NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Australian bishops find 'difficulties' in retired bishop's book on church reform

Dennis Coday | May. 14, 2008

CONFRONTING POWER AND SEX

IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:

Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus

By Bishop Geoffrey Robinson
Foreword by Donald Cozzens
Liturgical Press
320 pages, $24.95

Days before Australian Bishop Geoffery Robinson was to begin a U.S. tour promoting his book about church reform, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, the Australian bishops? conference released a statement saying they had found ?doctrinal difficulties? with the book.

Here?s a Catholic News Service story:

* * *

By Dan McAloon, Catholic News Service

SYDNEY, Australia -- The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has listed its concerns with a retired bishop's book that critiques sexual and authoritarian abuses in the church.

The 2007 book, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, was written by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, retired auxiliary bishop of Sydney and former head of the church's abuse panel.

The bishops said that "after correspondence and conversation" with Bishop Robinson, "it is clear that doctrinal difficulties remain." Central to these, they said, is Bishop Robinson's "questioning of the authority of the Catholic Church to teach the truth definitively."

Read more about Bishop Robinson's book here, **Australia?s reform minded bishop schedules U.S. tour** **[1]**, and here, **Bishop?s book calls for ?a better church?**[2]

Collegeville, Minn.-based Liturgical Press [3] has obtained the North American rights to Robinson?s book, and it is now available for purchase here.

The Australian bishops acknowledged in a May 6 statement their indebtedness to Bishop Robinson "for his years of effort to bring help and healing to those who have suffered sexual abuse" and for his work in establishing professional standards for church personnel in Australia.

"We do not question his good faith," the bishops said. "However, people have a right to know clearly what the Catholic church believes and teaches, and the bishops have a corresponding duty to set this forth."

The bishops said Bishop Robinson's questioning of the authority of the church "is connected to Bishop Robinson's uncertainty about the knowledge and authority of Christ himself."

"Catholics believe that the church, founded by Christ, is endowed by him with a teaching office which endures through time," they said. "This is why the church's magisterium teaches the truth authoritatively in the name of Christ. The book casts doubt upon these teachings."

The bishops also rejected the reformist proposals advocated by Bishop Robinson in his book. They stated that "the authority entrusted by Christ to his church may at times be poorly exercised, especially in shaping policy and practice in complex areas of pastoral and human concern. This does not, in Catholic belief, invalidate the church's authority to teach particular truths of faith and morals."

Bishop Robinson's book, recently published in the U.S. by Liturgical Press, criticizes the structural and doctrinal causes the bishop claims are at the heart of sexual and authoritarian abuse in the contemporary Catholic Church, including the culture of secrecy and cover-ups that allowed systemic clerical abuse to go unchecked within its ranks for decades.

In his foreword to the book, Bishop Robinson revealed that he had been abused sexually as a teenager, a long-suppressed memory that he had to confront as coordinator of the Australian church's response to revelations of sexual abuse by priests and religious. He co-chaired the panel on behalf of the Australian bishops from 1997 to 2003.

His book, he contended, was not an attack on the church "but the beginning of a debate which will eventually lead to a better church."

Bishop Robinson was unavailable to respond to the bishops' statement.

* * *

Robinson is scheduled as keynote speaker at a the symposium "Rebuilding the Catholic Church" May 16 in Philadelphia.

After Philadelphia, Robinson will be visiting Chevy Chase, Md. (May 19), Morristown, N.J. (May 21), Manhasset, Long Island, N.Y. (May 22), Fairfield, Conn. (May 24), Dedam, Mass. (May 29), Cleveland, Ohio (June 5), Seattle, Wash. (June 7), San Diego, Calif. (June 10), and Los Angeles (June 12).

Information on the Philadelphia symposium is available on the co-sponsors? Web sites: Voice of the Faithful of Greater Philadelphia [4] and Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church [5].

Contact information for Robinson?s other U.S. stops is here: Tour schedule [6].

Source URL (retrieved on *05/05/2016 - 17:41*): http://ncronline.org/books/2012/09/australian-bishops-find-difficulties-retired-bishops-book-church-reform

Links:
[1] http://ncrcafe.org/node/1720
[2] http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2007c/091407/091407j.php
[3] http://litpress.org/Detail.aspx?ISBN=9780814618653
[4] http://www.votfgp.org/
[5] http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/
[6] http://www.rccrenewal.org/tourschedule.htm