

21 from Pope Benedict to Cardinal Re which demonstrates the all-too-human limitations at play in the Pope's admission to having misunderstood Morris during their meeting. While many of the difficulties between Morris and Rome could be put down to cultural differences or theological stalemates, some of the actions of various parties in Rome to Morris' entreaties remain perplexing. The complete pastoral disregard shown for Morris' support for victims of clerical child abuse and Rome's apparent inflexibility in terms of a date for his resignation in Chapter 23 stand out here. Similarly Morris' encounters with Vatican intrigues, while at times a tad baroque, do ring true. Anyone familiar with other disciplinary cases surrounding figures as divergent as Marcel Lefebvre and Hans Küng would be aware that the Roman attitude toward due process leaves a lot to be desired. In the end, upon concluding Morris' book one is left with the discouraging impression that the Vatican is a lot like Las Vegas in two regards: what happens in the Vatican stays in the Vatican and the house always wins!

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COMMENTARY

When a non-Romanised Bishop Confronts Rome

By Michael Costigan*

When drafting these notes I had not seen Bernard Doherty's review of Bishop William (Bill) Morris's book. My contribution is in no sense a second or alternative review of the Emeritus Bishop of Toowoomba's *Benedict, Me and the Cardinals Three*. I am simply taking up the Editor's kind invitation to offer a few reflections of my own after reading a book that I see as unique and significant.

My first observation is that, as Toowoomba's Catholic leader from 1993 to 2011, Bill Morris was in the best sense a bishop formed and animated by the teachings and pastoral orientation of the Second Vatican Council. Secondly, I believe that, unlike some other past and present members of the Australian hierarchy, Morris was, in a praiseworthy way, "non-Roman" (but never anti-Roman) in his thinking and actions.

That this bishop was profoundly influenced by the Council is evident from the

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way in which he encouraged dialogue in his huge rural diocese. He fostered the creation of diocesan and parish structures wherein the laity, religious and clergy could all participate and be consulted. In his eyes all of them formed “the People of God”, to use a term enshrined in *Lumen Gentium*, the Council’s major document on the Church. He was, as Father Frank Brennan SJ emphasised when launching his book in Sydney and Adelaide, essentially a team player. Morris believed that the principle of collegiality, which was at the heart of the conciliar teaching, should apply not only to the hierarchy, but, with appropriate adaptations, at other levels in the Church.

Bishop Morris also approached relations with the Holy See in a manner reminiscent of some of the more forthright conciliar fathers, including a few auxiliary bishops and the leaders of relatively obscure dioceses as well as the incumbents, often cardinals, of more famous sees. Their approach, like his, was marked by courage, a high regard for speaking the truth as they perceived it, pastoral zeal and the expression of frank and open beliefs. Among such bravely assertive “back bench” conciliar participants were reformers like Belgium’s Bishop Joseph De Smedt and Italy’s Bishop Luigi Bettazzi, together with traditionalists like Italy’s Bishop Luigi Carli and even Australia’s Bishop Thomas Muldoon.

Would Bishop Morris have had a different style in his dealings with the Vatican if at least some of his clerical training had taken place in Rome? I understand this has been suggested by one or two other Australian bishops. While sympathetic with him in his difficult relationship with the Roman Curia, they noted that he had never even visited that city until five years after becoming a bishop. That led me, an old Roman myself, to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages experienced by clergy and religious who have spent some years in the city.

It has long been accepted that many bishops and religious superiors have sent some of their more academically successful charges to Rome so that they would return imbued with that spirit of loyalty and devotion to the papacy and to the Vatican’s ways which is often called Romanità. If, however, that has indeed been a key element in what motivated those leaders, it must be said that over the years the aim has been only partly successful – and in some cases not at all.

