

THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

In 1915-1916 the Old Catholic Church in Great Britain was reorganized on a more liberal basis. The resulting Liberal Catholic Church has continued to carefully preserve the regularity of the orders of its ministry received from the Old Catholic archiepiscopal see of Utrecht in the Netherlands. The Liberal Catholic Church does not share the doctrinal stance of the Old Catholics, while laying claim to unity with the 'Catholic' church of all ages. The Church dates its inception from the date of the consecration of the First Presiding Bishop James Ingall Wedgwood (d. 1951) on the 13th February 1916.

Australia played a very important role in the development of the church throughout the world, as, although Bishop James Ingall Wedgwood established it in London, much of the development subsequently took place from the centre based in Sydney. Bishop Wedgwood travelled to Australia in 1916 and consecrated Bishop Charles Webster Leadbeater (d.1934) who had earlier been a priest in the Church of England. Together they formulated the liturgy that formed the basis of that which is used today, and in 1918 adopted the name of The Liberal Catholic Church.

In 1918 both Sydney and Melbourne acquired their own churches and the pro-Cathedral Church in Regent Street, Sydney, was to be the centre where many of the earlier bishops of the church were consecrated. By that time, centres had been commenced in Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth, and in 1926 the latter was the first to construct its own building which is in use to this day.

In 1923 Bishop Leadbeater assumed the position of Presiding Bishop, and was based, in Sydney. (The Presiding Bishop is elected from the bishops around the world all of whom have equal rank.) The church in Sydney therefore became the focal point for a great deal of activities that had rapidly spread throughout the world. It again provided worldwide leadership when from 1973 until 1984 an Australian, Bishop Sten von Krusenstierna once more held the office of Presiding Bishop. The church is at present active in 35 countries around the world. Its international head office is in London, although the current Presiding Bishop is Bishop Ian Richard Hooker an Australian who is based in Perth Western Australia.

Belief and Worship

The Liberal Catholic Church draws the central inspiration of its work from an intense faith in the living Christ, believing that the vitality of a church gains in proportion as its members not only commemorate a Christ who lived two thousand years ago, but strive also to serve as a vehicle for the eternal Christ who lives ever as a mighty spiritual presence in the world, guiding and sustaining his people.

The Church regards the Scriptures, the creeds and traditions of the church as the means by which the teachings of Christ have been handed down to his followers. It does not invest them with any idea of literal infallibility. It derives from them certain principles of belief and conduct which it regards as fundamental, true and sufficient while not exhaustive, as a basis of right understanding and right conduct. The service to humanity, reverence for all life and the sacrifice of the lower self to the higher are the laws of spiritual growth.

The fear of God and His wrath, the ritual condemnation of unbelievers, servile cringing and self-abasement, repeated appeals for mercy, naive attempts to bargain with God, and fear of everlasting hell, have been eliminated as derogatory to the idea of a loving Father and to man whom He has created in His own image.

The Liberal Catholic Church gives special attention to the ministry of healing. Healing and priestly functions are seen to be complementary. There is a strong belief that bodily ailments are in many instances the outcome of maladies of the soul, and can best be remedied when the soul is at peace. Every endeavour is made to direct the healing process to the origin of the disease.

The Liberal Catholic Church teaches that man is a complex of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit of man, made in the image of God, is divine in essence and part of the one great whole. Therefore, it cannot cease to exist and its future is one whose glory and splendour have no limit. Its unfoldment takes place under an inviolable law of cause and effect 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. (Galatians 6:7). Thus our actions in each physical incarnation largely determine our experiences when the physical body is finally cast aside, and greatly influence the circumstances of our next birth. This means that The Liberal Catholic Church embraces reincarnation in its body of teaching. It holds with Origen among the early church fathers, the concept of the pre-existence of the soul, and that the doctrines of judgement and resurrection may be interpreted as repeated lives in different bodies until final perfection is reached. Several passages in the New Testament are held to indicate that the idea of reincarnation was not unknown to Christ and his disciples.

The Liberal Catholic Church in its theology allies itself in many respects with the Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought of the early Christian centuries. In holding the concepts of repeated incarnations of the human soul in successive personalities and its gradual spiritual evolution towards perfection and ultimate union with the Divine, The Liberal Catholic Church is unique among Christian churches today.

Within the bounds of its teachings, the Church includes all that is good and true in the widening field of scientific knowledge. It welcomes new studies of the psyche of man, including psychology, extra sensory perception and psychical research.

