



arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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How will Pope Francis now influence the Synod?

Over the past two years, in particular, so much of our hope for change in the Church has centred on expected decisions that could arise from the Ordinary Synod on the Family that will take place this October. During that time, Pope Francis has made many statements that illustrate his broad approach to complex issues, putting expressions of mercy and forgiveness above formal judgements and pronouncements. His style initially appeared to be one of outlining a priority of values with the hope that other bishops would follow. While he has drawn so much admiration from people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds, significant numbers in the Church's hierarchy continue to resist his charisma. It is intriguing to speculate on how he is now attempting to overcome such strong opposition.

His recent decision to allow priests to absolve the sin of abortion appears to indicate a slightly more direct, albeit cautious, way of influencing a change. If such an action is being taken to extend God's mercy and forgiveness and allow as many people as possible to re-establish contact with the Church and the sacraments, then why restrict it to just one Jubilee Year? Surely if it is prudent to do so, then it is prudent to do so all the time. And why wrap up the initiative in the outdated and dubious cloak of an indulgence?

It appears that the main reason could be to minimise the expected opposition of the conservative elements by applying a limit and even adding a sweetener by extending the permission to the priests of the reactionary Fraternity of St Pius X. Could it be that he might have the hope that, after this one year period, most will see that the wider opportunity for forgiveness and repentance has increased faith practice, leading to greater acceptance of delegation and pastoral responsibility at the local Church level. Then the practice will continue on.

This initiative, coupled with the intention to streamline the marriage annulment process by allowing bishops to nullify a marriage rather than a court, represents a way of bringing about change by practice rather than by debate only. Learned discussion often promotes objections of what cannot be done, while cautious practice overcomes the difficulties. If changes like this are proposed and their

possible implementation outlined before the Synod, then unreasonable resistance could well be lessened.

Pope Francis stated recently that "without encountering families and the people of God, theology runs the great risk of becoming ideology". He has emphasised that a false conflict must be avoided between those who are pastors "on the side of the people" and academics "on the side of doctrine". We hope that he carries this theme with him strongly when he joins with his fellow bishops in the approaching Synod.

John Buggy

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ARC Secretariat – Have Your Say – Subscription

Wake-up call to all: Time to take action for reform

Gideon Goosen

The 2013 *Apostolic Exhortation* of Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, is a call for reform in the Catholic Church. Apart from a few dioceses placing study guides or commentaries on the internet, not much had been heard about this exhortation. It seems to have been ignored by many, especially the bishops (although the bishops of Ireland and England have called for the ordination of married men. Finally!) I have certainly not heard any mention of it from the pulpit although there has been information posted on church notice boards regarding same-sex marriages and child abuse. Why are parishes and dioceses not setting up workshops on this important issue of reform?

There are a number of extraordinary points made by Pope Francis in this exhortation. Here are some of the more striking ones: that the community takes the initiative in evangelisation; we need to practice outreach (#24); we cannot leave things as they are (#25); conversion could start with the of the papacy (#27); there is a need for decentralisation (#16); we must not be afraid to re-examine certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the gospel even if they have deep historical roots (#43); there are in fact few precepts in following Jesus Christ; the gospel is about freedom and mercy (#43); the doors of the church are always wide open (#47); we must renew/re-create structures; and there are ecclesial structures which hamper efforts at evangelisation (#26); the parish has great flexibility (#28).

Many people have called for reform. Among the most convincing and wide-ranging are those by the former Archbishop of San Francisco, John R Quinn. The problem is not in ideas but in implementing them. I will start with the statement that things in the church cannot be left as they are (#25). There is also this advice: “Do not be afraid to re-examine certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the gospel even if they have deep historical roots” (#43). We can add to that a call to renew or recreate structures which facilitate evangelisation (#26).

Here goes. I will limit myself to the parish and diocese (Roman curia and individual diocese matters for another time). Let us examine some structures and customs that in my experience of ‘church’ seem to me to be in need of change, not for change’s sake but to facilitate evangelisation. We all have our own experiences. Mine relate to many parishes over three different continents. It will be important to listen to other voices as well. Parishes and dioceses throughout the world are all different. What follows is my personal take on ‘the state of the nation’ relating to parishes. Hopefully my experience is totally different to the norm!