Prominent among the Roman institutions for the priestly training of Australians and others, mainly from 40-odd missionary countries, has been the Pontifical Urban College for the Propagation of the Faith, often called Propaganda Fide College or more colloquially “Prop”. Several Australian commentators, most of them Prop graduates, have written about life in that college and the real or intended Romanisation of its alumni. One such is the Canberra-based historian, Emeritus Professor John N. Molony, formerly a priest of the Ballarat Diocese.

One of the earliest of Molony’s many books, *The Roman Mould of the Australian*

Catholic Church (Melbourne University Press, 1969), advanced the view, challenged by his fellow historians Patrick O'Farrell and Edmund Campion, that the decisive influence on the character of Catholicism in this country came from Rome, directly and indirectly, rather than from Ireland. He pointed out that most of the Irish bishops appointed to Australian dioceses in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Cardinal Moran (but not Daniel Mannix), had strong Roman backgrounds and connections, which determined the way they viewed doctrine and acted as pastors here. Molony held that this prevailing Roman influence continued well into the last century, when many of the Australian-born bishops were graduates of Propaganda College. His argument was reinforced when appointments made shortly before the publishing of his book resulted in all seven Australian archdioceses being headed by Prop men.

Later, in two personal memoirs, *Luther's Pine: an Autobiography* (Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2004) and *By Wendouree: Memories 1951-63* (Connor Court, Ballan, 2010), John Molony wrote of his own years (1947-53) in the same college. He admits with what could be seen as an element of distaste that he too was unable to withstand completely the college's Romanising pressure.

The late Father Peter Brock of the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese was another who wrote a book, *Home, Rome, Home* (Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 2001), about his Propaganda College memories. Towards the end of Brock's years (1964-68) in the splendidly located college on the Janiculum hill, he had contact with a new group of fellow Australians who reached Rome late in 1967.

Like most of the newcomers, Peter Brock was an admiring disciple of Father Carlo Molari, a young professor of theology at Propaganda's neighbouring Pontifical Urban University. Unlike some other theologians at the university, Molari was dedicated to Vatican II and happily accepted its radical effect on theology and its teaching. As his biographer, Tess Livingstone, makes clear, George Pell, who had left Prop for Oxford earlier in 1967, was another admirer of Molari and a supporter of Vatican II's reforms – although, in later times, as a critic of some ways in which the Council was being received and interpreted, he was to modify his youthful enthusiasm (see *George Pell: Right from the Start*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney, 2002).

Apart from passing references to “new dynamics” in the college and some loss of equilibrium there, Father Brock has little to say about the crucial part played by Australian students, especially some of the 1967 newcomers, in what has been labelled “the Propaganda College affair”. He does note (page 190) that college life and relationships with the superiors began to take on an unfamiliar air of tension from 1997. The best description of this quasi-revolution has been supplied by Peter Howard, a former Melbourne priest. Although not a Prop man himself, he studied

in Rome in 1985-86 and went on to live for about fifteen years in Florence. There he became an expert on Italian culture before returning to Melbourne as a priest-lecturer in church history.

Howard's account of the ways in which Propaganda's Australians tried to change their college's approach to priestly formation is in the 18-page Chapter 14 ("Australian Clergy in Italy after Vatican II") of a collection of essays edited by Bill Kent, Ros Pesman and Cynthia Troup, *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions* (Monash University Publishing, 2008 and 2010). With permission, Howard draws on unpublished letters written to his Melbourne family from Prop by one of the 1967 newcomers, Terry Curtin, who commented perceptively in that correspondence on what was happening at Prop during the four years he spent there before his ordination in Australia in 1971. Monsignor (to give him his later title) Curtin, much esteemed in Melbourne as a theologian and pastor, was ordained as an Auxiliary Bishop for that Archdiocese in December 2014. John Molony could be interested to note that Curtin is now one of only two active Australian bishops who can call Propaganda College their alma mater. The other is Bishop Michael Kennedy of Armidale, a former Wagga Wagga priest whose residence at Prop in the late 1990s (rare for an Australian by then) was thirty years after Curtin's.

