

18 December, 2003  
INSECT REPORT 2003-2004

## **CATHOLIC THEOLOGIES WORLDWIDE: REGIONAL REPORT: AUSTRALIA**

### **1. BASIC FACTS**

#### **1.1 Population and Religions.**

Although the population of Australia passed the 20 million mark in December 2003, the figures used below are based on the 2001 census figures which gave the population of Australia as 18,972,350. Of these the number of Catholics is 5,001,624 or 26.65%. The other large Christian churches are the Anglicans, 3,881,162 (20.68%) and the Uniting Church In Australia (UCA), 1, 248,674 (6.65%).

Other smaller Christian Churches can be listed as follows:

Presbyterian (3.40%),  
Eastern and Oriental Orthodox (2.82%),  
Lutheran (1.33%), Baptist (1.65%),  
Church Of Christ (0.33%),  
Pentecostal (1.04%),  
Salvation Army (0.38%),  
Jehovah Witnesses (0.43%) ,  
Seventh Day Adventist (0.29%), and  
Latter Day Saints (0.27%).

Religious Communities, other than Christian, are :

Muslim (1.50%),  
Jewish (0.45%),  
Buddhist (1.91%),  
Hindu (0.51%).

There are other categories in the census that are worth noting. One such category is labeled "other" (0.48%) and includes all other minor religions. Both the "No Religion" and the "No Reply" categories have increased in recent years to 15.48% and 11.66% respectively. There are many possible interpretations of these latter figures. Two common interpretations are that

either it reflects a move to a more secularized society, or that the data indicate a disenchantment with institutionalized religion.

## 1.2 Faculties of theology (addresses).

Here the names and addresses of the faculties will simply be listed. Further comment will be provided below.

There are two universities with faculties of theology. They are: **Australian Catholic University**, (ACU), (P O Box 968, North Sydney, N.S.W. 2059; ACU has seven campuses, see below); In Perth, **University of Notre Dame**, (13-19 Mouat Street, Fremantle, W.A. 6160 or P O Box 1225, Fremantle, W.A. 6160; it also has a campus in Broome: P O Box 2287, Broome, W.A. 6725).

The diocesan seminaries are: **Brisbane** (Holy Spirit Seminary of Queensland, Box 67, Chermside, QLD 4032); **Melbourne** (Corpus Christi Seminary, 180 Drummond Street, Charlton, VIC. 3053); **Sydney** (Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Box 5149, Homebush, N.S.W. 2140, and Redemptoris Mater Seminary, 315 Bunnerong Road, Pagewood, N.S.W.2035); **Perth** (St Charles Seminary, P O Box 134, Guilford, W.A. 6935 and Redemptoris Mater Seminary, 26 Cambon Road, Morley 6062.);

## 1.3 Other theological colleges.

In the following list of theological colleges, the first mentioned in each city is the main theological provider for diocesan seminarians: **Adelaide** (Catholic Theological College, Adelaide College of Divinity Campus, 34 Lipsett Terrace, Adelaide, S.A. 5032); **Brisbane** ( St Paul's Theological College, Approach Road, Banyo, QLD 4014, or Box 110); **Melbourne** Catholic Theological College, 278 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne, VIC 3002; United Faculty of Theology, 'Kernick House', Queen's College, Melbourne, VIC 3052; Yarra Theological Union, P O Box 79, Box Hill, VIC, 3128;). **Sydney** there is the Catholic Institute of Sydney, (C.I.S.), (99 Albert Road, Strathfield, N.S.W. 2135); The C.I.S. is the main academic institution for seminarians.

The two Catholic universities were mentioned above. Something more needs to be said about them. The *Australian Catholic University (ACU)*,

<http://www.acu.edu.au>) has campuses in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Ballarat. Its history is a little unique. In the latter part of the nineteenth century religious sisters and brothers were coming from Europe in great numbers to assist the expansion of Catholicism in Australia. Much time and effort went into establishing schools and hospitals. With time these religious orders and institutes began preparing teachers, and later nurses, for Catholic institutions in Australia. Many small training institutions grew up in the main cities. In the next century, through a series of amalgamations, relocations, transfers of responsibilities and diocesan initiatives more than twenty historical entities contributed to the creation of what was become the first Catholic university in Australia, *Australian Catholic University*, which was created under state laws.

