” mentioned Professor Denis McLaughlin’s finding that the majority of teachers in Catholic schools constitute a ‘parallel church’, which largely disregards the teachings of the Catholic Church.

There are signs of this ‘parallel church’ in our own diocese. In Morwell parish, the Bishop issued a decree last year removing the governance of the parish schools from the parish priest.

Instead, these primary schools are allowed to prepare the children for the sacraments of initiation without the parish priest being involved. The bishop appointed another priest or personally administered the various sacraments either in the drama room or the hall.

The sacraments form part of the Church and belong in the parish and not in the schools. The schools should be part of the parish - the parish should not be an optional extra of the school.

How is it that the bishop can contradict his own diocesan sacramental programme (and Church teaching) and administer the sacraments to children who are not connected to the parish?

As a parent, this has caused me great distress. Thankfully, Fr John has offered an alternative parish-based education program for parents, for those of us who want our children to receive the sacraments in our parish with our parish community. (As a bonus, his program has been a great way for us parents to learn and grow in our faith too!)

Name and address supplied

Dangerous Interpretations

Drawing on “the wisdom of God and humans”, Paul Denny sets out what he considers are principles that “should govern human (including church) activities.” Mr Denny was one of the presenters at the ‘Spiritual and pastoral visit by Bishop Coffey’ in Traralgon recently.

He contends that “The principle of collegiality (or collaboration, from Vatican II) requires a loving informed consensus decision by those making it. This is achieved through the practice of discernment. This goes hand in hand with the principle of communion (or community, developed since Vatican II), whereby it is the community which saves.”

How can this *serious* misunderstanding of both collegiality and communion go unchecked?

And what of the bold statement that it is *the community that saves*?

Football, here we come!

The lack of priestly vocations seems to be a convenient excuse for some to promote parishes in partnership and priest-less gatherings such as the Liturgy of the Word.

Priestless parishes are impossible.

Liturgy of the Word is appropriate in certain circumstances, and I have nothing against it.

However, in our diocese we have priests arranging for Liturgy of the Word to be celebrated in ‘partner’ parishes while Mass is said in a neighbouring parish. I understand that the distance to travel to the next parish for Mass is half an hour or less.

Who would *not* travel that distance to go to Mass?

Surely it is not unreasonable to expect people to travel an hour, or even more, to attend Mass, as opposed to offering a Liturgy of the Word?

Why are we so eager to try to dismiss our need for priests and the Holy Mass, thinking we can do it all ourselves? Where is our faith in the true presence of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist and that the Mass is the centre of our Catholic faith?

It seems that some people find it a lot easier to travel all the way to Melbourne for a football game than to a neighbouring town for Sunday Mass.

J. Henderson, Morwell

Congratulations

We’ve just run off and read the latest *Into the Deep*. What can we say? A million congratulations. Everything is so true, so clear, and so exposing of the double standards of the bishop, the CEO, the clergy, the poor led-by-the-nose laity who haven’t caught up with the facts of life. It’s all so depressingly sad, but at the same time, incredibly encouraging to know that you and your band of musketeers, know what’s right and aren’t afraid to speak out. Thanks again.

B. & M. Schaefer, Melbourne

De Souza Talks on the Rosary

Raymond de Souza’s talk in Traralgon was well attended in spite of the Bishop’s Office’s request that it not be advertised. He spoke on “Is the rosary a prayer of vain repetitions?” A full report will appear in next month’s issue. In the meantime, consider this: Pray the rosary like MAD - with Modesty, Attention, and Devotion.

Lack of Vocations?

Over a 23-year period the number of priests in the world decreased, while the number of seminarians increased.

This is according to a study that compared the data of the Church's Statistical Yearbook from 1978 with December 2001.

Diocesan and religious priests decreased from 420 000 to 405 067. The decrease is due above all to the reduced number of religious-order priests, especially in Europe, North America and Oceania, in whose countries the average age of priests has also increased.

In contrast, the number of seminarians has almost doubled from 63 882 candidates to the priesthood in 1978 to 112 244 at the end of 2001.

As opposed to the case of seminarians, there is no significant growth in the number of women entering novitiates. In this case also, the most notable decrease has been registered in Europe, North America and Oceania.

www.zenit.org

No Authority to Reform

"For a Catholic, the Church is indeed composed of men who organise her external visage. But behind this, the fundamental structures are willed by God himself, and therefore they are inviolable. Behind the *human* exterior stands the mystery of a *more than human* reality, in which reformers, sociologists, organisers have no authority whatsoever."

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
in The Ratzinger Report, by V Messori

St Gabriel Communications

Log on to www.saintgabriel.com.au for Raymond de Souza's Catholic Apologetics website.

Last Laugh

Colin Coomber of the Bishop's Office in Sale, asking the protesters: "Why didn't you just write the Bishop a letter?"

Marian Lappin of Sale, in the Latrobe Valley Express newspaper, saying, "I don't agree with the methods demonstrated by certain parishioners who felt the need to gather a 'picket line' and inform the media over an issue that could have been discussed in a controlled, calm environment had the Bishop simply been contacted and an appointment arranged."

Obviously these options were tried as the first (and second and third...) course of action! Who would take such drastic action for the fun of it?

Mary, our mother

And mother of the Redeemer,
Gate of heaven and star of the sea,
Come to the aid of your people,
Who have sinned,
Yet also yearn to rise again!
Come to the Church's aid,
Enlighten your devoted children,
Strengthen the faithful throughout the world,
Let those who have drifted hear your call,
And may they who live as prisoners of evil
Be converted!

John Paul II

Apologetics?

From the Greek

Defence!

Contact Into the Deep

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Or mail to Mr Pat O'Brien, RMB 5165
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Please notify by e-mail if you would like to be added to the regular e-mailing list.

The purpose of Into the Deep is to provide a forum for those who:

- no longer have a voice in Catholic Life, our diocesan newspaper,
- wish to understand and defend the teachings of the Catholic Church,
- wish to support and defend those who are unjustly treated by Church bureaucrats and organisations,
- wish to campaign for the renewal of our Catholic schools,
- wish to promote Eucharistic Adoration in all parishes, wish to have a means of support and contact for one another in remaining true to our Catholic faith.

Letters to the Editor

Readers are encouraged to contribute letters or articles. We cannot guarantee that all will be published, and some will be edited due to space.

Please keep letters factual, and report only first-hand information.

The purpose of sharing letters is to pass on relevant information and suggestions for making positive changes, that is, in line with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

We live in joyful hope that the diocese we love can be faithful to the authentic tradition of the Church. As such, Into the Deep aims to be a messenger of hope and not of doom.

Name, address and phone number must accompany letters. However, if there is a reasonable request, anonymity will be preserved when publishing.