

6-26-08 - A lack of anger in the room...[Robinson and Lakeland]

TOM McMAHON, Catholica Australia

We held over Tom McMahon's commentary on Sunday for fear of information overload. Today's commentary is not a replacement. It is a special report Tom filed yesterday on two meetings he attended at the University of San Francisco last week. One with Bishop Geoffrey Robinson and the other with author of "Catholicism at the Crossroads", Paul Lakeland. Given the present crisis in Catholicism, Tom has come away wondering what level of anger it takes to motivate the people to do something?

OBSERVATIONS of a not so innocent bystander ... Robinson and Lakeland talks at USF, June 2008

Twice in two days I journeyed to the University of San Francisco where our family boasts of eight grads, including myself; Friday evening I heard Australian Bishop Geoffrey Robinson and on Sunday author Paul Lakeland. Surveying the listeners I remark "the usual suspects were rounded up and their gray hair was apparent; a young audience, the hoped for future of Roman Catholicism may have in wind and fog lost their way to the Hilltop. I offer here no comment on the content of the two talks. I offer more on the people's reaction. I observed a common denominator, "a lack of anger in the room". Jesuit educator Eugene Schallert in the late '60's coined and used this term in referring to the people's reaction to Vatican Two education. My wife speaks of being excited about religion as one of Gene's students ... more than likely her last religious excitement.

Much has been favorably written about Bishop Robinson's presentation and there is his book on SEX and POWER in the Roman Catholic Church; I listened to his powerful and carefully prepared expose, with much of my energy observing the audience and their reactions to the classical lecture by an expert parent figure and the classical children who listen with diligence; People seemed to be mesmerized by the fact that a cleric was raising issues that exposed the internal dysfunctionality of the institutional church. The American Catholic does not want to wash the church's dirty linen in public and I wondered how many there were willing and capable of taking Robinson's message to a confrontation with roman powers ... how many will sign their John Hancock on a protest letter to Archbishop Neidenaar for his cowardly condemnation of Robinson? As an innocent bystander who has educated myself in clerical abuse I sensed there was little anger in the room. Anger is the gasoline that powers the engine of doing something; the chaotic collapse of the roman priesthood is catastrophic and episcopal leadership is bankrupt ... caput! My first encounter with a Catholic bishop was when I was in 8th grade. I can still recall the injustice and my anger at him ... perhaps I show it herein.

Did anyone think of a study group to pursue further what the bishop addressed or to discuss his book? Where does one go from here? Or do we wait for the Wizards of Oz to recomb their hair and form another committee? The parish is paralyzed with ignorance and fear and complacent docile membership. America would still be a colony of England if there never had been a Boston Tea Party and a king would rule France today if it weren't for the storming of the Bastille ... and the peasants only had pitchforks! As I write I recall Fr. Bill O'Donnell leading a procession of 60 clerics out of the funeral of a priest who had jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge; Willie turned to me and in loud voice ... really loud ... shouted out "the man jumps off the god damn Golden Gate Bridge and they haven't got the guts to acknowledge such ... we're in serious trouble" Ah Willie, how do we get your spirit back? (Crude language at times does get a bit of attention!)

Crisis for me indicates a possible new direction. The word sex to me is a neutral; society has two genders, male and female and daily as a male I have sexual encounters and social exchanges for which I will not be arrested. For decades in the Roman priesthood I witnessed male clerics abusing women by ignoring them or using them around the parish as lowly serfs. Genital activity is a different breed of cat; abuse by male genitals on innocent children is ugly and criminally insane. I wait for the day the hierarchy admits to using street language to give us the horrible picture of now deceased Oakland's Monsignor George Francis repeatedly fucking a four-year-old girl and then blessing her with holy water. Don't get off the subject by talking about the man being pathologically sick ... yes, sick, sick, sick! As well as the system that produced

this demented Frankenstein. Meditate for two minutes on the criminal activity and perhaps one can appreciate the anger that is forever stored in the victim. Where is the anger of the people?

I appreciate Geoffrey Robinson's honesty and I sensed in him, especially in his refusal to quit his lecture tour, a suppressed anger that was gilded with protecting the office of priest and bishop. Like an upset terrier we heard a bishop in clerical collar yapping at the heels of an offending pathological brute ... and the people clapped Robinson on, hoping to mark their calendars for the next talk by a gladiator champion. Catholics are nice guys and polite women ... for heaven's sake McMahon do you have to use four letter words; you have been an angry boy since seminary days. An angry Jesus paid a heavy price when he took on the temple gang. The American bishops in collusion with Rome are a secret mafia family that is up to no good. Would that James Joyce were alive today to write about them.

Paul Lakeland

I left USF angry after listening to Paul Lakeland ... and the wind was cold ... Paul has answers to chaos in the church today; he knows the power of the laity (which means duty). Paul is a modern Paul Revere, gently hanging his lantern of truth on educational outposts in America. I have only admiration for Paul Lakeland's presentation and his clear analysis of a dysfunctional system. Michael Crosby OFM has written numerous Gospel-orientated books on reformation. Michael is safe even getting in 2003 a nihil obstat and along with Paul Lakeland they could make a great team of educators. Where were the people at Paul's talk? or better still what levers, as VOTF's Ed says, can be pulled to get some action in this badly messed up chaos. Ah I have it — let us pray for more vocations to the convent and the priesthood ... join the Sierra Club and puff the magic dragon...

The average religious educational level of most Catholics is around 6 years old, or first grade, first communion time. (I'm not fooled with the present episcopal controlled RCIA; in the year 2008 I saw a graduate come out of this controlled system — much like my seminary training — with a strong fear of the harm done by Vatican Two!) A cowardliness pervades the American Catholic, they are fearful that the bishops will speak to St. Peter and the pearly gates will have protestors locked out. Perhaps a study of Deitrich Bonhoffer's CHEAP GRACE, written before he was hung by the Nazis, might help out. Fascism rose to power in so-called Catholic-Christian countries, France with Petain, Italy with Mussolini, Germany and Hitler; under the guidance of Yves Congar, whom Pius the 12th had silenced, John the 23rd convoked the peoples' Council, totally anti-fascist and attacked today by the fascist Vatican and Right Wing present American politicians. Fascism is best described as self centeredness, whereas Vatican Two is an outreach of universality. Where do you think Jesus stands?

Thanks Bishop Robinson and Paul Lakeland for your generosity and wisdom. I wait to see what the results and follow-up will be. I'll monitor the people of God and wonder who will step up "to set my people free"? I have a suggestion that it could be the Jesus of community where two or three are gathered

Tom McMahon, the lonely and forlorn former clerical lieutenant who dances with wolves and eats with the indigenous people and has been on Rome's hill of Calvary ... an angry bystander who still cares for the people. 24/06/2008

Tom McMahon, a former priest now married, lives a very fulfilled life in San Jose and continues to contribute voraciously to several Catholic discussion lists in the States. He has been an enthusiastic supporter and encourager of the Catholica Australia initiative from the very beginning.