



ARCHBISHOP BARRY HICKEY  
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF PERTH  
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***“Time to re-establish moral authority”***

“Barry Hickey, Catholic Archbishop of Perth, sees the decline in Church attendance as part of a wider moral dilemma in Australian society.”

You finished your editorial about the Catholic and Anglican churches on June 14 with, “But the big question is what they can offer in the contemporary world to keep those whom they get back into congregations?”

On behalf of the Catholic Church, my reply, in a nutshell, is that we offer the truth about our relationship with God, the truth that there is life after death, the truth that the only way to interior peace and happiness is a moral life and a life of love, and that all of this is found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

We offer a community of believing people who are brothers and sisters to one another, supporting each other in times of joy and sadness. This is indeed something in a world of individualism and personal loneliness.

All of this is relevant to everybody, but many people get so engrossed in the material world eternal truths appear to be irrelevant.

Your other question, at the beginning of the editorial was, “Why people are drifting away from the churches.” You make a number of points, including the statement, “there is no doubt that the moral authority of the traditional churches has declined.” This is true, but it isn’t all of the truth, nor is it because of the reasons you stated.

The real truth is that the moral authority of morality has declined. Large numbers of people are so committed to individualism that they refuse to countenance the idea that there may be a moral law based on the truth of human nature. Your own newspaper, for example, has written editorials condemning the use of ‘personal morality’ by MPs when enacting legislation. I am not sure how

society could enact a Criminal Code, for example, without some concept of what is right and wrong for all.

It is not just that people are drifting away from the churches; the Church's 2000-year history is full of peaks and troughs of religious and moral life. It is also important for us as a society to try to understand what else people are drifting away from and what they have drifted towards.

The most obvious answer is that many have drifted away from their own families and away from the true value of human life. With respect for the heroic efforts of many sole parents, and for the pain of many unjustly forced out of their own families, it remains a fact that the number of children forced to live apart from one or other of their parents because of broken marriages is appalling.

The fact that so many of our people cannot live up to their most solemn vow to share their life (and their children) with another person, freely chosen, ought to concern us all. The damaging consequences have been studied at length, but the cause seems to be too painful for people to acknowledge openly.

You mentioned contraception as though this is a weakness of the Catholic Church, but the dramatic rise in the divorce rate started with the arrival of the contraceptive pill and the false philosophy that it is the way to strengthen family life. The arrival of the pill also began the process through which for the last 30 years or so we, as a nation, have failed to reproduce ourselves. The unpalatable truth is that contraception can weaken the trust between husband and wife and threatens the union of marriage itself. It opens the door to extramarital sex without fear of becoming pregnant and redefines children as a burden not a gift.

In addition to this large-scale avoidance of life, it is also a fact that for every three children born in our society, one is deliberately killed in the womb. Now, we have 'drifted' into allowing the extermination of human embryos in the name of medical research. When a "new, improved model" is more important than life itself, we should recognise that we have drifted far on treacherous currents.

We have also drifted far from understanding the importance of human sexuality as the bond of love and unity within the family. Instead, we have turned it into a public entertainment in television, films and magazines. One of the consequences of this deception of ourselves and our children is that Australian teenagers have among the highest rates of abortion and sexually transmitted diseases in the western world.

Our decreasing ability to be faithful to life and faithful to one another may well come from the fact that we have become too distracted to acknowledge and follow the example of the total fidelity of the one who made us, who loves us and who will never abandon us.

The Catholic Church will go on teaching these eternal truths regardless of whether individuals or societies accept them. We will look for new ways to enter people's consciousness, but we won't do it by selecting more alluring beliefs.

(Signed)  
+Barry J.Hickey  
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