

BISHOP ROBINSON'S HERESY

"One of the rights I treasure... is my right to be wrong... I demand the right to be wrong one hundred times a day, in big things and in small... I could not survive a single day without [this] right..."¹

In the course of an interview on ABC Radio with the former auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, Geoffrey Robinson, over his recent book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*, journalist Noel Debien made this comment:

"It strikes me that we are at the 100th anniversary of *Pascendi*, September 8th—100 years of the Modernist crisis—and the document that said what was not, and what was, Catholic—I suppose from the point of view of those who were in charge at the time. In a sense your book appears to be a summary of the worst nightmares of the ultramontanists."²

The interview, broadcast in Australia on Sunday, 2nd September 2007, took place just six days prior to the centenary of the Church's condemnation of the gravest heresy since Arianism. The centenary was ignored by the Vatican, a failure in deference obviously not shared by those on the margins of Catholic orthodoxy. Whether the timing of its publication was coincidental or not, Bishop Robinson's book encapsulates much of the heterodoxy St Pius X condemned in his great encyclical.

One can have faith in God (mere faith) and yet not have the Catholic faith. Mere faith may have the best of motives, the realisation that one is the effect of transcendent intrinsic and extrinsic causes, and that it is reasonable to acknowledge a Creator and a Redeemer. It may be focussed clearly on a personal God, or only obscurely so. It may be strong or weak, so weak that it might be called 'faith' only in name. Whatever its state, mere faith is a human thing, a natural virtue educed by a person in his own intellect and will. The Catholic faith, in contrast, is not a human thing at all. No one can contrive, or obtain, it for himself. It is a gift—something given by God to those whom he chooses.³

One of the indicia of the Divine provenance of Catholic faith is negative. When a man loses this faith he loses with it all memory and understanding of what he once possessed. He no longer conceives of God as superior to every created or creatable thing; the one necessary being—HE WHO IS; the one who not only gives man his nature but holds him in being, yet who is closer to him than he is to himself. Almighty God is reduced to a formless, indeterminable entity. The heretic may think himself justified in suggesting improvements to the Catholicism he has abandoned, but he is like one blundering in the dark.

¹ Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church, Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, John Garratt Publishing, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 235-6

² Australian Broadcasting Corporation, interview 2nd September 2007.

³ The normal way a man acquires the Catholic faith is through Catholic parents, the instruments God chooses for its transmission. It is infused at Baptism and articulated through instruction. As the child grows, the day comes when he must make a conscious decision to embrace the thing for himself. He will have all the habits and dispositions fostered in him by his parents' to assist him, but ultimately, the decision is his.

The Congregation for Bishops wrote to Bishop Geoffrey Robinson in August 1996 about views which were “seriously critical of the magisterial teaching and discipline of the Church.” The Pope (John Paul II) he was told, was seriously concerned. In October the same year he was advised that relevant documentation would be forwarded to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “implying,” he says naively, “that I was suspected of some form of heresy.”⁴ One must doubt his reported history of what led to the confrontation—public criticism of Rome for alleged lack of support over problems with sexual abuse. Criticism in matters of administration does not amount to criticism of the Church’s “magisterial teaching”.⁵ Clearly his public utterances had revealed his heretical leanings. The bishop confirms their existence in his book, and demonstrates their extent.

‘Robinsonism’ is a curious blend of Modernism⁶ and neo-Protestantism. “The claim of conscience,” historian Sir Maurice Powicke remarked of the Protestant revolt in England, “in the end took the place of Rome”⁷, and it is Bishop Robinson’s insistence on the primacy of conscience over the teachings of the Catholic Church that grounds his heresy.

