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Bardon: A Puzzle for the Protestant Evangelical

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that really matters. To be truly glad in another's abilities, to appreciate the talents for the use of which he is responsible, to welcome him as a fellow labourer in his "larger" or "smaller" sphere, these restrain us from the wasteful habit of making irrelevant comparisons. Here in the world of men we can but see through "a glass darkly", we can know only "in part" and all our judgments are limited and relative. When that which is perfect is come, and we can know even as we are known, it may very well be revealed that many comparatively unknown ministers have served their Lord as faithfully, and perhaps at greater cost to themselves, than many a famous ecclesiastical figure.

Bishop Gore was discussing the Service of Ordination with one of his young men. In that service which was to be held on the following morning, the bishop had to ask the ordinand questions, each of which began with the words, "Wilt thou . . . ? Wilt thou . . . ? Wilt thou . . . ? To these questions the young man was required to reply, "I will . . . I will . . . I will." When their preparations were complete and the candidate about to leave, the bishop looking earnestly at the young man said, "Tomorrow I shall be asking you, "Wilt thou . . . ? Wilt thou . . . ? Wilt thou . . . ? But at the end of your life Another will be asking you, 'Hast thou . . . ? Hast thou . . . ? Hast thou . . . ?'"

Peter turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, and said to Jesus, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me." A man is not overcome of envy as long as he is *minding his own business*.

G. W. BYRT

Mr Byrt's second article will appear in our next issue.

BARDON: A PUZZLE FOR THE PROTESTANT EVANGELICAL

Bardon is a suburb of Brisbane, Australia. Until two years ago it was little more than that. Today the name "Bardon" has become a symbol for one of the most amazing situations in the Christian life of the Australian continent.

Imagine a weekly three hour—(often longer)—prayer meeting, in which human leadership seems almost non-existent, in which tremendous heights of corporate joy are reached and equal depths of sheer compassion are plumbed by congregations averaging some three hundred in number, yet with no disorder and nothing that would jar or be other than a joyous reverence born of an uninhibited love for Jesus Christ and, for all, whatever denomination, who bear His Name.

The scene of this remarkable weekly occurrence is the Roman Catholic Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Bardon. This church has become the recognized centre of Catholic "Pentecostalism" in Brisbane and the parent body of a movement amongst Australian Catholics that is growing

every week. This is despite the same kind of reserve, within the Catholic Church and even opposition which the Charismatic Movement often meets in evangelical Protestant circles.

For one who is a convinced Protestant of the 'Conservative Evangelical' school, and who, all his life has asked 'Can any good thing come out of Rome?' this movement presents some very real problems. To glibly quote the scripture about Satan appearing as an angel of light, and to brand the whole movement as being 'of the devil', would be coming dangerously near to sinning the Pharisaic sin against the Holy Spirit—"He casts out demons by the Prince of demons".

If, from this point, I write more subjectively, it is because this would appear to be the best way in which to present some accurate, yet vivid glimpses of what is going on.

I came to Brisbane in June 1970, convinced that, at the best Rome could consist only of dead formalism and at the worst, of a hotbed of every heresy and doctrinal deviation under the sun. As for Jesuits . . .

Some members of the Church I have the privilege of seeking to serve gave me the good Johannine advice—"Come and see". In the past three years I have "been and seen" some ten or eleven times. No two occasions have been the same, and only three factors have remained constant, the minimum obtrusion of human leadership, the absolute spontaneity of the prayers and worship, and the sense of a love, that could hardly fail to melt the coldest heart present.

On the occasion of my first visit to Bardon I heard my first Jesuit priest speak in public. On my second visit, I met him. My introduction to Paul Siebert S.J., Science Master of the Iona Boys' College, Brisbane, was nothing if not dramatic. I was introduced to this physical giant of an Australian priest as "The Reverend Phil Audemard"!—Before I could put out my hand for the formal handshake, I found myself crushed in a bear like hug and my fourteen stone was lifted bodily as the voice boomed in my ear "God bless you, Brother Phil. Praise the Lord!" Then with a rhetorical—"Isn't Jesus wonderful?" Father Siebert let me down to earth again!

