

arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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How wide is the dint in Church authority?

One of the most significant insights following the revelations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was expressed by Francis Sullivan, the CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. He pointed out that there was no combined strategy exercised by the various Church leaders in their individual efforts to cover up the multiple instances of child abuse. He observed that they all acted to preserve themselves and the Church in almost exactly the same way as if the manner of acting had “been built into their DNA”. This has led to the most blatant misuse of authority on such a wide scale that confidence in the Church’s moral authority has been very much diminished.

While bishops may state that they regret the errors of judgment that have been made and express sorrow for the hurt done to individuals, I am not sure that they realise just how much credibility has been lost in the authority of the Church overall. Where teachings may have been questioned but still accepted by Catholics previously, could it be that some of those teachings and dogmas are maintained by the Church purely because of the fear of admitting error, strengthened by this endemic culture of self-preservation? The comments of ARC members on page 2 of this issue and the review on page 12 add to my many reasons for asking this question.

It is easy to dismiss quickly some passages in the Bible as simply stories without going further and taking note of the extent that those stories have bound us into questionable beliefs. For example, notions of heaven, hell, resurrection, ascension, etc, are expressed in a cosmology that is purely fanciful with no alternative perspectives given by the Church that we can even communally express meaningfully in prayer. We now know that we live in a universe that contains some ten quintillion stars (that is, 1 followed by 25 zeros). We also have the capacity to measure the size, distances and positions of a billion of those stars, one of the largest having a diameter of 2.3 billion kilometres. In addition, we have a much better understanding of the sources of our knowledge than those

who wrote the scriptures. Is it any wonder that intelligent people question a faith that seems to demand a blind loyalty to the past instead of mature reflection on the impact of our new knowledge?

It is one thing for an authority to demand adherence to something because it believes it to be right. It is a very different thing when it avoids the search for truth in order to uphold the position that the authority is always right. The Royal Commission has exposed the misuse of authority by the Church in seeking to preserve its moral reputation. It is not inconceivable that a similar misuse had been exercised in preserving the impression that the Church is always right. We should not be surprised if there is less confidence in the Church’s overall teaching authority when the preservation of reputation was almost universally a higher priority than preventing the long-term harm done to children.

John Buggy

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Letter to the Editor

The recent article by Alan Clague *Let's make the Creed more Credible* struck a chord as it has been a topic on my mind for some time. In a recent discussion group we discovered that a number of us had difficulties saying some of the words or phrases in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds and just skipped in silence when we felt we could not really profess these 'beliefs' from the heart. 'He descended into hell', the 'men' as in 'for us men' and 'holy' as in 'holy Catholic Church'. It certainly made us reflect on what we believed and how we would express our belief.

It reminded me of an Inter-Church Council in our area which consisted of one or two lay representatives from the various denominations. Before we joined, we had to sign a form that we believed all the statements in a given Creed. When I read it through, I realised that it was expressed in such fundamentalist terms I could not in conscience sign it. The wise men who were leaders in the group (yes, thirty years ago, the leaders were all men!) asked if I would write and submit my own Creed and they would discuss it. This I did. It was deemed satisfactory and we worked happily together for a number of years. Perhaps today we are ready for a revision of the Creeds on offer?

Rosemary Breen
Inverell

Heretical Reforms?

Noelene Uren

In the American TV drama, *The West Wing*, there is a scene where the President, played by Martin Sheen, arrives at a luncheon for radio presenters. Everyone, according to protocol, stands, except for one young woman, a talkback radio host, who remains seated, looking self-assured or maybe, more correctly, smug. The President, aware of some of her pronouncements, questions her about her background in theology. No, she has a doctorate in English Literature. He then asks her about her statement, on air, that homosexuality is an abomination. Is this her considered opinion? She replies that it is in the Bible.

The character of the President knows his Bible. With a feigned puzzled air he now bombards the hapless woman with questions, each of his points given with chapter and verse. The Bible allows slavery. Should we bring it back? Working on the Sabbath is punishable by death. Do I need to put half my staff to death? Touching the skin of a dead pig is forbidden, therefore I must ban football. And so it goes on.

In a recent article, reprinted in *The Australian* from *The Times* (Aug 22, 2017), it states: 'Anxious theologians and conservatives have attacked the Pope, arguing that his reforms are heretical'.

