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JOHN HAZLEWOOD

Relations with bishops during my years in Australia were often uneasy and sometimes even troubled, except with my first bishop, John Hazlewood. Although very much a flawed man and, by the time I got to know him, in steep decline, I loved and admired him. He was the only bishop who treated me as an equal, seemed at ease in my irreverent company and happy with my peculiar gifts. When he retired after eighteen years as bishop of Ballarat, a great shindig was held to send him on his way. I contributed to that celebration by composing and reciting the following ballad in his honour. It is a little over the top, perhaps, but also of minor historic interest to those who served in the Diocese of Ballarat at that time, not least because all full time priests of the diocese then are mentioned by name.

THE BALLAD OF HAZLEWOOD JOHN

Ichabod! The sun is set!
Our glory's waned and gone!
As I'll relate, recite, narrate
In this Ballad of Hazlewood John.

An aesthete from the wild west
To Ballarat he came.
To Ballarat sedate, refined,
To Ballarat the tame.

An arty dilettante and dean,
Fond of wit and wine
Full of style and high church guile
And eloquence divine.

His origin New Zealand,
By inclination pommie.
Opposed to war in Vietnam,
To Ruxton's mates a commie.

Famous for his rocking masses
His views the masses rocked.
Vivaciously, audaciously,
He all the masses shocked.

The young upon his every word
Hung with fascination.
A priest, but not a pharisee
A cause for celebration.

A priest who life and joy affirmed,
Who didn't finger-point,
A priest like this was sheer bliss
And couldn't disappoint.

A dressy priest, a flashy beast,
A priest who'd risk and dare,
Who wore his church's crazy garb
With swirling style and flair.

A priest who understood your sin,
Who sympathised with you,
Committed sin, admitted sin,
Who empathised with you.

A priest who in the pulpit
Was more than mere wit,
More than pious platitudes
And mangled Holy Writ,

For every now and then behind
His sparkle and his fun
He'd lift the veil to manifest
The warmth of God's dear Sun

And raise the heart to play its part
In following Christ with pleasure,
Not just diverting, but converting!
A dean to love and treasure.

And so to Ballarat he came,
This dazzling, demon dean,
A priest the likes of which folk here
Had never, ever seen.

And here for eighteen years now,
He's borne his crook and mitre,
Our witty pastor, learned priest,
Courageous guide and fighter.

Jealous for the Catholic cause,
Promoting it with zest.
With guile and joke and holy smoke
And many a high church jest.

A bishop who could see the good
Of both sides in debate,
Allowing him a tolerance
Fanatics love to hate.

Always, always tolerant,
No cyclopean fanatic,
Unlike some in Mother Church
Who're one-eyed, mono-manic!

Too tolerant perhaps at times though,
He'd see the good in all,
Risk laying hands on any dill
Who seemed to have God's call,

Why not though? As the greatest saint
Has often been a dill.
To priest a dill can well at times
The will of God fulfil.

This tolerance, sweet tolerance,
Was not a sin, I love it.
It's Anglican. Its civilized.
It's something wise men covet.

It's something Bishop Hazlewood
Has had in no small measure
More than wisdom, learning, wit,
His greatest grace and treasure.

He's tolerated you and me,
All sorts of dozy drones,
Like Walker, Willows, Rowlands, Cook,
Turnbull, Hart and Jones.

And Stanley, Jackson, Brasington,
Edebohls and Cheong,
Chislett, Savage, Reuss, Treloar,
Mulhallen, Burgess, Long.

He's tolerated liturgies
Of every style and sort,
Roman, English, trendy, trad.,
Interminable! Short!

Tolerance, sweet tolerance!
His greatest gift, I love it!
So Anglican, so civilized,
Something wise men covet.

He came and woke up Ballarat,
This seasoned, priestly trooper,
Remaking us, and waking us
From Church of England stupor.

He organised those zany rallies,
Colourful, exciting,
Provocative, extravagant,
Unusual, inviting.

The atmosphere electrified
Almost overnight,
He gathered to him sparkling priests,
Young, outrageous, bright.

Attracted them from near and far,
All sorts of types and faces,
Chislett, Mansell, two Treloars,
From Sydney of all places.

From St. Helena Island came
Neaum the versifier,
And in a cloud of holy smoke,
Edebohls, on fire.

And refugees from Africa,
A wild and crazy band.
Ballarat, Victoria,
Their shonky Promised Land.

And Fr Michael King, a monk,
Who down at Camperdown,
Set up a lovely monastery
The crown of Camperdown.

All came because of Hazlewood,
Tolerant, magnetic,
Accepting, open-armed, forgiving
Warm-hearted, sympathetic.

The Lay Thanksgiving Program was
A highlight of his reign,
And one that one day soon we'll need
To bring to life again.

The Registry and Centre too
A monument remain
To Hazlewood's remarkable
And stimulating reign.

But things like these, although they please,
We don't hold half so dear
As attributes of character
We honour and revere!

For best of all's been Hazlewood
As simply priest and man,
Fallible, incorrigible,
No pallid puritan.

A priest who life and joy's affirmed
Who hasn't finger-pointed,
Tolerant, witty, soft of heart,
He's rarely disappointed.

A priest who's understood our sins,
Who's sympathised with us,
Committed sins, admitted sins,
Who's empathised with us.

Who's tolerated all of us,
The clever, wayward, dumb
Munson, Sankey, Steele and Tonks,
Mathes, Ross and Neaum!

Wardrop, Hodges, Dulfer, Scott,
De Silva, two Treloars.
Oulton, Phipps, de Dear, Hitch,
Some bright, some dull, some bores.

There might be things about this Bishop
We tattle of, deplore!
But most of us from him would welcome
Eighteen years more.

That's not to be. The end we see.
Our friend and shepherd's going.
So eloquent and stimulating,
Tolerant and knowing.

Thank you Father, thank you Bishop,
Thank you Priest and Friend.
You've challenged us most gloriously
Delighted us no end.

Farewell our glory. End of story.
I've finished now, am done.
Yet hasn't it, Lord Bishop, been,
Outrageous glorious fun!

But ichabod! The sun has set!
Our glory's waned and gone!
As I've related, told, narrated
In the Ballad of Hazlewood John.

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