In some ways the first sighting of this man had been even more significant. The meeting—my first, was well under way. The congregation had expressed its worship in thirty minutes of hearty singing—"He lives"—"How Great Thou Art" "To God be the Glory", etc., etc., plus a few hymns native to the Catholic Charismatic Movement. There had been testimonies as nuns called upon the congregation to "Praise the Lord" for conversions of unruly boys, as other people gave thanks for bodily healing and many other blessings. There had been the manifestation of something I had never heard before, namely "Singing in the Spirit", a spontaneous harmony of indescribable beauty as some third or half of the congregation began to sing together "in tongues". Now the meeting had moved into a time of specific prayer. People were voicing the most delicate of family problems,

alcoholic relatives, shaky marriages, requests for the conversion of loved ones, and so on. Suddenly a man, obviously known to Paul Siebert began to pray brokenly along the following lines—"Lord Jesus, you know my family situation. You know what a rotten temper I've got and how that J - - is always picking on me—and Lord You know how the kids have given You away because of the rotten example we've set with our bickering and quarrelling . . ." The prayer got no further for the speaker broke down sobbing. Immediately one sensed something like a warm breeze of love surrounding the praying man, and Paul Siebert quietly called across the Church "Brother T - - the Lord Jesus doesn't want you to bear this burden alone. You just keep quiet and we will pray for you". Person after person prayed until somebody broke into singing:

"Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on *them*",

and then the congregation took it up, singing it over and over again until one could almost sense God actively answering the prayer. None present that night could have been surprised when two weeks later, the same speaker, with glowing face and almost delirious with joy, told how that he had gone home that night to find his own heart changed, a changed wife and a new beginning: they had fallen in love all over again and the whole family was praising God together in a new found happiness.

"Bardon" has gained a reputation here in Brisbane for many things in recent days: not the least has been the reputation of being the place where broken marriages are mended!

Another never-to-be-forgotten night was a special "healing service" held in the parish hall. Two hundred and fifty people were ringed around the walls singing and praying quietly while in the middle half a dozen groups of three or four others prayed with, and laid hands, on, the sick who had come for help. Each praying group, composed not only of Roman Catholics, but Anglicans, Presbyterians and others, including Baptists, ministered to the sick people independently of the others. The sound of separate quietly praying groups, mingled with the prayers and singing from the sides of the hall can only be described as a "quiet chaos of beauty". Little children in their pyjamas and dressing gowns played "hide and seek" around the groups at prayer, and one could not help feeling that Bardon 1972 had merged into the Capernaum of two thousand years before.

Two of the many "results" of such services may be mentioned. There was the Dutchman who had been a resistance fighter in the war, and who had been trapped under a bridge with an ammunition train upon it during an allied bombing raid. Since that day he had been unable to go under a railway bridge without extreme anxiety. If a train did go over, he would go almost berserk with terror. For thirty years he had been in this situation. On that Friday night in Bardon, the Dutchman was set free. The following day he was out on his business rounds when he pulled up in his car to check some papers. At first he did not even notice that he was

under a railway bridge; it was only the passage of trains overhead that made him aware both of where he was and of the fact that all fear had gone.

Another memory that comes to consciousness is the picture of Vincent Hobbs, the parish priest holding a little 18 months old baby boy up before the congregation and saying, "Do you remember this little fellow? We prayed for him two weeks ago. The doctors confirm that he *did* have a tumor on the brain: they tell us that a miracle has occurred and that the tumor has gone". One will never forget seeing the mother standing there with tears of joy streaming down her face as the congregation broke into applause and the semblance of a church service returned only as the building rang to the repeated, spontaneous singing of "How Great Thou Art" and "To God be the Glory".

There is much more that could be told: of the forty matriculation school boys converted after two science lessons and of the daily prayer meetings that followed in this *Catholic School!* . . . of the loving response of a lay reader in the movement the night a hostile priest voiced his noisy objections to what was going on, using the actual expression—"You call yourselves Catholics—You're nothing but a pack of rat-bags!"—of the delightful testimony of the young seminarian who was telling of the 'one by one' conversion of his fellow students with the refrain "And then there were eight"—"And then there were seven", etc., ending up amid scenes of great hilarity—"Now there's only one—that's the abbot, let's pray for him!"

One could tell of the phenomenal sale of Christian literature that is going on in that Church. One Brisbane Christian Bookshop, on one occasion was cleared out of virtually every "Andrew Murray" book in stock, while R.S.V. Bible and the books of David Wilkerson and David Du Plessis are going at a rate that would cause any bookseller to sing the *Te Deum!*

The final word must be on how this revival (for such it is) began.

On the human level it began when Vincent Hobbs, Bardon's Parish Priest, read an article by Professor Kevin O'Connor on what was happening in the U.S.A. among Catholic Pentecostals. In the January Father Hobbs had attended a retreat in which "Spiritual Renewal" was the theme and object, and in which the speaker had told of the things he had seen and heard in the circles alluded to in Kevin O'Connor's article.