ACU commenced operation on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1991 with initially eight campuses in Ballarat, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne (2) and Sydney (3). The university was formed by the amalgamation of four Catholic Institutions of higher education in eastern Australia: Catholic College of Education Sydney (in New South Wales), Institute of Catholic Education (in Victoria), McAuley College of Queensland and Signadou College of Education (in the Australian Capital Territory).

The University is a public university, open to all, and is a member of the Unified National System of Higher Education, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the International Federation of Catholic Universities. The Vice-Chancellor is a member of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The University has faculties of Arts and Science, Education and Health Sciences. The faculty of Arts and Science includes a Sub-Faculty of Philosophy and Theology.

There is a second Catholic university, Notre Dame University, which is a private university. It has campuses in Perth and Broome. The University of Notre Dame Australia was established by Act of the Parliament of Western Australia. The Act was passed on 21 December 1989 and proclaimed on Australia Day, 26 January 1990. The University's first Trustees were appointed by Archbishop William Foley, the then Catholic Archbishop of Perth. The Archbishop of Perth appoints or nominates a number of the Trustees. The University was established under canon law as a Catholic institution by the Administrator of the Archdiocese of Perth, the Most Reverend Robert Healy, D.D., on 2 July, 1991.

## 1.4 Ecumenical Institutions.

One should also mention the ecumenical (inter-denominational) institutions of theological education. Nungalinga (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Combined Churches National Education Network), is an indigenous ministers training centre, located at Dripstone Road, Casuarina, Darwin, Northern Territory, or P O Box 40371, Darwin, N.T. It is a partnership between Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and the Uniting Church in Australia. There are a number of other “colleges of divinity” (or “consortia”) which bring together Christian churches in their theological education. There is Adelaide College of Divinity (ACD) founded in 1979, for Catholics and Lutherans; the Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD), founded in 1910, and affiliated with Melbourne University in 1993; Brisbane College of Divinity (BCD), founded in 1983, for the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and UCAs; the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD), founded 1983 with currently twelve affiliated member institutions, including the Catholic Institute of Sydney (and the Centre for Christian Spirituality?); Perth College of Divinity (PCD) founded in 1985 for Anglicans, UCAs, Baptists and forms part of Murdoch University). It should also be mentioned that Flinders University, Adelaide, has a theological faculty that crosses Christian boundaries as does Charles Sturt University, though neither of these are Catholic institutions.

## **2. HISTORY OF THEOLOGY ESPECIALLY AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL.**

### **2.1 History of Institutions of theological education.**

The history of theological institutions follows that of setting up dioceses and then seminaries. Sometimes diocese combined and a national seminary, such as St Patrick’s at Manly, Sydney was set up. Religious orders also established their own theological education centers, initially for their own members, such as Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne or Theological Union at Hunter’s Hill, Sydney. Catholic colleges for training teachers and nurses also offered some theological training for members of religious orders and then, much later, after the Second Vatican Council, for lay men and women. All this was done without government financial help. Only since the Second Vatican Council have the numbers of religious vocations declined with the result that some institutions have become unviable. In

recent times Sydney has seen the closure of three such institutions, the Columban College at Turramurra (Columban priests), the Theological Union at Hunter's Hill (Marist Fathers), and St Paul's National seminary at Kensington, (for late vocations, run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart). These were closed due to lack of numbers and general non-viability.

The way the state relates to primary and secondary schools and these higher institutions needs some explanation from an historical viewpoint. The Church Act of 1836 sought to treat all religions equally by providing financial aid to all religions. However sectarianism, which arrived with the convicts and settlers, was never far away and when the churches refused to give up their rights to run their own religious schools, the government of the day withdrew financial funding and declared, in the 1872 Act that education should be "free, secular and compulsory". In Australia, there has never been a state religion and all religions are treated equally before and after the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1902, when it ceased to be a colony. The strong sectarianism among Christian denominations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century abated in the twentieth century with the foundation of the World Council of Churches and then, for Roman Catholics, the Second Vatican Council and its embrace of ecumenism.