SOME STRUCTURES THAT ARE DYSFUNCTIONAL

Parish (Pastoral) Councils. These need a re-think. In my experience these have turned out (in most cases) to be rubber stamps with councils agreeing with what the parish priests wants. Even though the members are supposed to be elected, the parish priest manipulates things to ensure that his preferred members are on the council.

The decision-making process needs re-thinking. In some cases the parish priest actually decides what he wants and gets the council to agree; in other cases he tells them: ‘You are only an advisory body. I can choose to listen to you or not’. This leads to the ‘waste of time’ response by parishioners.

In my experience, anyone who puts forward viewpoints different to what the parish priest wants is scolded (or threatened with dismissal from council as I have been!) or ignored. The result is that people then walk away from the council or church.

One underlying problem is clericalism in the sense that the lay people on the council think ‘Father knows best’ and their opinions are really not worth anything. On the other hand, no one want chaos. Ideally, the council members decide *with the parish priest* what to do. Clericalism also raises its head when the parish priest thinks he is above the parishioners and does not have to listen to them.

The purpose of the Councils need re-thinking. Is it to set the policies (spiritual and material) for the parish? Or to manage the parish on a daily basis? Some have descended into management-style meetings concerned with trivia.

Finance Committee. Here much the same applies as to Parish Councils. They are dysfunctional. In most cases the parish priest makes the decisions either in or out of the committee. In these cases we have a person not trained in finance making decisions about hundreds-of-thousands of dollars. It is not unknown for a parish priest to sink the parishioners into huge debts after a few years in a parish. A prudent finance committee might have moved more cautiously.

In one instance a banker told the parish priest that he should return the loan of \$100,000 since he did not get approval for a commemorative wall. The parish priest ignored him and went ahead and spent the money as part of current expenses.

Only one parish that I have ever been in left all the talk about money matters to the laity. Decisions were made with the committee but the priest never spoke about money at all during the celebration of the Eucharist. That is in sharp contrast to priests who interrupt the Eucharist to speak about money (special collections) after reading the gospel (but instead of a homily). Money matters obviously prey on their minds. This is not good for the spiritual leader of the community.

A reform in this area would be to leave all money matters to the qualified finance committee which makes decisions with the parish priest.

Putting parishes together for administrative purposes is out. This new structure is condemned by some like Sarah MacDonald (see *ARCVoice*, July 25) because the solution favours administration over pastoral concerns. In my diocese no opinion has been sought re the future of parishes. It has been all top-down.

The Roles of Priests and Laity Need to be Revised. These two go together. If the priest's role is redefined, the laity's role will also need adjusting (Read *Evangelii Gaudium* on this). The Parish priest should be the spiritual leader of the community, not the parish manager. Currently he is too involved with administration of parish money, buildings and people. His true role should be spiritual and pastoral. In one diocese the bishop actually asked priests to withdraw

from the financial running of the parish and concentrate of the spiritual side. They were not able to do this. Even though not trained for the job, they however liked it better than other aspects.

The changing of these roles will be the greatest challenge to the church. Both the laity and the clergy will find it difficult. We cannot leave things as they are (#25). Part of this change will be: Who do we ordain? and: Is the current seminary training the best model for the preparation of spiritual community leaders? How do we encourage the laity to be co-responsible for the church?

SOME STRUCTURES THAT ARE LACKING

General Parish Meetings. Occasions for the parish with the parish priest to talk over issues of how the parish is functioning and how it could be better (a review of activity). Currently this is missing and one gets the impression that some priests are not interested to hear what parishioners have to say. (And that is understandable in a top-down-church. After all, if the bishop is not interested in what the priests think, why would they be interested in what parishioners think.

Clergy-Lay Forums: There is no diocesan structure when clergy and laity can sit down and talk about common issues facing their church.

Diocesan Synods: Bishops are not interested in listening to the clergy and laity on what they think. Witness the absence of diocesan synods.

There is a need for better **networking** within parishes and within dioceses. All groups and ministries need to inform others of what they are doing, if a sense of one community is to be achieved. Family and small groups need to be expanded and encouraged. They are the hope for the future.

A Lay Parish Manager:

All the above rest on the theology of laity and overcoming clericalism. If the laity are only to 'pray, obey and pay' there is no need for these structures. But if they are part of the church community, they have an active role to play; they need to take the initiative (#24).

