

## The Liberal Catholic Tradition: a Farewell Note

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**The Rt. Rev. James Ingall Wedgwood (1883-1951)**

A year ago I resigned as an auxiliary bishop of The Liberal Catholic Church in Australia. In my resignation letter I had the opportunity to explain my reasons for doing so and to say goodbye to the members of my parish, the Church of St Francis and St Alban in Gordon, New South Wales. This is my farewell note to a tradition that occupied an important part of my life for thirty-five years.

The journey began in 1979 in Porto Alegre, my hometown in the south of Brazil. After having been admitted as a member of the church by the local Priest I was admitted as a server by Bishop John Coats, during his visit to Porto Alegre, on 8 May 1979, in the hall of a theosophical Lodge.

I received minor orders in Argentina in 1981 and major orders in Brazil later on. I was ordained a priest on 15 December 1985. It was my privilege to be able to correspond with Bishop Sten von Krusenstierna, then Presiding Bishop, and received his kind and wise advice. I also helped Bishop José Cacaís Gonçalves when he became Regionary Bishop for Brazil. He later on appointed me as vicar general.

In 1992 I was invited, together with my wife at that time, to work at the International Headquarters of The Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, India, and became the priest-in-charge of the Church of St Michael and All Angels there. The work involved celebrating the Holy Eucharist, particularly during the summer months, all by myself. The Church still has a potent and profoundly spiritual atmosphere and has a devout and dedicated Priest-in-charge.

On my return to Brazil from India, in 1996, and after my divorce, I helped the Priest-in-charge in Porto Alegre for a couple of years, before moving to Australia and getting married in 1999. I joined the clergy at the then Church of St Francis in Gordon, in Sydney. It was a delight to be part of an active parish of dedicated people. Although I heard, over the years in Australia, consistently critical remarks about Theosophy and the TS, and about Bishop Leadbeater in particular, I did not feel

discouraged by them. That showed me that freedom of thought was alive in the church and eventual exaggerations did not affect the church's unity.

I was asked to be the Vicar of the parish in 2002 and that my name be considered for the Episcopate in 2005. Neither of these positions was sought by me. I tried to fulfil the responsibilities of both positions to the best of my capacities, while aware of my limitations in doing so. I am not in a position to assess the work done by me during those years as it is difficult for one to see oneself impartially and objectively.

However, what I can do is to place on record my profound gratitude, respect and lasting indebtedness to the two men who gave to the world The Liberal Catholic Church. An extraordinary amount of criticisms, personal attacks and vilifications were heaped upon them for more than a century now. Yet, their unprecedented testimony of the awesome reality of the Benign Power flowing through the Sacraments of the Church is shielded by the collective experience of countless independent people around the world.

James Ingall Wedgwood and Charles Webster Leadbeater were no doubt mortal men who, like many, were not free from personality traits as well as likes and dislikes. But when they set to work on The Liturgy of the Church, and because they gave it their very best, they were in communion with the 'mind of Christ', in the felicitous expression of Origen at the dawn of the Christian tradition.

What they have legated to future generations of worshippers is not just a foundational document – it is the link to the very Life, Spirit and Bounteous Grace of God as an Eternal Reality, destined to the upliftment, healing, regeneration and salvation of humanity as a whole, 'the enduring sacrifice by which the world is nourished and sustained'.

Although not acting anymore in an episcopal capacity Wedgwood's and Leadbeater's liturgy still lies on Our Lady's altar in the quiet room in our house. Whenever requests for prayers and help come, from different corners, the beneficent words of the liturgy are used and help invoked. Such prayers are followed by prayers to the Benign and Compassionate Feminine Power in different traditions as well. Both Bishops Wedgwood and Leadbeater were profoundly reverential of the Divine Feminine and I try to follow their example. Bishop Wedgwood used to celebrate a private mass at Our Lady's altar in his parish in Camberley, Surrey, on Mondays and Bishop Leadbeater helped to formulate a ceremony for the worship of God in his feminine aspect in Sydney.

In saying farewell to the body of the Liberal Catholic tradition I embrace in my spiritual practice its teachings, its profound mysticism and its deep testimony that humanity has not been abandoned. The image of God lies hidden deeply within our soul and our consciousness. The deepest call in the spiritual life is to allow that image to manifest in our lives, in our relationships and in the world. Though the world goes through tribulations the sun of God's love shines upon all with a beneficence that knows no limits.

In the end I always return to St Paul and his life-altering words, written by someone who was inundated by the grace and power of God: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.'