Robinsonism borrows certain of Modernism’s terminology and techniques. The bishop speaks of “stories” and “saving events”; insists that the faith of people must grow from a “childish” into an “adult” faith; speaks of “the influence of the world around and within us” as part of Divine revelation; uses the technique of questioning to express doubt; laments the fact that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* “reduc[es] faith to intellectual assent to a series of propositions”⁸, and cites Modernist theologians among his authorities. He is Modernist too in his adoption of the terminology of Feminist ideology.⁹ But he does not appear to follow the Modernists in casting doubt on other central truths of the Catholic faith like the Immaculate Conception, Christ’s virginal conception and birth, his miracles, his Resurrection, or the validity of the sacraments¹⁰. Robinson has his own ‘buzzwords’ and expressions: “proof”, “growth”, “progress”, “process”, “the church of the future”. He asserts that “people should grow to become all they are capable of being”. He replaces the Church’s terms, Old Testament and New, with “First Testament” and “Second”. He

⁴ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 21

⁵ That the Church did not act precipitately in considering the question of his orthodoxy is apparent from the time that elapsed before he took the decision to resign in July 2004. One can only conjecture whether the CDF advised him he would be removed if he did not do so.

⁶ With its denial, however tacitly expressed, of the existence of the supernatural or that anything exists beyond the material, Modernism has been ‘a bridge too far’ for many heretics who see the fatuousness of these claims.

⁷ Sir Maurice Powicke, *The Reformation in England*, OUP, London, 1941

⁸ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit, p. 121

⁹ He is, of course, not alone in this. But since Feminism is rooted in subjectivism, one of the chief traits of modern philosophy, it is inevitable that the heresy which has modern philosophy for its inspiration should adopt Feminist categories willy nilly.

¹⁰ He does however, question the Ascension, and denies that the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin should be part of Catholic Doctrine.

is naïve, like all Protestants, about the provenance of the Bible, regarding it *eo ipso* as a source of revelation and ignoring the fact that we know it to be so only because of the guarantee of an extrinsic infallible authority.

Bishop Robinson asserts that what has driven him into print is the attitude of the Catholic Church's hierarchy towards the scandal of sexual abuse among clergy and religious. He disposes of this motive in ten pages (in the Introduction), referring to it only intermittently thereafter. He spends the bulk of the book (some 280 pages) in a comprehensive criticism of the Church and its teachings including the nature and content of the Catholic faith; revelation; the inerrancy of sacred scripture; sacred tradition; the Church's authority to teach and to discipline; Christ's Divinity; the apostolic succession; papal infallibility; and the Church's moral teachings.

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The Church defines *sacred tradition* as the means by which, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, she perpetuates and transmits through her doctrine, life and worship to every generation all that she is and believes¹¹. Bishop Robinson reduces tradition to something mechanical. Insofar as it is dynamic, it is "a process of handing on the meaning and message of Jesus Christ... always a work of the Spirit and human beings working together." He will not allow as part of tradition "those truths the Catholic Church appeared to claim were handed down from Jesus but not included in the [New] Testament" because "we can have no convincing proof that such verbal handing on of statements of Jesus occurred".¹² It is hard to see how he can deny the influence of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church infallibly yet affirm his infallible influence on this "process of handing on the meaning and message of Jesus Christ". His use of the term "Spirit" (no longer "Holy") seems to be a device to reassure the reader against human fallibility.

He invents a new entity, "the Great Tradition", to replace the Church.

"[The Great Tradition] cannot be contained in books and papal documents, or even in the bible. It exists only in so far as it is received, accepted, assimilated and lived by human beings, and then passed on to others. It is not words but a living faith, that is, a way of living based on a person and a story."¹³

How are believers to attain certitude? We must use the tool of discernment to weigh the only three influences available to us, the bible, the world around and within us, and the wisdom of the past. We must then test our findings against "the Great Tradition".

"Much thought needs to be given to this matter and nothing less than the collective wisdom of the entire Christian world will be sufficient. The extremes of all three tendencies must be sternly resisted and we must work towards an understanding where each of these means of knowledge is properly balanced by the other two."¹⁴

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter 'CCC') n. 78 quoting *Dei Verbum* n. 8 §1

¹² *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit, pp. 68-9

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 69

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 74

But what reliance could one place on the weighing of such “findings” when he concedes there may be errors in “the process of handing on” such as that committed by the priest who purported to celebrate Mass by attempting to consecrate a pizza and a can of beer. There is, he admits—

“no clear line between creative adaptation and betrayal, and the argument will probably continue forever...”¹⁵

Hardly a satisfying foundation for a new doctrine!