GIDEON GOOSEN is a Sydney-based theologian who has taught theology for many years. His latest book is *Hyphenated Christians*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013)

“Let a female speculate”

Extract of Sister Elizabeth Johnson’s

LCWR talk

David Gibson

17.8.2014



Sister Elizabeth Johnson photo courtesy of Fordham University

Sister Elizabeth Johnson accepted an award on Friday night (15 Aug 2014) from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the umbrella organization for most of the 50,000 Catholic nuns in the U.S. The LCWR has for two years been the target of an investigation by the Vatican over a range of perceived problems with their doctrinal views and their social justice mission. The sisters reject the accusations.

The investigation is a source of much controversy, and despite signs that it might ease under Pope Francis, the polemics reignited a few months ago when a top Vatican cardinal blasted the nuns for announcing that they would honour Sister Johnson — whose work theologians from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have sharply criticized — at their annual meeting last week in Nashville.

The following is an extract from her talk at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ

The full text of this article is available from
the Editor: mknowlden@bigpond.com

It is a beautiful honour to receive this award from you, faithful women with whom I share the vocation of being a woman religious in the church today. You are truly my Sisters! You could have chosen from among so many other women religious exercising leadership today in so many different venues. I am awed by your tribute and humbled to join the ranks of previous recipients.

This award is recognizing leadership I have exercised in the ministry of theology. In truth, I would never have become a theologian were it not for the leaders of my own religious community. This vocation within a vocation was simply not on my radar. But Mother Immaculata Maria sent me to study for a Masters, and subsequent General Superiors sent me for the doctorate and helped me discern whether to take a faculty position at Catholic University. They thought the church needed women to teach theology and sensed my interest. From them to our current President Helen Kearney and her recent public supportive statements, the care from my leaders has been unceasing.

One example may stand for the rest. When I applied for tenure at Catholic University, I received the full positive vote of the faculty. But the outcome was in doubt because some bishops were not happy with an article I had written. I considered resigning my faculty position rather than go on with the arduous process of interrogation. In a letter I keep in my Bible, our General Superior Sister John Raymond McGann advised me to stay the course: ‘Don’t do this if it kills you. But try to find joy in the cross of criticism. Don’t strive to be so orthodox and safe that you sell short the ministry of the theologian and lose your way. The real victory is your integrity.’ And in a PS: ‘Put more money in your budget for recreation.’ [I did get tenure.]

Without these women, I would not be standing here. As leaders they imagined and encouraged me into the ministry of theology. Through thick and thin, they channelled the support of the community to me in spiritual and practical ways. Never underestimate your influence as elected leaders.

.....

Elizabeth Johnson (continued)

But it would be disingenuous to ignore the criticism from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith directed at the LCWR for giving me this award. Note that I would not be speaking about this if Cardinal Gerhard Mueller had not made his remarks public. The CDF sees this award as an insult to the U.S. Bishops whose Committee on Doctrine criticized my book *Quest for the Living God*. From Cardinal Mueller's statement it appears that neither he nor the staff advising him read the book or my written response to the concerns raised, but rather channelled the U.S. committee's judgment.

Yes, *Quest* was criticized, but to this day no one – not myself, nor the theological community, nor the media, nor the general public – knows what doctrinal issue is at stake. Despite my efforts to give and get clarification, none was forthcoming; the face-to-face conversation I sought never came about. It seems the committee reduced the rich Catholic tradition to a set of neo-scholastic theses as narrow as baby ribbon, and then criticized the book for not being in accord with them. But as Richard Gaillardetz said in this year's presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, the committee's assessment of *Quest* is itself theologically flawed. Indeed, the committee's statement raises a multitude of issues in a confused way. It criticizes positions I take that are in accord with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In several instances it reports the opposite of what the book actually says, in order to find fault. I am responsible for what I have written, but not for what I have not said and do not think. In my judgment such carelessness with the truth is unworthy of the teaching office of bishop.

Cardinal Dolan of New York told me that the reason my book was singled out was because of its influence. And in truth, despite the committee's criticism, thousands of messages poured in from people who had found *Quest* a help in their own journey of faith. Sales went through the roof (my community is grateful for the royalties!). Translations into European and Asian languages continue to be made; currently German is underway. I simply hoped that the book would serve this wider readership with

insights into the living God, abounding in kindness in the midst of our suffering world.