The Australian government allows religious (church) schools and since the 1960s provides substantial funding. Other than mainline Church schools, other schools called "Christian Schools" have appeared. These tend to be more or less fundamentalist Christian schools of a Protestant kind often run by boards of parents, while Roman Catholics have set up *Opus Dei* schools. All these have government funding provided they comply with educational standards. At the tertiary level, the government funds educational institutions like the Australian Catholic University and Avondale College (Seventh Day Adventist) as part of the Unified National System of Universities. Those not part of that system are generally not funded. The government began to fund Catholic training colleges for nurses and teachers (the forerunners of the ACU) in the late 1970s though not to the same extent as government run ones. But the government never funded theological training as in seminaries and church run theological colleges. A private Roman Catholic University like Notre Dame only receives very limited funding and is not part of the Unified National System of Universities.

Theological education and formation takes place today in a decidedly ecumenical context which can be delineated by saying something about the

evolution of the National Council of Churches in Australia. The NCCA, (established in 1994) includes the mainline churches and has as its main aim the promotion of ecumenism. Its predecessor, the Australian Council of Churches, developed from the Australian Committee for the World Council of Churches established in 1946. While some progress in ecumenism has been made, (as can be seen in the establishment of the inter-denominational Colleges of Divinity in the major cities), and infra-structure established at the state and local level, it has been slow. Ecumenists would maintain that there is a lack of commitment to ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue on the part of many Christians and their leaders. The rise of militant Islamic groups world-wide has given noticeable impetus to Interfaith Dialogue even given the small percentage of Muslim in Australia (1.5 per cent). The intolerance of small extreme anti-Islam and anti-Jewish groups has also become more apparent through occasional attacks on mosques and synagogues. In general though, religion is accepted in Australian society but is seen as a private matter. Although the origins of the settlers in Australia was clearly Christian, today Australia would pride itself on being multi-faith and multi-cultural. Nevertheless its Christian origins can be seen in many ways, including the fact that Parliament is commenced each day with the Lord's Prayer. So, theological education takes place in country where other Christian denominations and other world religions are taken seriously.

As regards the actual theological curricula that is taught, it can be said that theological colleges follow, in general, the western style of seminary course with biblical studies, fundamental, systematic, moral and pastoral theology. Hebrew, Greek and Latin are still offered here and there, but are in decline in spite of periodic attempts to revive them. Seminary theological training would be more geared to the ordained ministry compared to the two Catholic universities mentioned above. Many theological courses are geared to teachers because the numbers involved with Catholic schools nationwide are large in proportion to the population, so there is a significant need for theological background for those who will teach religious education in the Catholic schools.

Some dioceses have also set up their own pastoral institutes for the preparation of lay men and women who will work in the parish or diocese in a variety of ministries. One such institute would be the Institute for Mission (<http://www.4.tpg.com.au/users/ppi>) in the diocese of Parramatta, N.S.W. Many theological students go overseas to study for a doctorate at centers like Rome, Jerusalem, Louvain, Paris, Washington, Chicago, Toronto and

Ottawa although cost and the availability of doctoral studies within Australia is putting a break on overseas study.

## **2.2 Theological Developments**

### **2.2.1 Main Trends**

There are a number of things that can be said regarding main trends. The first relates to the professors of theology. Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a noticeable increase in lay men and women studying theology at all theological institutions. This has been encouraged by the admittance of men and women to programs of study formerly only open to seminarians. At the same time there has been a decrease in the number of ordained priest available to teach theology in seminaries and in theological faculties. The reasons for this would include the fact that there is a shortage of priests, and secondly, some have preferred to return to pastoral work in the parishes. So one sees two contrary movements: on the one hand, there has been decrease in ordained lecturers in theology, while on the other, more qualified lay people are becoming available. However the availability of lay men and women has not always led to employment.

