
Books

Bishop Pat Buckley • Liffey Press • 2005 • £10.95

By William Burns

THIS ACCOUNT of the life of Bishop Pat Buckley, Ireland's radical and gay Catholic priest, is a strikingly candid and intimate insight into his troubled mind – and what a religious warped mind it is too. It is a fascinating and heartfelt look at a gay man's struggle to reconcile his sexuality with his Christian faith. Bishop Buckley is one of the millions of victims of Christian indoctrination, psychologically disturbed because he took it far too seriously.

No other religion is as good at making you feel bad or inadequate. The atonement doctrine alone makes one a worthless sinner without God (i.e. the morally blameless man, Jesus, who loved everyone had to be savagely beaten and nailed to wood and made to die horribly on a cross because, along with the rest of humanity, you are a filthy, rotten piece of manure who fully deserve this punishment that Jesus suffered on your behalf). But Pat blames the Catholic Church not the Bible's influence for his mental anguish. He says: "The Catholic Church messed up my head" (p151). This is typical of believers who prefer to assume that the harm is coming from somewhere other than the biblical source.

On the question of homosexuality, which is dealt with in the most gobbledygook, mystical fashion, the biblical condemnation of such behaviour is explained away. Pat writes: "The Bible does not address, much less condemn, the phenomenon of two people of the same sex living a life of committed love together. Men and women had not really looked closely at this notion two thousand, or five thousand years ago. The Bible condemns things like the sodomising of defeated military enemies, male pagan temple prostitution and straight men having 'fun' sex together".

Pat quotes the Gospel of John that wherever there is love, there is God and interprets this to mean that 'God is both present and revealed in same-sex love' (p119). But there is no reason to assume that John's Gospel approves of 'same-sex love'. Along with other Christian denominations, the Catholic Church is homophobic because the Bible is homophobic (Lev.18:22; 20:13; Rom.1:26-27; 1 Cor.6:9-10; Colos.3:5-6; 1 Tim.1:10). It's as simple as that.

Bishop Buckley's book is best understood as a cautionary tale against Christian indoctrination. In particular, it is about how a Christian ideology can harmfully affect the gay person. Buckley had to deal with his sexuality for his own sanity. The fact that he now accepts his homosexuality by explaining away the Bible's language and liberalising his religion is a step in the right direction. Perhaps in the future he'll see the Bible as wrong on this issue, as it is on many others, and leave it at that.

Like many who struggle with their religion or faith, Pat Buckley's God is one of his own making. He comes across as a tolerant friend. "Gay and lesbian people will be as welcome in Heaven as all others" (p119). If only the Bible would express such sentiments, then homophobic believers would have to look elsewhere to support their idiotic hate. Unfortunately, as Peter Tatchell has put it, the Bible is to gays what Mein Kampf is to Jews.

Sex can be one of the most enjoyable experiences that we have on this earth. And we all have our own peculiar way of getting aroused or excited. Each to his own, is my motto, as long as everything is consented and above board, of course. Buckley believes that God participates in the sex act.

Participates! Whatever turns you on, Pat. His god is urging us on when when we're having an orgasm. He says: "Do not lovers cry out, as they make love, and as they are about to climax and reach orgasm: 'O God, O God, O God'? How can you tell me that God is not in those 'O God' moments? Of course he is. In fact, he is there especially" (p161). This man is so obsessed with his



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imaginary God-friend that he has him sharing his sex life. Imagine God enjoying our sexual pleasures. You have to wonder, then, whether he is also there when we masturbate, screaming for us to climax. Incidentally, the good bishop believes that Jesus was interested in sex. He says: "Did Jesus masturbate and have 'wet dreams'? Of course He did. He was a normal man" (p149). Jesus lusted! Mary Magdalene, perhaps?

It really is hard not to feel sorry for Pat Buckley caught up in this nonsense. But, God or no God, from what I know of Pat, he is a tolerant and likeable man. And if we have to have Catholic priests, he's the kind I'd prefer. His God, who happens to be just like himself, is approachable and approving (unlike that rotten biblical character) and doesn't really care what we get up to as long as we don't hurt each other.

Considering his constant castigation of the Catholic Church, it really is incredible that Pat still claims to be a member. "I am a Catholic in the sense that I am a part of the family of God", he says. "I have no allegiance or loyalty to the vicious and corrupt human institution that is centred at Rome" (p132). This can't be entirely true for he's still involved with Catholicism. But he's pretty damning all the same. "The Catholic Church has perfected the abuse of power, the abuse of money, greed, sexual exploitation, racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, paedophilia, and every other 'ism', 'phobia' and 'philia' you could conceive of or name. As a system, the human side of the Catholic Church is as rotten and as evil as you'll find!... The Roman Church authorities want Catholics to believe that God speaks to the Pope, the Pope speaks to the bishops, the bishops speak to the priests and the priests speak to the people. In this model, the lay people are 'the lowest form of church life'. The joke among priests is: 'treat the laity like mushrooms. Keep them in the dark and throw plenty of shit on them'" (pp132-3). In spite of his profound hatred for what he conveniently refers to here as 'the human side' of the Catholic Church, it's ironic that Pat still believes in a lot of this 'godly shit' himself, and that certainly includes Catholic theology. His book confirms this.

To end on a more positive note, Buckley has a side to himself which refuses to conform and challenges religious dogma. It is this secular aspect of his character that I admire the most. He is something of a rebel at heart. I hope that in the future he has the courage to walk this path further and stand on his own two feet more often. At the moment, though, he's still very much a 'God-junkie', in love with his imaginary friend in Heaven. Indeed, these comforting illusions are so ingrained in his mind that he believes he belongs 'to another world... to eternity' (p198). Whatever gets you through the day, Pat. If only the Catholic Church were full of people like Bishop Pat Buckley, compared to the dangerous dogma of Christian fundamentalism or Bible literalism, his ideology is less rigid and more liberal. If I had my way, I'd immediately make him Pope.