But now and again my little God book and its author come under fire for supposedly serious yet still unclarified errors. What is going on here? To borrow Phyllis Tribble's words from her study of Eve and Adam, let a female speculate. It appears to me that a negative reaction to works of theology that think in new terms about burning issues has become almost automatic in some quarters. A judgment made somewhere that 'this is harmful' gets picked up, amplified, taken for granted, and repeated. The adverse reaction becomes institutionalized. Reasons are murky, but a negative miasma colours the atmosphere whenever the subject comes up.

This kind of institutionalized negativity sheds some light on how critique of my book and criticism of LCWR are intertwined. For the doctrinal investigation of LCWR gives evidence of a similar generalized negative pattern that has been a-building over recent decades. While reluctant to examine the context in scholarship and in life of statements made at LCWR Assemblies, the investigation's statements express more of a vague overall dissatisfaction or mistrust on certain topics. Judgments are rendered in a way that cannot be satisfactorily addressed. In the absence of careful analysis, negativity spreads. Both of us are caught in an adverse situation not of our own making.

Through careful discernment the LCWR has forged a response which is publicly modelling a different form of leadership. To a polarized church and a world racked by violence, your willingness to stay at the table seeking reconciliation through truthful, courageous conversation has given powerful witness. This is costly. The LCWR is experiencing the truth of Clerissac's adage, 'It is easy to suffer for the church; the difficult thing is to suffer at the hands of the church.' Nevertheless, under duress, you persist, giving honest, firm voice to your wisdom gained by years of mystical and prophetic living, as Pat Farrell said last year. What a grace for our time.

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson at the Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Frank Brennan

The royal commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continues to fill us with dread that we have not yet adequately identified why the incidence of abuse reported in our institutions is higher than in other churches. The divisions amongst our bishops, previously unreported and unknown previously to many of the faithful, are disheartening. Just this week we have heard Bishop Geoffrey Robinson who was an auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Pell when he was archbishop of Sydney telling the royal commission that His Eminence ‘had lost the support of the majority of his priests and that alone made him a most ineffective bishop’. Cardinal Pell is the most promoted Catholic cleric in Australian history. The point is not whether Bishop Robinson is right or wrong. The point is that we are part of a social institution which is suffering an acute loss of institutional coherence when an auxiliary bishop sees a need to make such a public statement about his erstwhile archbishop.

Two days ago at that Royal Commission a letter was tendered for all the world to see. It is a letter from Bishop Robinson to His Excellency Archbishop Franco Brambilla who was the papal nuncio here in 1996. According to Bishop Robinson, the nuncio had earlier asserted that there was no such thing as child sexual abuse in the Italian Church. The nuncio had written to Robinson castigating him for criticising the Vatican for being too slow to respond to child abuse in the Church. Robinson had been speaking at a conference dealing with sexual abuse at Sydney University, attended by ‘about 40 victims and 40 journalists’. One of the participants had suffered abuse at the hands of a Melkite bishop (who died in 2012). Bishop Robinson replied on 8 June 1996:

Turning now to the particular case, I was well aware that in the audience I was speaking to there was a woman who for nearly twelve months had been the

victim of the sexual abuse of Bishop George Riashi. He admitted the abuse to Bishop Peter Connors and to yourself at the end of 1993. He also admitted it to the victim in the presence of Bishop Connors. You reported the matter to ‘Rome’ and he was withdrawn from Australia in November 1994. In the month before that, during the last Synod, Cardinal Clancy and Bishop Connors personally informed the Cardinal Prefect of the Oriental Congregation of all aspects of the matter.

From overseas Bishop Riashi continued to insist that he was still Eparch of Australia and would be returning. In June 1995 this was confirmed in a public letter from the Melkite Patriarch. In August 1995, however, Bishop Riashi was instead promoted to be Archbishop of Tripoli in Lebanon. In this capacity he then returned to Sydney in August-September and made many public statements about his innocence and about bad people who sought to discredit him. He succeeded in turning many people against his own victim so that they blamed her rather than him.

Bishop Robinson went on to say to the Apostolic Nuncio: ‘

In the matter of Bishop Riashi ‘Rome’ has been of no assistance whatsoever to the Church in Australia. It has, instead, created the potential for a massive scandal in this country.’ I daresay none of us had any idea that this sort of thing was going on. How could it have been possible for such a man to be further promoted in the church hierarchy when there had been admission of such wrongdoing and full disclosure to all relevant church authorities just 20 years ago? How could the papal nuncio who knew all this be writing to castigate a bishop who was saying that there must be a better way, especially when that bishop was the one steering the bishops’ conference at that time to finalise the Towards Healing protocol?