Peter Howard's essay confirms the conclusion that many Australian seminarians in Rome did not automatically absorb and accept the more rigid forms or characteristics of Romanità.

As an alumnus of Prop and the Urban University myself (1952-56) and then of the Pontifical Lateran University (1956-61), I grieved over Howard's account of the troubled final years of Monsignor Felice Cenci as Rector of a college that he had headed and where he was much loved for close to a quarter of a century. My own time under him was his vintage period, when in certain ways his open and trusting *autoformazione* methodology anticipated the spirit of the Council. The type of Romanità he tried to encourage in us certainly included veneration for the Pope, while featuring respect for diversity and, by his own example, an attempt to foster Christ-like devotion to anyone suffering poverty, disadvantage and injustice. It was far removed from the extreme kind of Romanisation which often engenders ambition, careerism and an unquestioning acceptance of all that a narrow school of theology lays down.

My late friend and classmate, the progressive English-born historian and theologian Adrian Hastings, confirmed my positive recollections of Cenci's Propaganda in the 1950s in his memoir, *In Filial Disobedience* (Mayhew-McCrimmon, Great Wakering, 1978). He concluded that "the personal achievement of Mgr Cenci, uncharacteristic of the Roman approach" was "fully compatible with a commitment to full-blooded Catholicity" (pages 46-66).

The fact is that the Romanisation of priests, seminarians and religious has multiple forms and degrees. It affects different people in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. Seminaries and other houses of formation are not like sausage factories, producing identical outcomes from an assembly line. Among Propaganda College's Australian episcopal ex-students, randomly named here, were Norman Gilroy and Guilford Young, Geoffrey Robinson and George Pell, Patrick Power and Thomas Cahill, Matthew Beovich and Francis Rush, Thomas Muldoon and Bede Heather, Bernard Stewart and Lancelot Goody, James Knox and Leonard Faulkner, Frank Little and James O'Collins, Patrick Lyons and Barry Hickey. The many other Australian clerics and ex-clerics with a claim to Prop as their alma mater have included Paul Bongiorno, Grove Johnson, Patrick Cunningham, Con Keogh, Richard Connolly, Percy Jones, Ian Burns, Julian Miller, Frank O'Loughlin, Vincent Tiggeman, Kevin Barry-Cotter, Des Cahill, Don Victory, John Ware and Aldo Rebeschini. I rest my case.

If Bill Morris had belonged in this company, would he have acted differently when faced with the attempts by such powerful and thoroughly Romanised officials of the Holy See as the Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze (actually a contemporary of mine at Prop), the Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re and the American Cardinal William Levada – not to forget the German ex-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) – to remove him from his diocese? While this is a purely speculative question, my own opinion, as a friend who knows well the honesty, integrity and other qualities of Bishop Bill (we worked together for years for the Australian Bishops Conference in the area of social justice and human rights), is that, notwithstanding a hypothetical Roman background, he would still have reacted as he did to what he (and the likes of Frank Brennan and many other wise and competent onlookers are in full agreement) saw as unjust and ill-founded treatment.

Would a Pope Francis have handled the William Morris case in the same way as Pope Benedict and his advisers? I do not believe so. Making or allowing others to make repeated demands for a resignation for which there was no justification would not have been his style. Apart from other considerations, the Argentinian Pope could well have a special feeling of empathy with the Australian country bishop. Both are non-Romans who were never Romanised. Answering the Italian journalist Franca Giansoldati, Francis said: "Are you aware that I don't know Rome? Just consider that I saw the Sistine Chapel for the first time when I took part in the conclave that elected Benedict XVI (in 2005). I haven't even been to the museums. The fact is that, as a cardinal, I didn't come here often."

In more than one respect, the Bishop of Rome and the retired Bishop of Toowoomba are twin souls. May their very different ministries continue to bear abundant fruits.

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