The second point relates more to the students of theology. Theological institutions in Australia attract not only local students, but students from Asia and Oceania for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. These students might be candidates for the priesthood or those already ordained who are seeking postgraduate qualifications. A further development worth noting is that there is now an ecumenical mix of students in most theological institutions which has become quite noticeable since the Second Vatican Council and which has been facilitated by the many colleges of divinity and interdenominational training initiatives such as *Nunyalinga*, mentioned above. This ecumenical trend has, no doubt, been assisted by the developments in the NCCA. In recent years this body has been strengthened by the last of the mainline churches to join, namely the Catholics and Lutherans. The ecumenical thrust has also been greatly assisted by the interdenominational Australian and New Zealand Society of Theological Schools' (ANZSTS) Conference and theological journal, *Colloquium*.

Another journal, *Pacifica*, plays a similar role, and emphasizes the local scene as can be seen from its subtitle, *Australasian theological studies*.

The actual teaching of theology also shows some distinctive trends which will be briefly described. One could say that theology has become more ecumenical, more inculturated, more diversified in its authors, more varied in themes. Ecumenically speaking, there are more articles in Catholic theological journals on ecumenical topics. The journals themselves are far more open to featuring theologians from religious traditions other than Catholic. One journal, mentioned above, is specifically ecumenical in its orientation, namely *Colloquium*. From an inculturation viewpoint, the seriousness with which the challenge to inculturate theology has been taken up in post Second Vatican Council Catholicism in Australia, can be gauged by the keen interest and publication output on the topic of Australian theology. As regards the feminization of theology, this phenomenon can be seen in both the number of women theologians writing for theological journals and publishing books as well as the number of articles, written by men and women, with themes that relate directly or indirectly to the developing theology around women, their spirituality and their role in the church. New women's theological journals, like *Women-Church*, have been founded to better express their point of view.

The themes which are the focus of the writing, are also more varied. Topics include the range of bioethical issues and social justice issues that are common to theology around the world. Of particular note in Australia is the renewed attention given to theological writings around the issues of justice for the indigenous people of Australia who had been largely overlooked and neglected in theological writings prior to the Second Vatican Council. The Year of Indigenous People, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1993, did much to raise awareness, but Australians have also, on their own initiative, been revisiting the historical data surrounding the treatment of indigenous peoples in the two hundred years since settlement, and re-writing the history books. The question of reconciliation between the indigenous peoples and the settlers is seen as a theological and justice issue in contemporary theological writing.

The attention given to spirituality today in theological writings is also noteworthy. The nature of spirituality and its relationship to theology forms part of this exploration. The phenomenon of many Catholics saying that they are more interested in spirituality and less so in "religion" has given food for

theological thought, particularly to the institutional church be it Catholic or otherwise.

There are also other issues that occupy Catholics in Australia today. The third rite of Reconciliation has been a controversial issue. Fairly widely practiced and liked, it was directly reported back to the Curia by right-winged Catholics and as a result the third rite has been virtually banned. The ordination of women continues to be an issue as does the role of priests and lay ministries in a climate of increased shortage of priest as explained above. Other issues, common to many countries around the world, relate to the environment, reproduction, sexual ethics (use of condoms to avoid HIV, homosexuality, oral sex, IVF), sexual abuse by the clergy, and bio-ethical issues (euthanasia, stem-cell research). In short the theological agenda is virtually limitless.

### **2.2.2 Developments in theological disciplines.**

Before commenting on theology after the Second Vatican Council, a few words on theology during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century will help to highlight the changes that came in the latter quarter of the century. In the early part of the twentieth century theologians saw their task as one in which they popularized biblical research and translated Roman documents and presented them to the public. Theology was neither creative nor critical, but rather consisted in relaying the contents of documents to the faithful in a fairly uncritical way. There were some discussions of marginal questions often related to the sacraments. This tended to give theology a very practical orientation with an emphasis on canon law. The distinctiveness of the Catholic Church was seen in its uniform sacramental rituals in contradistinction to those of Protestants.