So things are not easy. They are not easy for me as a Catholic priest in the public square. They are not easy for those of you turning up to work each day in your healthcare facilities to further the mission of the Church. They remain wretched for many victims who doubt that the Church can again be trusted. I thank you for your perseverance and pray that together we can make a better fist of holding out to the world the face and hands of Christ.

The above extracts are from an address to the Catholic Health Australia Conference on 26 August 2015. The full text was published in *Eureka Street*.

Potiphar's Wife

The Vatican's Secret and Child Sexual Abuse

ATF Press (www.atfpress.com)

Kieran Tapsell

Review by Harding Burns

Kieran Tapsell has provided an excellent guide to the understanding of sexual abuse by clergy in the Catholic Church, and the place of Canon Law in the Vatican management of related crimes. Tapsell first studied Canon Law as an undergraduate seminarian. On graduating from University Law School his career has been as solicitor, barrister and district Court Judge. As a legal Scholar he is informed and up to date.

The Code of Canon Law which regulates the life of the Catholic Church is regarded by the Vatican as a system of law in parallel with the civil law of Sovereign States, for the investigating into allegations of abuse and delivering judgement in Canonical Courts. These matters would also be dealt with by State law, but the Church follows its own system exclusively, and has resisted disclosure of its findings by refusing to deliver documents or records on Court subpoena, even to the point of expecting bishops to face jail for contempt of Court. [- quote Cardinal Castrillon p266.]

In the papacies from Pius XI to Benedict XVI the Vatican has negotiated Concordats with certain States which guarantee immunity from the Civil law. In Colombia and Italy, clergy cannot be sentenced to a state prison but may be confined in a monastic house. However, in 2001, the French Bishop Pican was given a suspended jail sentence by a civil court. He was regarded by the Vatican as a martyr and an exemplar for bishops in the universal church. State Law in the Anglophone West is less sympathetic to the Vatican claims. Both the Foreign Minister and the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic rebuked the Vatican over Benedict XVI's letter to the Irish bishops. The Nuncio was recalled and the Irish Embassy to the Vatican in Rome closed.

It would seem that an Irish solution might have arisen in Victoria in 1994 when Premier Kennett said that if Cardinal Pell 'did not fix it', he would. The Vatican has been able to impose the strictest Pontifical secrecy by the Code of Canon Law, related decrees, *crimen sollicitudinis*, *motu proprio* and the threat of excommunication. The artifices of *bella figura* and mental reservation are applied to direct attention away from

abuse crimes. The awarding of compensation for victims is delayed or diminished. The '*recognitio*' of Vatican Approval for local church initiatives may take years. Attempts to dismiss or laicise paedophile clergy are thwarted. The Vatican advises a 'pastoral' approach: the paedophile is not brought to justice because he has no control over his paedophile behaviour [sic]. The concept of an ontological change at ordination means that clerical misdemeanours or crimes can only be managed by the paternal/filial approach of fellow clergy or bishop. These attitudes formed in the training of seminarians can only distort a mature view of sexuality. Is it likely or conceivable that the 'abused child victim' could have seduced the 'vulnerable' cleric? A modern version of Joseph and Potiphar's wife!

The universal and local churches have been badly served by the Vatican during the reigns of the last five popes, particularly Benedict XVI. They have been the cause of scandal that they have deflected from themselves. Benedict XVI's letter to the Catholics of Ireland was the height of arrogance. The bishops were justifiably annoyed. The Vatican approach to the crimes of child abuse is no different from the attempts to discipline American nuns, or the Apostolic Visitation forced on the Bishop of Toowoomba. Secrecy, refusal of access to documents and the denial of natural justice should not be tolerated. Perhaps the best outcome of the present Commission of Inquiry will be a more autonomous Australian hierarchy relying on Australian Law and, in the Vatican, a pope having a realistic understanding of collegiality and subsidiarity.

Tapsell's book is not only a leadership text on widespread clerical abuse, but also on an out-of-date system of governance and arcane practice in the Catholic Church. It will be greatly welcomed by ARC members and the vast body of the faithful awaiting change.

Harding Burns is a retired physician
and a member of ARC.