On Good Friday 1970 Father Hobbs invited the speaker to meet with any in the Bardon Catholic Church who were concerned to enter into spiritual renewal. The meeting was held on 1st May and between 15 and 20 people attended. The discussion soon began to "flop" and it looked as though nothing would eventualize. At this point the little group stood to sing a hymn and then sat for spontaneous prayer. It was then that there was a breakthrough and a spirit of unity became evident, a spirit which has never left the group and which has grown with growing numbers.

The second meeting was held on Whit Sunday 1970. At one stage the number in the group dropped to 8 but then the "upward" climb began, and since then there has been no looking back.

No Charismatic phenomena were sought, but these gradually appeared until today they are frequently, although not regularly, heard.

For this writer the whole situation poses strange questions. The theological problems remain and they may never be resolved, but he has to confess that one of the Bardon "theme songs" is inescapable in its reality!

"We are one in the Spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
And they'll know we are Christians *by our love.*"

PHILIP AUDEMARD

COMMUNITY CHURCH IN TASMANIA: A NEW TOWN EXPERIMENT

I read with interest Roy Dorey's article in *The Fraternal* under the title 'NEW TOWNS: Urban living for the next generation', and thought readers might be interested in the work of a Community Church in a new mining town on the west coast of Tasmania.

When the mine opened in 1967 and the town was completed, there was accommodation for 235 families and 200 single men. Two Baptist business men from the coast, 80 miles away began visiting the town, Savage River, holding Sunday School classes and a morning worship service. A Baptist Minister, Simon Bath, travelled almost as far from his home area each Thursday and conducted religious education in the new local school. At the same time Church of England, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic Churches began to send their men and a committee was formed to sort out what might be done at Savage River.

The Tasmanian Council of Churches was keen to see some workable sort of Christian witness in the new mining area. Savage River Mining Company was approached and they generously offered a complete building in the centre of the town which now became the property of the Heads of Churches of Tasmania. The purchase price was one Australian Dollar. At this stage the church was made up of Anglicans, Baptists, Church of Christ, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and from the outset it was obvious the Church was going to be ecumenical in its outlook and behaviour.

The building was duly transformed from a Barracks, which had 21 rooms, into a building which had a chapel at one end, and a hall at the other. Heads of the Churches attended a Dedication Service and from that time forward the Savage River Church has been an autonomous group taking its place in the community of iron ore miners.

The role of the Church in the Community has been twofold. It has provided a *facility* for families who have been

Church people in their previous places of living. A Sunday School, with Protestant and Catholic teachers, has ministered to Protestant and Catholic children. The Church has met midweek, one week having Bible Study and Prayer, and on alternate weeks having a recreation night for single men, providing indoor bowls, music, table tennis, supper, and a touch of home.

Regular Sunday morning worship services have been conducted by local residents, Anglican Lay Preachers, or R.C. Parish Priest, now married and living in the town, or R.C. Christian Brother, now serving in Education Department, or myself. On alternate Sundays, members of the major Denominational groups come to us on a roster basis, and this allows our town people to keep in contact with their original denominational groups.

We have experimented in orders of service, and find sitting in a large circle, using guitars and modern ballad-type hymns and having discussions, to be the most acceptable and beneficial method of worship. Often a subject is pre-arranged so that all the congregation may take part. Holy Communion may be as simple as a glass of wine, and a plate of bread being passed from one to another around the circle. These gatherings are happy, children often attending and sitting on the floor near their parents, lots of laughter, sometimes tears, and always a warm sense of true fellowship.

The other equally important role the Church plays in this unsettled mining community is the part of the *Helping Hand*.

There have been some major breakdowns, young couples swapping wives, and things going very badly. There have been nervous breakdowns, men and women not being able to cope with the isolation and the rough West Coast weather with its average rainfall around 100 inches a year. There have been the usual sad situations where alcohol and gambling have ruined otherwise happy homes, and at Savage River these people seem to come to the church for help. We seem to take the place of parents, we are often the shoulders that people weep upon, and in the helping hand role, I believe we do make a substantial contribution to the town.

The Church has been able to relate to the *Young People* of the town. It has provided a place for the teenagers to gather and play records and dance. Very few families in the town are practising Christians, and fewer still are the number of young people who are committed. Young married couples who stay for 18 months and move on to other mining areas, often lend a hand in running socials or outings or dances for the teenagers. Occasionally a dinner is arranged with a film or guest speaker and *all* the teenagers of the town will attend. The relationship between the Church and the teenagers has been good. Five members of the Church take Religious Instruction at the local State School (350 children including 50 secondaries) and there give instruction to young people whom they know personally.