Without recording the changes in theological thinking that were introduced by the Second Vatican Council, (about which many books have been written), the changes in theology in Australia after the Second Vatican Council can be seen by recounting how the Council's new ideas were disseminated. Firstly the priests and religious, and then the laity will be considered. In a rather broad generalization, as one anthropologist-and-priest put it, one can say that the religious sisters took to Saturday morning theology classes to learn the theology of the Second Vatican Council, whereas the religious brothers were less interested as they were engaged in sporting activities on a Saturday morning, and the priests too busy attending

to sundry parish matters. The ongoing formation of pastors has always been a challenge to those who wish to promote them. A house in Canberra, St Peter's, was set aside for the ongoing formation of priests, or in-servicing, but as it has always been optional, the take-up rate has not been sufficient to ensure that pastors have an updated theology. The overall consequences of this ecclesial situation is that the religious sisters have become familiar with the latest theological and liturgical developments, the religious brothers a little less so, while many priests (and not a few bishops!) feel at a disadvantage with regard to the new insights and theological nuances introduced by the Second Vatican Council.

The laity has also taken to studying the Second Vatican Council theology. Many courses in theology at seminaries and theological institutions opened up their courses to the laity. Institutions which were originally set up for members of religious orders, having opened their doors to the laity, found, within a short time, that the majority of students were laymen and women. Of these many, but not all, were lay Catholic teachers who were seeking some qualification in religious education and theology for their role in Catholic schools. (At this stage, one should recall, the number of religious brothers and sisters in Catholic schools (and teaching religious education) was declining, while the numbers of lay people asked to teach religious education was rising sharply). In addition some dioceses have set up institutes for ministry or pastoral theology to better prepare the laity for active ministries in the parishes. We shall return to this latter development below. Later, with the establishment of the Australian Catholic University and Notre Dame University, there were Catholic university faculties open to all who wanted to study theology. The response of the laity has been very positive to these opportunities.

The consequences of this post-Second Vatican Council development are complex and manifold. The omission of priests to keep up with the post-Second Vatican Council theology has caused an element of distrust between the priests on the one hand, and on the other, the religious sisters and brothers, and lay people who have studied recent biblical studies, sacramental theology and liturgy. Many priests feel under siege, yet there is little or no dialogue across the clerical/lay divide.

Another complicating matter is that of the shortage of priests Australia-wide. The average age of priests in many dioceses is very high and increasing, and the number of seminarians too small to fill vacancies. In the absence on any

national plan, a variety of responses on the part of bishops has been forthcoming. It is well known that some bishops would like to be able to ordain married men and readmit to the ministry those priests who resigned from their ministry and married, but this request has been rejected by Pope John Paul II. Some bishops are asking priests to look after more than one parish and relying more on pastoral teams of lay men and women. Others are appointing religious sisters as pastoral assistants in a parish without a priest. Others are engaging in an ecumenical solution whereby, in country towns, one pastors will stay on in a town to look after Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church members on a day to day basis, while each community will get a visit from their own pastor only intermittently. Other bishops again have resorted to importing young males from Asian countries to teach them English and theology and ordain them to work as priests in their dioceses. In general, it would appear that the few priests that remain, are given more and more work which, in turn, often leads to greater stress, low morale and resignation, thus rendering the problems even more acute.

On the more academic level there have been some positive developments in disciplinary areas. In the 1960s the Catholic Biblical Association (CBA) was established, followed in the 1970s by the Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA) and the Australian Catholic Moral Theologians Association (ACMTA). Other indications of positive developments can be illustrated with a few examples. A collaborative ethics research center, the *Plunkett Centre for Ethics in Health Care*, ([http://www.acu.edu.au/research/Research\\_Strengths/flagship\\_\\_\\_centres/Plunkett\\_Centre/index.cfm](http://www.acu.edu.au/research/Research_Strengths/flagship___centres/Plunkett_Centre/index.cfm)) has been established between St Vincent's hospital and the ACU in Sydney, while Brisbane archdiocese has its own *Bioethics Centre*. Melbourne archdiocese has set up a *John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family* (<http://www.jp2institute.org/>). The diocese of Broken Bay in N.S.W. has a *Center for Christian Spirituality* which offers course by distance education as well as attendance. Another development in theology worth mentioning is that of the *Centre for Early Christian Studies* at the ACU, Brisbane. Opened in 1997 as a research center, it has hosted many international conferences on themes relating to the Early Christianity and Patristic studies as well as producing publications from time to time, relevant to the centre's expertise. The centre co-hosted two *Oriental Lumen* conferences for the Australasia-Oceania region in 2000 and 2003.