The Gospel According to Peer Gynt

Gabe Lomas

Peer Gynt is a 'likeable' sort of rogue whose story is retold by Henrick Ibsen in a poem for which Ibsen later – when he decided to use it as a play – commissioned Edvard Grieg to write the incidental music. The poem retells the story of a figure who lived many years ago in mountainous rural Norway and whose fame for bragging and deception has entered Norwegian folklore. Peer Gynt is an anti-hero who acts with a breathtakingly jocular selfishness that earns him our disdain – but also perhaps our sneaking respect. He makes us feel somewhat uncomfortable. Maybe he's too like us

He tries to be what he's not, even after realising that his behaviour is largely a sham. He pretends first to be a great hunter who has the most alarming adventures; then he becomes a lady's man; then a Troll; then a merchant ship's Captain; then a Mid-Eastern Prophet; then an Emperor; then a seafaring adventurer promising largesse to the crew; and so on and so forth. He ends up an old man trudging through the bush, making his way back home, witnessing the auctioning of his own possessions, all the while protesting that he's led a blameless life and is being meanly dealt with and judged for it.

On his return, he kicks ill-temperedly at things that are in his way. He's hindered by balls of yarn – ideas that he should have examined and sent forth to resound throughout the world; withered fallen leaves that are watch-words he should have heeded but gave no chance to bear fruit; sighings pretend to be the breezes that were songs he should have sung; dewdrops that were tears he should have shed; broken straws that were deeds he'd left undone. All of these things threatened to crowd around and tell on him at Judgement Day, accusing him of not having acted as he ought.

Peer Gynt's rudderless behaviour reveals him for what he is – and reflects a little on what we ourselves may be like. Peer skipped along through life, hiding from the effect he was having on others; we, too, can tend to flit about, not paying proper attention to how we affect those with whom we interact. Yet the effect we have on others is crucial, casting the die for who and what we are in the community. How we behave, especially in our relationships, can be the mirror of how we reflect the Divine life in our own lives.

Like Peer Gynt, we move within a social structure that is not made by us but to which we are expected to conform. At the same time we live within a church whose structures are not of our making and can be seen to impose unjust conditions on us and on other members. Like Peer, we want to be rid of these constraints and to experience what we call the freedom of the children of God.

We can move towards this freedom by trying to reform the institutions that impose themselves on us, and by protesting individually or in groups about our grievances. We can try to bring pressure to bear on those who have taken charge of developing humanity and steering it along its path.

Most Gyntianism is of this kind, and most of us have been involved in, or are involved in, action groups that can mobilize against injustices. Such groups aim to get 'those in authority' to realign and to re-constitute their way of thinking. That's one method of bringing about change.

Another method is to decide that the solution lies in our own hands, in how we ourselves behave. This can cause us to step outside the expectations of society and social institutes and live by our own codes of conduct and religious insights. Those of us that do this often come to construct our own frameworks of moral reference.



Others again, believing that the way in which we behave with each other is the touchstone of who we are and what we are, and make it their main point in life to foster genuine inter-personal relationships. They have little time to consider organizational and institutional demands unless these serve their ends. Generally, they value people over structures.

These three courses of action are the chief options open to those who are 'fed up with the system', and they usually use a combination of such strategies in dealing with the behavioural constrictions under which we live. The mix they employ can vary quite a bit, but they always seem to use one or more of these options in response to rules and regulations.

Peer Gynt accomplished only small and insignificant things in his lifetime, mostly make-believe and unreal. He hadn't even done enough to gain individual damnation. So an agent – the Button Moulder sent to collect his soul – said he would melt Peer down with other minor souls into something

more substantial. But Solveig, a woman whom Peer Gynt had run away from and whom he had not treated well, remained steadfast and constant in her dedication to him, and in the end it was her love that reached out and gained some respite for him.

If there were such a thing as a cocoon of love, one could imagine a person such as Solveig spinning one around both herself and those with whom she interacted. The cocoon would embrace the poor, the marginalised, and indeed all humankind. The love and esteem that such people create is salvific, and embraces not only those who spin the cocoons but everyone else as well. It is unconditional and Christ-like, the very love we are called to imitate if we are to be 'other Christs'.

GABE LOMAS is a married priest who holds degrees in Philosophy, Theology, and Linguistics. He ministered in the UK and PNG for about 20 years, and is now retired.