In Chapter 6 he presents a potted history of the Church. Predictably, the Second Vatican Council was “an immense achievement, one of the greatest in the entire history of the church.”¹⁶ He lists eleven instances of ways in which (he says) the Council overturned past procedures. He claims:

“In all of these cases there was discontinuity with a more recent tradition in the name of a fuller continuity with the Great Tradition, the handing on of the person and story of Jesus Christ...”¹⁷

Yet, there were problems with the Council, too, notably its direction (in *Lumen Gentium* 25) that the faithful are “to show religious submission of will and intellect to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra...”¹⁸ Bishop Robinson demonstrates how he got around this text:

“By putting the will first and speaking of the teaching authority, the Council stressed the willingness, the wanting to accept the teaching authority of the pope. In practice, it meant that when I picked up a new papal document I willed it to be right, and this willingness had its effect on the way I read the document. It did not mean that I surrendered the powers of my intellect; it did not take away my right to disagree...”¹⁹

He does not bother to complete for his readers the passage from the Council Fathers—“such that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence and the judgements he makes are adhered to sincerely according to his manifest mind and will.” The full quotation makes a nonsense of his claim, and a nonsense of his criticism that the reversal of the expression ‘will and intellect’ in later documents drawing on *Lumen Gentium* 25 demonstrates a move from “willingness to accept the person teaching”, to intellectual assent to what is taught. The provision always demanded intellectual assent.

He follows the Modernist line in criticising the restriction of doctrinal limitations on the freedom of the believer. He quotes the maxim *in essentialibus libertas; in dubiis libertas; in omnibus caritas*²⁰ claiming, gratuitously—

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 71

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 118

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 120

¹⁸ The Latin text runs as follows: *Hoc vero religiosum voluntatis et intellectus obsequium singulari ratione praestandum est Romani Pontificis authentico magisterio etiam cum non ex cathedra loquitur; ita nempe ut magisterium eius supremum reverenter agnoscatur, et sententiis ab eo prolatis sincere adhaereatur, iuxta mentem et voluntatem manifestatam ipsius, quae se prodit praecipue sive indole documentorum, sive ex frequenti propositione eiusdem doctrinae, sive ex dicendi ratione.*

¹⁹ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 120

²⁰ The maxim is variously attributed to St Vincent of Lerins and St Augustine.

"I had always understood [this maxim] to mean that the necessary matters on which unity was essential should be kept to a minimum... I believe that 'creeping infallibility' has involved a tendency to move many matters from... the doubtful... to... the necessary... [T]his trend imposes unnecessary demands on people, and goes against the 'freedom to grow' that is at the heart of this book."²¹

He expresses concern that "there are people who are using [the Catechism of the Catholic Church] as the yardstick of all orthodoxy."²²

He asserts, again gratuitously, that the teaching of St Augustine and that of St Thomas differ on the issue of conscience and that this alleged division appears in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. He says that the teaching of Pope John Paul in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*—"The Church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience"²³—is at odds with the Church's insistence that people must conform their thinking to the teaching of the Church. He seems oblivious of the fact that this is precisely the point the late Pope was making.

He presents "a middle ground between the two extremes of freedom without responsibility (I decide to do something and that makes it morally right for me) and responsibility without freedom (don't think, just obey)."²⁴ But he obscures the fact that a man is morally responsible for the right forming of his conscience before he acts on it and denies that God's Church provides him with an infallible guide to its formation.

"It is surely a contradiction in terms to speak of infallible advice to conscience. If a statement is presented as infallibly true, it is no longer advice... Moral statements can be more or less certain and they can be made with more or less authority. But if they are to respect the essential role of conscience in moral growth, they must stop short of infallibility."²⁵

This reflects the "non-directional counselling" school of thought developed from the views of American psychologist, Carl Rogers. It is stupid. Infallible advice in moral matters is *precisely* what a man seeks that he may act without error.