### 2.2.3 Important Publications and Authors

The promotions of theological journals and the creation of new ones is also a feature of the development of theology post-Second Vatican Council. While some like the *Australasian Catholic Record* has continued as before in many external respects, it covers a much wider range of topics and includes contemporary methodologies. *Compass Theology Review* (founded in 1967) was introduced to encourage theology with reference to the Australia context. In 1990 it modified its title with a subtitle which reads: *A Review of Topical Theology*. It has been a catalyst in promoting and encouraging contextualized theology. Another significant change of title was the journal of religious education, *Our Apostolate* which, with the emphasis on the scriptures with The Second Vatican Council, appropriately became, *Word in Life*. Most recently, reflecting the global prominence of electronic communications, the ACU has produced the Australian Ejournal of theology with a URL as follows:

<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/>

As regards individual theologians a number can be mentioned. David Coffey would be one of the leading theologians whose writings are known internationally. Other prominent theologians are John Thornhill S.M., Denis Edwards, Tony Kelly C.S.R., Frank Fletcher M.S.C., Richard Lennan and Eugene Stockton. Among the biblical scholars, W.Dalton, S.J., Brendan Byrne S.J., and Francis Moloney S.B.D. are acknowledged international scholars, as is Elaine Wainwright RSM. The leading scholars in Patristics are Robert C.Hill and Pauline Allen. Paul Collins has attracted the attention of the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith with his writings on papal power.

#### **2.2.4 Problems of method**

The problems of methodology in doing theology in Australia are ones common to many parts of the world. One could illustrate this with a pertinent example from the field of Christian ethics. The incident occurred in Sydney and regarded the safe needle injection clinic for drug addicts. When the Sisters of Mercy agreed to operate a safe needle clinic, with the consent of the local archbishop, the Roman Curia intervened and forbade them. The clinic nevertheless opened under supervision of the Uniting Church in Australia. The incident highlighted the different methodologies in doing ethics, where one approach included harm minimization while the more

traditional approach affirmed absolutes. Thus problems of ethical methodology persist within the Catholic Church.

More generally, the influence of the methodologies of Lonergan, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx is evident which is not surprising given that many Australian theologians studied in Europe or North America. Other issues of a methodological nature would be the use of the social sciences in doing theology, how to incorporate science into theology, the application of inculturation, dialogue with other Christian traditions, and the integration of human experience especially women's experience, into theological thinking and writing. In terms of Bevans' models of doing theology, it would be true to say that the most common models found in Australia would be the synthetic, anthropological, praxis, and transcendental models. The counter-cultural is less well developed, but comes to the fore particularly in the context of dialoguing with Protestant theology, especially Barthian.

One problem associated with methodology and human experience is that of the ordination of women. On the one hand one has the pope saying that there is to be no discussion of the ordination of women within the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, one has positive feedback regarding women in ministry roles, such as assistant pastors within the Catholic Church as well as in other Christian churches where indeed some women have already taken on the role of ordained pastor.

Then there is the problem of inculturation. On the one hand many theologians have taken the question of culture very seriously in doing theology. This applies not only to the culture of indigenous peoples but also to the many cultures found in a society as multicultural as Australia. This has implications for both theoretical, practical and liturgical theology. However, at the same time one is conscious of the neo-catechumenate movement which places ordained persons from cultures alien to Australian ones, in local situations without any cultural preparation. This seems to deny the importance of culture in preaching the gospel; it rather suggests that the gospel is above culture.

Given the high percentage of Australians who are Catholics according to the census, it is no surprise that the Catholic Church exerts some influence on public debate. In recent years the push to legalize euthanasia was met with vigorous opposition from the Catholic Church (and other churches) and the bill was rejected by parliament. The Catholic Church continues to speak out

on other issues related to bioethics such as cloning, stem cell research as well as on issues of social justice including reconciliation with indigenous people, the treatment of refugees and trade deals with the USA and other countries. So one could say that theological stances on these matters does exert some influence on public policies. However the negative influence of the many sexual abuse cases against bishops, priests and brothers has done considerable damage to institutionalized religion in Australia as elsewhere.

