LA NUOVA BUSSOLA QUOTIDIANA
Direttore Riccardo Cascioli
FATTI PER LA VERITÀ

LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Cardinal Pell is innocent, that's why

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Anna Silvas

Dear Riccardo,

At your invitation, I pen a letter to you and your readers on the case of Cardinal Pell's conviction and on the Church in Australia.

To begin with: I don't believe that justice was served in this jury trial. It has all the smell of a ritual sacrifice for an ugly agenda, to me.

I have often attended Mass in that right transept under the organ loft of the Cathedral in Melbourne (the most beautiful Cathedral in Australia, with the most noble Gothic spire in the world, I would say). I have often been a few metres from that door that leads down a short passage into the area of the sacristies, and often seen the altar servers, choir and priests processing in and out of there. I just cannot see that there could be a place for the perpetration of the vices of which Pell has now been convicted in a jury trial, least of all in the circumstances of High Mass on Sunday.

I have had the privilege of listening at length, more than once, to Monsignor Charles Portelli, who was Pell's Master of Ceremonies in the five years Pell was Archbishop of Melbourne. Portelli is a man of fine intelligence, probity and culture. He captained the Archbishop in all that concerned the Sunday Liturgy, and all its preparatory and subsequent circumstances. All Pell's deeds were witnessed and accompanied by Portelli.

George Pell too is a man of great probity, intelligence and culture, exceptionally so, I would say, among Australian bishops. That already puts him offside, in the Tall Poppy Syndrome, quite a cultural characteristic in Australian society. I have no doubt that Cardinal Pell, like me, is a sinner, and in his inner journey of chastity before the Lord, he has had his struggles, for virtue untested is not virtue. But the arena for this was internal, in the privacy of his soul. It is unthinkable that after thirty years or more of committed and proven intellectual, moral, priestly and episcopal life, that he, just having been appointed a Metropolitan, should on the first occasion of a Sunday Mass stoop to so crass and crude and sordid an exercise of pedophilia of which he has been legally convicted. No, it requires a certain preparatory moral degradation to resort to such casual stunts.

Now for a little of what I can see of the wider context of the Australian Church and society.

First I mention a news item of 1996 which I clearly remember. Very early on, a 'gay' crowd staged a public 'rainbow' protest in a Sunday Mass. When they fronted up to received Holy Communion, Pell refused them. The homosexualist agenda in Church and Society has been gunning for him ever since. One of the most vicious attacks on him lately has been that of David Marr. He is a 'public intellectual' of left wing Australia, a long 'outed' homosexual and advocate of the 'gay' cause, and virulently anti-Catholic.

The passionate moral indignation of such a figure who would wag his finger against the Catholic Church, tells us that something is going on much deeper than the to and fro of legal and political debate.

For decades Australian politics (including the erstwhile 'centre-right' Liberal Party), the mainstream media, and the cultural elites have been drifting steadily Leftward into the totalitarian and conformist world of Political Correctness. Part of that shift involves a less and less disguised hostility to the Western tradition and its Judaeo-Christian underpinnings in general, and to the Catholic Church in particular.

Alas, within the Australian Church herself, there is a large party of hostility to Pell. Many of these will be aging clergy of the Spirit of the Seventies. For Pell was always an intentionally orthodox Catholic priest, his stance towards the Second Vatican Council in the spirit of Pope Benedict's Hermeneutic of Continuity. Never subscribed to the rebellion against *Humanae Vitae.* Thus you find the strange paradox that Catholic 'progressives' who are in favour of changing the Church's sexual ethic, who are soft on divorce and remarriage, abortion, homosexuality, and are predictable sponsors of the latest faddish political enthusiasms, themselves exploit the incidence of sexual abuse within the Church to perversely promote their cause. They have the spirit of David Marr in them.

Alas, as a retired bishop said to me recently, we have given a lot of ammunition to those who would attack us from without—or subvert us from within. There has been a disturbing number of priests in the Melbourne Archdiocese implicated in sexual scandals over the last three or four decades, as has emerged in public enquiries in recent years. Without a doubt, the Church, whether in Australia or worldwide is *semper purificanda.* We are long overdue for a severe chastisement, if you ask me, and I think things are set to become much worse for us. Just consider soberly the state of our higher leadership right now.

In the midst of the exposure of the moral and spiritual weakness of the Church in Australia, we also have another tragic fallout: the accusation of innocent priests and others. It is hard to be caught between the victims of clerical sexual predation crying out for vindication against a culture of cover-up, and the clerical victims of predatory false accusation and slander. I have heard tell that these days any priest who is accused is likely to be treated as a 'hot potato' by his bishop: he is basically dropped. They seem a cowardly lot, bishops. Or perhaps they will style it 'prudent'.

I do not know whether the legal appeal against Pell's conviction will succeed or not.

Let us consider the worst-case scenario, that it will not. In that case, my reading of Pell's situation would go something like this. Jesus Christ his Lord loves him too much to leave him at the pinnacle of ecclesiastical advancement. Pell joins the ranks of the innocent sufferers, from Abel even to our Lord. Perhaps he is called to carry a burden of vicarious suffering for fellow-priests and believers who are not so innocent, and for a Church in great need of repentance.

Perhaps in another way Cardinal Pell is winning the greatest ecclesiastical 'advancement' of all, to approach something of the original condition of the Apostles in the earliest years of the Church: *For it seems to me that God has displayed us apostles at the end of the procession, like prisoners appointed for death. We have become a spectacle to the whole world, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are dishonored.*(1 Cor 4:9-10)

Pray for Cardinal Pell, and pray for …

Anna the Sinner