When he turns to the Church's teaching on sexuality Bishop Robinson discloses the source of his problems with the Church. From his earliest years as a priest, he says—

"[I objected] to the idea that sexual sins are always and in all circumstances mortal (*ex toto genere suo*), so that there cannot be venial sins in the field of sexuality".²⁶ "I began to feel that there was a total lack of proportion between the offence of a 'bad thought' and the punishment of eternal damnation, and that it was quite unthinkable that a loving God would act in this way."²⁷

²¹ Ibid, p. 121

²² Ibid, p. 122

²³ *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 64, emphasis is in the text of the encyclical. Cf. *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 160

²⁴ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit, p. 170

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 167-8. On this issue of conscience, see also Robert Tilley's review of Bishop Robinson's book entitled "A Sensitive Conscience" in *Annals Australasia* 22 October 2007.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 176

²⁷ Ibid. The bishop does not do justice to the Church's teaching. Three elements are required before a sin is mortal (ie grave): 1) grave matter—and this is fulfilled by the very nature of the matter of sexual sins; 2) full knowledge; and 3) full consent.

Significantly, he adds: "I now realise that what changed for me in those early years was not so much my understanding of sex as my understanding of God."

His objections to the Church's teachings in *Humanae Vitae*, loom large.

"[I]t is a simple fact that over a period of time very large numbers of Catholic people made conscience decisions to reject the teaching of that encyclical. For most of these people their decisions fulfilled all the requirements of conscience that I have spoken about... Many... then began to say to themselves, 'If the pope is wrong on this question, how can I be sure that he is right on other questions?'... For individual Catholics, there has been a loss of trust in the authority of the church in moral matters and this has left many people without real guidance in their moral lives..."

He inverts, here, the blame for the situation in which dissenters find themselves. It was the Church, not they, who were wrong, for they made decisions "in conscience", and conscience can never be wrong! But a conscience decision *can* be wrong. That is why the Church requires a man to form his conscience in accordance with the rule of morals. It is why Christ established his Church, to tell him what that rule is.

Having abandoned the certitudes provided by the Church's determinations in sexual morality, the bishop sets out to establish his own. He relies on the idiosyncratic analysis of American Protestant advocate of homosexual marriage, Louis William Countryman, the burden of whose simplistic exegesis seems to be that Christianity's approach arises from a mistaken interpretation of the Jewish attitude to purity and to property. Robinson concludes that—

"it is difficult to sustain an entire sexual ethic on the basis of direct offences against God... Should we not look at sexual morality in terms of the good or harm done to persons and the relationships between them rather than in terms of a direct offence against God?"²⁸

He would, seemingly, countenance any sexual liaisons, including unnatural ones provided only that they are "loving" expressions of sexuality.

When he comes to deal with the Church's doctrine of Original Sin he returns to the Modernist line.

"Since the Council of Trent we have come to realise that what we know about Adam and Eve comes from a story, not an eyewitness account of what happened."²⁹

By means of the term, 'story', he conveys that the narrative about Adam and Eve in the first two chapters of Genesis is little more than a fairy tale. 'Story' is ambivalent: it can mean something true, but its more common use is of something fictitious. He uses it in this latter sense. How do we know that the narrative is little better than a fairy tale? Because it is not "an eyewitness account of what happened". Here, too, he is applying the principles of Modernism grounded in the materialist claim that we can be certain of nothing which does not fall under the senses.

The fact that there could not exist "an eyewitness account" of what happened at the time of creation does not mean that there is no knowledge of it. Almighty God, who cannot lie, has revealed to us that he created the first man in innocence in his own

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 204-5

²⁹ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 251

image and likeness, but that the man rebelled with consequences for his offspring ever after. He revealed this through the mouth of his prophet, Moses. In respect of those things that Moses could not have known through experience (such as man's creation and his fall) the Church teaches that Moses wrote under inspiration,

“a supernatural impulse by which the Holy Spirit urged and moved the sacred writers to write, and assisted them while they wrote, in such a way that they understood exactly, willed to report faithfully, and expressed with infallible truth all that God had ordered and only what he ordered them to write.”³⁰

Bishop Robinson's reliance on the materialist thesis confirms him in denial of the truths in the first three chapters of *Genesis*. He goes on to justify his analysis:

“[T]hrough scientific discovery we have been made aware that the development of the human race was slower and more complicated than the biblical story of Adam and Eve allows for.”³¹

The Church is clearly wrong because modern science contradicts Divine revelation—and we cannot doubt what modern science seems to show! His next step is to address an issue closer to the source of his problems with the Church:

“The question of the origin of evil in the world is a profound one, deserving of lengthy and serious consideration, but there have always been problems with the story of Adam and Eve as an adequate explanation of this problem... Is it safe to base religious belief on such an affirmation...? ... Does revelation give us 'the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents'?”³²

Chesterton once remarked that Original Sin was the one doctrine of the Catholic Church which could be proved experimentally. St Paul's confession in Romans Chapter 7 illustrates the point: “The things I should do, I do not, and the things I hate, those I do”³³ It is folly to demand ‘proofs’ for events beyond human knowledge. Almighty God has revealed what befell the human race at its inception. If a Catholic rejects what God has revealed here, he has no objective ground for his alleged certitude in *any* element of his revelation.³⁴ His rejection involves a denial that God revealed it, which is to deny God's power, which is, ultimately, to deny God himself.

For one who, in addition to his qualifications in canon law, holds a licentiate in sacred theology, Bishop Robinson demonstrates a remarkable ignorance of the subject. He advances arguments on difficulties on various theological topics as if

³⁰ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 18.11.1893, 3(a).

³¹ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 251

³² *Ibid*, pp. 251-2

³³ *Romans* 7: 19

³⁴ Cf St Thomas's comment on this, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 5, a. 3; and cf. II-II, q. 11, a. 1 “[H]e who adheres to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches. It is otherwise if he holds what he chooses to hold of the things taught by the Church and rejects what he chooses to reject, for he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will... It is clear that such a heretic with regard to one article has no faith in the other articles, but only a kind of opinion in accordance with his own will.”

these had never before been addressed and answered by the Church Fathers, her Doctors and theologians. Among them, the questions—

whether the evidence of human imperfection in the Bible demonstrates that it is not Divinely inspired;³⁵

whether the failure of one of the Gospel writers to mention something found in that of the others indicates disagreement between them;³⁶

whether the passages in the Gospels of Matthew (24: 36) and Mark (13: 32) that the Christ knew not the date of the end of the world meant that his knowledge was limited;³⁷

whether Christ intended the Apostles should have successors.³⁸

He does not trouble to report for his reader what the Church's theologians have taught on these topics, seeming to regard his own arguments as sufficient authority.

Bishop Robinson has lost the understanding of the nature of the Church of which he is a bishop. He conceives of it as simply a human institution whose determinations are prone to error.

“How could mere human beings claim such certainty concerning the inner life of God or the exact manner in which Jesus was both human and divine? Is there not a point, quite early in this speculation, at which we should bow before the mystery of God rather than attempt to spell it out in poor human words?”³⁹

The Church's structure and method of operation are to be determined *humano modo*, by consensus.

“[I]f the whole body of the church is to have the freedom to grow, it must have a say in the foundational beliefs of the church.”⁴⁰

He does not understand that the Church is (as Belloc said) the “[o]ne thing in this world... different from all other”⁴¹; though comprised of men it operates under Divine inspiration and direction; therefore it cannot err. Nor does he see the truth St Joan of Arc saw so clearly—*there is no difference between Christ and his Church*.

Rather than acknowledging with the Catholic Church that Jesus Christ is *God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father*, the Church's founder and its Head, he treats him naturally. Robinson's Christ is a stilted, a limping, Christ.

“At a time when we are coming to realise that Jesus himself might have given up the privilege of perfect knowledge and have had to struggle through his life and mission with only limited knowledge, should we not be looking again at claims which imply that the church has access to a level of knowledge that even Jesus might not have had access to?”⁴²

³⁵ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., pp. 54-5

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 88-91

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 94

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 104-5

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 236

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 148

⁴¹ ‘Letter to Dean Inge’, reproduced in Hilaire Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic*, London, 1931. My copy a republication by Books for Libraries Press, New York, 1967, p.305.

⁴² *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 248

Robinson's Christ is not the founder of the Catholic Church: he is opposed to it. He reminds one of the Christ of Luther, of Zwingli, of Calvin, or of any other of those who have objected to the teachings of the Church Christ himself founded. He is a Protestant Christ.