Controversy over Pope Francis's push to modernise the Church's teaching on marriage, the Eucharist and papal authority have led to pious pronouncements that there is grave danger to the Catholic faith and morals. The observation that to me was most patronising was from Ricardo Casciola, a conservative Catholic journalist, who said: 'Simple Catholics are disorientated because they see that what they were taught no longer applies.'

So back to *The West Wing*. Do we continue to justify our behaviour and opinions based on something written in a different time and a different culture, or do we hope for a religion of our times? Religion practised in simple black and white where everything is taken literally insults our intelligence, as does the idea that people no longer want to learn.

Pope Francis said, **'Instead of being just a Church that welcomes by keeping doors open, let us be a Church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself.'** Patronising statements, arrogance, a desire to keep the Faithful subordinated through ignorance is hardly the way forward. Perhaps those who are so against the Holy Father's attempts at reform should themselves go back to St John, chapters 14-17, where we read that, 'The Holy Spirit will lead us into new truths'. Maybe we can hope that the Holy Spirit will also lead to acceptance of these truths and support for Pope Francis.

NOELENE Uren is a retired primary school principal and a member of ARC

The Federal Opinion Poll on Gay Marriage

Alan Clague

We are being asked to offer our opinion on whether the government should expand the definition of marriage to include the union of two people of the same sex.

This poll does not concern itself with legal rights of the partners in such a union – these are already established in Australian law. It does not concern itself with the morality of such unions. Australian laws already permit many things that most would consider immoral, but are accepted as not being unlawful. It does not concern itself with the welfare of any children of a same sex couple. Societies have adopted various successful strategies for the upbringing of children, and a same sex couple would fall within an acceptable strategy. Yet these are the parameters that are likely to be used to prosecute both sides of the debate, and all of them have a great potential to arouse great emotions and animosity between individuals of different persuasions.

What attitude should a Christian take? The fundamental issue at stake here is whether society wishes to expand the meaning of a word that hitherto has always been restricted to the legal union of persons of opposite sex. In Western society, this has been restricted further to the union of only two

individuals, but not necessarily in other societies. Most Christians would consider this as a law of God, although there would be considerable differences in acceptability of divorce and remarriage. However, modern Christian society has been reluctant to demand that State laws must conform to what they consider to be God's law. For Christians, their vote should reflect their considered evaluation of the impact on contemporary Australian society of expanding the traditional definition of marriage to include homosexual unions – none of the emotional, irrelevant and destructive stances of those who seek to force their views on others.

Perhaps, the most important comment of all is that, when the poll is completed and the Australian parliament makes a decision, both sides should accept the result and should not harbour resentment against individuals, organisations or political parties that have expressed an opinion different from theirs. Let us all finish this and move on.

Alan Clague is a member of the ARC Secretariat



Marriage equality – some thoughts for the perplexed

Paul Collins

Posted on *Pearls & Irritations* on 22 August 2017

Throughout human history all types of arrangements have evolved to nurture children, of which a common form is a reasonably stable relationship between woman and man. Whether or not this was seen as marriage varied widely. So, use of the term ‘traditional marriage’ is a misnomer. What the Catholic hierarchy is presenting as ‘traditional’ is really a romantic, bourgeois understanding of marriage.

Over the last five years, the Australian Catholic Church has experienced its worst crisis in its 200-year history. The catastrophic fall-out from the evidence presented at the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse, the charging of ‘Australia’s most senior Catholic’ with historic offenses, the 2.6% drop in the number of Australian Catholics between the 2011 and 2016 Census, the collapse in the number of younger people adhering to or practising Catholicism (among Catholics aged 25 to 34 only 5.4% attend Mass) and the continuing decline of general Mass attendance (it is now down to between 8% to 10%), is all evidence of a profound malaise affecting Catholicism. The church’s proclamation of Christ’s Gospel has taken a series of body blows and Catholic moral authority is in tatters.

Have we heard a word from our bishops concerning any of these issues? Certainly I haven’t, and I listen pretty carefully. Australian Catholics have been totally bereft of leadership on these fundamental moral, spiritual and belief issues. That the church’s witness to Christ has been profoundly compromised seems not to trouble the bishops, at least if you take their public statements into account. Yes, to give them their due, they have been

reasonably good on refugees and human trafficking, but beyond that they seemingly have nothing to say.

Until, that is, an issue related to gender arises. Then they’re out of the blocks faster than Usain Bolt. We’ve already heard from Sydney’s Archbishop Fisher on ‘traditional marriage’. Now Archbishops Denis Hart (Melbourne) and Timothy Costelloe (Perth) are threatening to sack staff in Catholic schools, hospitals and other ministries who marry same-sex partners. And the Catholic Church employs 240,000 people in Australia!