Our Quest for God

by **Brown, Neil**

In a wonderfully engaging manner, Neil Brown mines literature, the sciences, and the living tradition of faith to illuminate our present-day world, to identify its joys and hopes, as well as its griefs and anguish. Although the darkness of our world is menacing, Brown's focus on 'love', 'mystery', and 'presence' encourages us to a renewed faith in the God who is source and fulfilment of our longings, as well as the heart of what unites us. *Our Quest for God* is an encouragement for all of us to trust the God who calls us beyond fear.

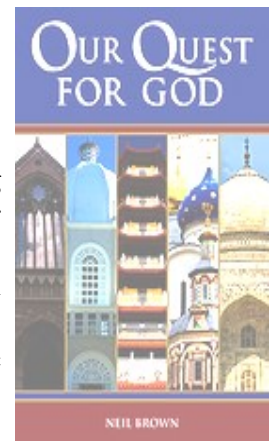
Richard Lennan
Boston College – School of Theology and Ministry

Presence and language are key themes in the search which is portrayed within *Our Quest for God*. Neil Brown's deep knowledge and love of Scripture and his love of language and literature are evident in his intricate weaving together of Scripture, poetry, prose and drama into a narrative that seeks, as he says in his epilogue, to keep 'the flame of belief in God alight in our times'.

This book carefully, thoughtfully and respectfully critiques the arguments of the New Atheists, but its great strength comes from its conviction that beyond physical reality there is a human reality that must also

heed the 'deep-down intuitions of our hearts and souls'. It calls us to undertake a 'journey', heeding these intuitions, reflecting on them and testing them in the light of our individual and world context as we strive to be authentic in mind, heart and action. This is the spirituality to which we are called and it is founded on trust, leading to hope and faith.

Sr Annette Cunliffe,
Congregational Leader, Sisters of Charity



The Author

Neil Brown is a priest of the archdiocese of Sydney. He taught Christian ethics for over thirty years at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. His other books include *Christians in a Pluralist Society* and *Spirit of the World*. He is presently parish priest of St Anne's, Bondi Beach, Sydney.

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The following is a pretty cutting reflection on the leadership of the Church from John Chuchman. However, in light of the pattern that's been emerging under the leadership of Pope Francis, might we question how much it illustrates the challenge this Pope faces; or how much it reflects the style of leadership of the past that needs to be changed? Perhaps the question for discussion might be how much John's criticisms still apply today to the national leadership of the Church in various countries?

Editor, *Catholica*

A Misguided, Misguiding Leadership ...

**In attempting to shackle humanity
to its staid vision of God and God's relationship to humanity,
the Catholic Church hierarchy has largely succeeded in impressing
the concept of Sin and Guilt upon people.**

**In spite of declaring itself to be counter-cultural,
the hierarchy has throughout the centuries
embraced the dominant culture of the time.**

**As a result, many of the clergy today
have a psychotic perception of the un-ordained and the reality of life.**

**In many places on the earth,
the hierarchy is blind to the suffering experienced by people
whose natural resources are being usurped by those more powerful.**

**The hierarchy too often lacks understanding
of the people who experience systemic oppression or bigotry by others,
especially by the church.**

**It fails to speak up for people who are poor and defenceless
in countries filled with riches.**

**For the most part,
the Catholic Church hierarchy has failed to teach and speak
about the human race facing ecological challenges
that portend a holocaust of nature and the end of human life.**

**The hierarchy does not understand married life,
the role of parents and children, or the relationship of adult siblings.**

**It does not speak for those who are not married,
nor does it speak for women in the church.
Most of all, the hierarchy does not understand the gift of human freedom
in determining the flow of human history.**

**The Catholic Church hierarchy is tied to
the un-ordained mindlessly following its every word,
failing to comprehend that its antiquated theology and doctrines
no longer motivate or serve as a guide for people.**

**Religious beliefs, doctrines, creeds and practices
are culturally and historically relative, adaptable, and functional.**

**They cannot be absolute and immutable,
because they are enshrined in institutions which evolve
with changes in knowledge, culture and history.**

**The hierarchy has used and is using its theology and doctrines
as a sacralization of its vested interests.**

**Doctrines have become a means to conceal and justify a reality
that the hierarchy prefers not to change.**

**And this is in direct opposition
to the values that the Catholic Church claims to uphold.**

Leonardo Boff

Francis of Rome, Francis of Assisi:

A New Springtime for the Church

NY: Orbis Books, 2014.