### 2.3 Public and Political Context and the influence of theology

Politicians realize that the churches continue to have large number of voters and are worth cultivating. Just how much the churches influence politics is difficult to gauge but an example can be given. With the General Sales Tax (GST) the churches, in close collaboration, did finally get some changes made to the legislation on certain items in the GST. Impact is often made in co-operation with other churches (the NCCA, for example) and other agencies. Another issue is the treatment of refugees. The Churches constantly try to exert pressure on the government for a more humane approach to refugees. In federal and state elections, bishops no longer try to tell their flock how to vote, although they might mention the values concerned.

### 2.4 The Ecclesiastical context and theology.

The Catholic Church in Australia which is part of the church in Oceania, is a very small part of the universal church. Numerically and politically, it is fairly insignificant in ecclesial, global affairs. When Australian members of the International Theologians Commission met in Rome, the comment was that they felt like outsiders eavesdropping on someone else's theological conversation. The Catholic Church does however have one or more cardinals at any given time, and who, either in an active role or in retirement, give some profile to the local church on the international stage.

The relationship between the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (<http://www.catholic.org.au/>) and the theologians has been regularized through the Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA, <http://www.catholictheology.org/acta/intr.htm>). Representatives of these

groups (theologians and bishops) meet from time to time to discuss issues of mutual concern. The Bishops also occasionally ask ACTA to research particular topics. There is an established protocol to handle any cases where the orthodoxy of a theologian's work is being questioned. Currently the mandatum to teach theology is being currently discussed as to how it might be best implemented in particular institutions since the nature of institutions varies across the board.

### **3. CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE.**

One of the challenges of the future is that institutional Catholicism, with declining Mass goers (in spite of an increased percentage of Catholics of the total population), is in danger of becoming irrelevant to people's lives and to society. The attendance rate at Sunday Eucharist is very low (about 18%,) and ways and means of bringing the young people in particular, back to the church is being examined. Decreased numbers of church attenders and the growing marginalized groups who seek spirituality away from the institutional church are a concern.

Another challenge in Australia is that which comes from the increasing secularization of the world and a society characterized by materialism, acquisitiveness, and hedonism. Can the Church develop a stronger counter-cultural emphasis, if it is not to simply imitate secular society.

The lack of any management plan to cope with the shortage of priests is reaching crisis point. There are few strategies in place to cope with the problem. Some dioceses have begun to train married deacons but this is not universal and does not solve the problem of celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments. There is thus a need to thoroughly overhaul the structures whereby Catholic communities meet their pastoral needs.

The formation of pastors for the future is a challenge related to the above. The closing of some diocesan seminaries and the opening of Neo-catechumenate seminaries is a development that will create problems for the future because it is dividing the faithful. The presence of movements such as the Focolare and Cursillo movements also tend to polarize feelings. Alternative ways of preparing individuals for pastoral work, both ordained and lay will have to be trialled. This will mean a broader range of people (men and women) involved in pastoral education and formation. A greater

amount of the sharing of professors of theology between institutes, and between Christian denominations is likely.

Another further challenge is how to overcome those who have tried to put the clock back by reverting to methods of the past, such as authoritarian and oppressive ways of dealing with people, narrow-mindedness and inflexibility. For example, the Church cannot continue to say nothing to divorced Catholics who have remarried and to refuse communion to the Christian spouse of a Catholic.

The role of women in the Church will continue to be a challenge for a magisterium that has not been able to be persuasive with its arguments in this area. The attempts to block discussion on the topic of the ordination of women is an example of the oppressive management style which renders the church dysfunctional.

At the basis of all the above challenges, is the way ecclesial authority is understood and used. The challenge for the future is: can the Church reach an understanding of authority and develop an implementation style that will simultaneously be faithful to the ancient Christian tradition and be embraced by the people of God?

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