The Liberal Catholic Church believes that there is a body of doctrine and mystical experience common to all religions which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It is ready at all times to establish relations of inter-communion with other churches on the friendliest possible basis. It permits its clergy to exchange pulpits with ministers of non-episcopal churches.

The Liberal Catholic Church recognizes **seven sacraments** - Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Absolution, Holy Unction, Holy Matrimony, and Holy Orders. To ensure their efficiency to the worshipper, its guards with the greatest care the administration of all sacramental rites, for it believes that the ancient rites for administration of the sacraments are based on the wisdom of Christ and that therefore they must be according to divine order and necessarily scientific. So the essential features of the sacramental forms are preserved with scrupulous care. Although little attempt has been made to study the rationale of the changes in the soul of man effected by these rites, there are, encouraging developments in this field.

The central act of worship is the **Holy Eucharist** which is regarded not as a commemoration of His life, death, and resurrection, but as Christ's supreme gift to His church. The Holy Eucharist is essentially a corporate act, and all who take part, indeed the whole of mankind and the whole of creation are thereby blessed. A vernacular liturgy is used and the prevailing tone is one of devotion and joyous aspiration.

Membership and Ministries

The Liberal Catholic Church welcomes to its altars all who reverently and sincerely approach them. It looks upon the Christian church as the great brotherhood of Christ and offers the Blessed Sacrament to any member of that brotherhood who reverently desires it. Furthermore, in keeping with the Church's recognition that truth can be found in all faiths, it allows the Blessed Sacrament to be given to any person who reverently and sincerely seek it.

Candidates are admitted to the Church by **Baptism**, or if that has already been performed, by **Confirmation**. If the candidate has already received both baptism and confirmation in complete form, a simple form of admission is used.

Inasmuch as The Liberal Catholic Church welcomes to its **membership** all who are seeking truth, it does not require its members to accept its Statement of Principles or Summary of Doctrine. All are encouraged to search for themselves and discover and unfold the truth, as they perceive it. At present the membership throughout Australia would be about 800 in all.

The **clergy** make no claim to spiritual or temporal domination over those who adhere to its Rite. In common with the priesthood of other churches they hold Christ's commission to teach (Matthew 28:18-20) but claim no authority over the individual conscience. The clergy of The Liberal Catholic Church are unpaid and usually retain their secular occupations. The majority of its clergy are married men with families.

Government

The worldwide Liberal Catholic Church is governed by the **General Episcopal Synod** which consists of all bishops throughout the world, each having equal voting power. The **Presiding Bishop** is elected from members of that Synod and who is regarded as first among equals.

Approximately every five years a gathering of the members of the Synod is held in a chosen country, to determine policies and matters concerning the worldwide church. An Interim Committee and a Judiciary Committee elected from among the bishops deal with matters arising between Synods.

Each country or province is controlled by a **Regionary Bishop** who in turn is assisted by diocesan and auxiliary bishops in that country. In Australia the Church is governed by the **Provincial Episcopal Synod**, the chairman being the Regionary Bishop. At the Provincial level, finances are controlled by The Liberal Catholic Church Trust Ltd, which consists of both clergy and lay members. Each church in the province controls its own finances through its own **Vestry Committee**. Parishes are controlled by a priest in charge who heads a Vestry Committee elected from among the members of that parish.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Australian Headquarters: P. O. Box 85, Gordon NSW 2072

The Regionary Bishop: P. O. Box 261, Innaloo WA 6018

At the local level consult the relevant telephone directory.

Some Resources in Print

The Liturgy of the Liberal Catholic Church, St Alban Press, 5th edn, 1983

Statement of Principles & Summary of Doctrine, St Alban Press, 7th edn, 1973

The Apostolic Succession in the Liberal Catholic Church, St Alban Press, 2nd edn, 1980
Cockerham, A. W.

An Introduction to the Liberal Catholic Church, St Alban Press, 3rd edn, 1985, Parry, J. B. &
Rivett, R.

The Liberal Catholic Church: What is it, St Alban Press, 2nd edn, 1978, Taylor, E. S.

The Liberal Catholic Church & Some Facets of its Doctrine, St Alban Press, 1977, Wicks, C.C.

For these and others contact: **St Alban Press P. O. Box 85, Gordon NSW 2072**

CHURCH COAT OF ARMS



The crossed 'keys of the kingdom' and a processional cross stand behind a shield on which is set a chalice and the host symbolising the sacrifice and offerings of the Eucharist. The motto translates as 'Thy Kingdom come'.