(pp.160, Pauline Books, \$33.95)

Review by Gideon Goosen

This is a book that speaks to us loudly today in the midst of a crisis in the Catholic Church. It is well worth reading. It is only a slim volume but straight to the point. No words wasted in this little pocket rocket. The chapters are all very short and pithy. I found the section on “Who is Pope Francis” especially sharp and accurate.

Boff, a leading Latin American theologian, gives a good short historical summary of how the Papacy became an Absolutist Monarchical Power in anticipation of what Pope Francis sees it today. He also gives parallels with Francis of Assisi as the title of this book indicates. Plenty to think about here.

A quick mention of the key words used about Pope Francis will give an idea of who he is. The following adjectives **cannot** be applied to him: ecclesiocentric, Vatican-centric, papal-centric, restorationist. Nor is he a master/indoctrinator, or a source of certainty. Positively, he bases his faith on the historical Christ, he is an advocate for the poor, he sets the world as the centre, sees the church as a field-hospital and wants to introduce a revolution of tenderness. Quite a program!

BIOGRAPHY

*Larrikin Angel: A Biography of
Veronica Brady*

Kath Jordan

Review (abridged) by ROBERT REECE *
December 14, 2010 Round House Press

Outspoken academic Sister Veronica Brady IBVM has died

Born in Melbourne, Sister Veronica taught at Loreto Convent in Kirribilli before moving to the University of Western Australia in 1972 and becoming an associate professor in 1991.

She has spoken out publicly against the Vatican stance on abortion, homosexuality and contraception, and has been involved in the Aboriginal rights movement.

UWA chair of English and cultural studies Brenda Walker said Sister Brady was a tireless advocate for Australian literature. ‘She was a strong mentor for younger academics, a voice for social justice and, in particular, racial equity and a champion of public broadcasting,’ Professor Walker said.

Sister Brady was also a tireless campaigner for Indigenous rights and was on the ABC board in the 1980s.

She had been suffering from Alzheimer's and was in care for the past two years. She died on 20 August, aged 86.

Sr Veronica was a member of ARC and she spoke at our earlier conferences.

May she rest in peace.

Sister Veronica Brady has slipped somewhat from public view but a new biography reminds us of a time, just a few short years ago, when she was a controversial and colourful figure. Greatly in demand on the international as well as the Australian conference circuit, her national celebrity status was confirmed by people like Philip Adams who exulted in her articulate irreverence towards the Catholic Church in particular.

How could she publicly challenge the Church's position on contraception, female ordination and so on while remaining not just a Catholic but a Loreto nun? While she no doubt caused much gnashing of teeth, liberal instincts within the hierarchy prevailed. Besides, realistically, how on earth could she be shut up? For journalists, her novelty value made good copy: this bird-like, bicycle-riding, red wine-quaffing celibate with robust and strident opinions on everything.

In this book, her long-time teaching colleague and friend, Kath Jordan, has produced what amounts to an extended tribute, a labour of love, rather than a biography in the accepted sense. Tapping her own intimate knowledge and a number of interviews with Brady's other colleagues and friends, Jordan gives us a comprehensive if somewhat uncritical picture of her career and her idiosyncratic character.

Just as Brady accepted her own biographical subject Judith Wright's condition that there were certain no-go areas, we are left suspecting that she laid down similar conditions to Jordan. The biographer's dilemma is raised once again: is it better to have known the subject personally and accept some limitations on what can be dealt with, or to embrace total objectivity towards the (preferably deceased) subject? On this question, the jury will always be out.

Inevitably, the reader will be curious to know the origins of Brady's gadfly personality, of her fearless courage and forthrightness in a world in which discussion of vital issues tends to be dominated by the weasel words of politicians and clerics. Clearly, her independent-minded father played a major part in all this, but the book portrays him as a somewhat shadowy figure.

As an inspirational teacher and public lecturer, Brady has been a powerful influence on many people's lives. And how refreshing it is to find someone who puts into practice the unfashionable belief that it is through the medium of great literature (she is certainly no post-modernist) that we can best grow as human beings.

In public life, it was as a member of the ABC board in the 1980s that Veronica Brady made her main contribution. More than most people she appreciated the enormous potential influence for good and for ill of this, our greatest national institution.

* Robert Reece is Emeritus Professor of history at Murdoch University

Have your say!

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of ARC

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