It will be no surprise to the reader to discover that Bishop Robinson has problems with others of the Church's teachings, such as Christ's Ascension into heaven—"only Luke speaks of this", he says⁴³—and the Dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Of the latter, he said:

"[A]n infallible statement has to have very powerful arguments behind it, and the powerful arguments for the Assumption are not there."⁴⁴

It matters not that, with the very best of reasons for doing so, the Church has spoken definitively on the subject, that is, *that Christ has spoken*.

Consistent with his loss of understanding of the infallibility of the Church, he has lost too the understanding of the Pope's participation in the Church's charism of infallibility. The definition of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council, he says, rests on unsure scriptural foundations.

"[P]apal power has gone too far and there are quite inadequate limits on its exercise."⁴⁵

Inevitably, he treats the formal pronouncement of Pope John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* excluding the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood as containing no binding ruling.

He sets the Church's position on divorce and remarriage against that of Christ and asks whether it is

"fully in harmony with the person of Jesus as revealed in the gospels? Is the particular tradition on divorce fully in harmony with the Great Tradition?"⁴⁶

He prefaces this question with a comment which must cause grave concern to the Catholic faithful in this country:

"[M]any Catholic bishops express a real uneasiness about the present teaching of their church on the subject of divorce and remarriage... [A]fter many years of pastoral practice, after much thought and prayer, they are not convinced that the current teachings of the Catholic Church on this subject fully reflect the mind of Jesus."⁴⁷

Conclusion

At root, Bishop Robinson's problem is disobedience, his heresy, the result of a long history of failure to obey the Church Christ established for his, and our, salvation⁴⁸.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 239

⁴⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, interview 2nd September 2007.

⁴⁵ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 128 and see p. 247

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 258

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 257

⁴⁸ His problems with the Church's teaching were manifest well before his appointment as a bishop. In a letter to the Editor of *AD2000* in December last, Fr Brian Harrison OS relates how the late Sydney priest, Fr Terry Purcell, repeatedly tried with the support of many fellow

Like the errant members of the Catholic laity he seeks to defend, he will not allow that he has been wrong. Hence the thing which commanded his obedience had not the authority to do so. Therefore it cannot be the means God has chosen to save man from his sins. Therefore it is a merely human thing, not Christ's Church. Nor is Christ its Head. Nor is it true that when the Church speaks, Christ speaks. Therefore it is not infallible when teaching in faith and morals. Christ did not appoint Peter to be pre-eminent among his brethren. The Pope is not his successor—and so on...

In the course of the interview with him mentioned above, Noel Debien made a further significant remark:

"[A]s I was reading the book I kept thinking of the phrase *Hier steht er und kann nicht anders*— the Luther statement, 'Here I stand; I can do no other'..."

The bishop denied the force of the comparison but, in a perhaps Freudian slip, he added:

"Luther didn't intend to leave the church and found another church at the time either."

Bishop Robinson's book is dangerous and we will do well not to treat it lightly. In calling for "that better church that must arise" he argues, along Catholic lines, that "in this matter it is God's desires rather than our own that we should be seeking to follow".⁴⁹ He presents a moral argument reflecting the defective, but attractive, view that, regardless of whether it is, or is not, rightly formed, conscience is supreme. It is a view with which his readers, afflicted with the *zeitgeist* of the age, subjectivism, will tend to sympathise.⁵⁰ He lards his text with emotive 'Meditations' in which he invites the reader to sublimate the doctrine he has proposed.

It is inevitable that Bishop Robinson's exercise of his "right to be wrong" will lead others into error. His book is likely to be the cause of the loss of Divine faith in a great number who are struggling at the margins of Catholicism.

Michael Baker

15th March 2007—*Solemnity of St Joseph* (transferred from 19th March)

priests to warn Vatican authorities that Fr Robinson was a public dissenter from the Church's teaching, but to no avail.

⁴⁹ *Confronting Power and Sex etc.*, op. cit., p. 77

⁵⁰ "The supremacy of [the] individual conscience removes the foundation of all the articles of faith, because they stand or fall according to whether the individual conscience assents to, or dissents from, them... [I]t is no longer the divine authority of the Church which guarantees them, but subjective individual impressions... It is not the thing which demands assent, but assent which gives value to the thing." Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum*, [translated from 2nd Italian edition by Fr John P. Parsons], Sarto House, Kansas City, 1996, p. 23.