What really concerns me is that the views the archbishops put forward as church teaching are really their subjective opinion about ‘traditional marriage’. Australian Catholicism is then identified with reactionary views that are neither defined in church teaching, nor accepted by most Catholics. The reason for this is because these hierarchs fail to make a distinction between sacramental marriage and ‘natural’ marriage.

Even before we descended from the trees, we’ve wanted to get together – we’re social creatures. We’ve also wanted to reproduce and some level of social stability is essential for child nurturance. Throughout human history all types of arrangements have evolved to achieve this, of which a common form is a reasonably stable relationship between woman and man. Whether or not this was seen as marriage varied widely. It’s interesting that even in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) there is no single word that means ‘marriage’ and laws and customs varied throughout the history of Israel. The key theological element was that committed human love was seen as an image of God’s love for the Jewish people.

Marriage was many things before Christianity and it wasn’t until the eleventh century that the Western church got into the marriage business; the Eastern church was a bit earlier. The key theological issue since then has been the sacramental aspect of marriage, because marital love is taken in the *Letter*

to the *Ephesians* as an image of Christ's love for and connection with the church community (5:29-32). But these verses are obscure and primarily refer to the connection between Christ and the church rather than to marriage. Only subsequently have they been taken to refer to sacramental marriage.

What the archbishops don't seem to grasp is that not all marriages celebrated in Australia are sacramental, that is, an image of the love between Christ and the church. That's not to say they're not good marriages; it just means they have nothing to do with the church. The archbishops also seem to have forgotten that Australia is a pluralist, multi-religious, multi-ethnic society where the large majority see marriage as a natural union. Archbishops are not the guardians of culture and so-called 'traditional marriage'. They really should butt out.

Even use of the term 'traditional marriage' is a misnomer. What the archbishops are putting forward as 'traditional' is really a romantic, bourgeois understanding of marriage that originates in the Victorian era and comes to its fruition in the 1950s nuclear family. Before that, marriage was not so much about romantic love, as about family arrangements, land, inheritance and securing the dynasty.

They also claim they're defending religious freedom, which Archbishop Fisher assures us is threatened by marriage equality. He predicts that church-run educational institutions will 'be forced to teach a more politically correct curriculum'. Will church agencies, he asks, be forced to choose staff unsympathetic to the 'church's teachings' or will Catholic welfare agencies 'be dragged before anti-discrimination tribunals' for refusing to provide counselling for same-sex couples? This from guys who are already threatening to sack people. Talk about 'religious freedom', let alone freedom of conscience!

Two things need to happen. First, the bishops need to realise that marriage equality has nothing whatsoever to do with them. This is not about sacramental marriage, and is therefore the business of the state. When people are offered a choice – as in the postal ballot – it is up to them to choose according to their consciences. As archbishops, they can make their own choices, just like everybody else. But they must *not* present their views as those of the Catholic Church.

Also, as I stressed in my previous open letter to Archbishop Fisher, just because bishops say something, that doesn't make it Catholic doctrine. Church authorities must, as Cardinal Newman said, 'consult the laity in matters of doctrine', especially matters that concern them intimately like marriage. And what they say must be 'received', that is Catholics must accept it as true.

Second: to focus on sacramental marriage, perhaps the church needs to get out of the state marriage business altogether. Certainly, I know a lot of Australian priests would prefer this. So, the couple would go to the Registry Office or wherever to procure a marriage license and then, if they wanted a sacramental marriage, or even just get a church blessing, they could go to the parish. Then there would be no confusion between Church and State.

The time has certainly come to 'stop messing with marriage' as the bishops themselves said a few years back. This applies particularly to them!

Historian and broadcaster Paul Collins' most recent books are *The Birth of the West* (2013) and *A Very Contrary Irishman* (2014). His *Absolute Power* will be published early next year by Public Affairs in New York.

Religion is no laughing matter!

Alan Holroyd

Religion is not a funny subject and, as it seems, neither is humour. In thinking about my faith, I've always wondered about Jesus the man, the real person and, considering his personality, he must have had a pretty good sense of humour. Yet in the New Testament gospels that side of Jesus is not written about. It's all very serious. Very scholarly. Indeed, we human beings do take our religions quite seriously. Although we do have the Joyful Mysteries in the Rosary, but joyfulness need not be humorous. Back to seriousness, before proceeding further I decided to do some research concerning humour and religion.

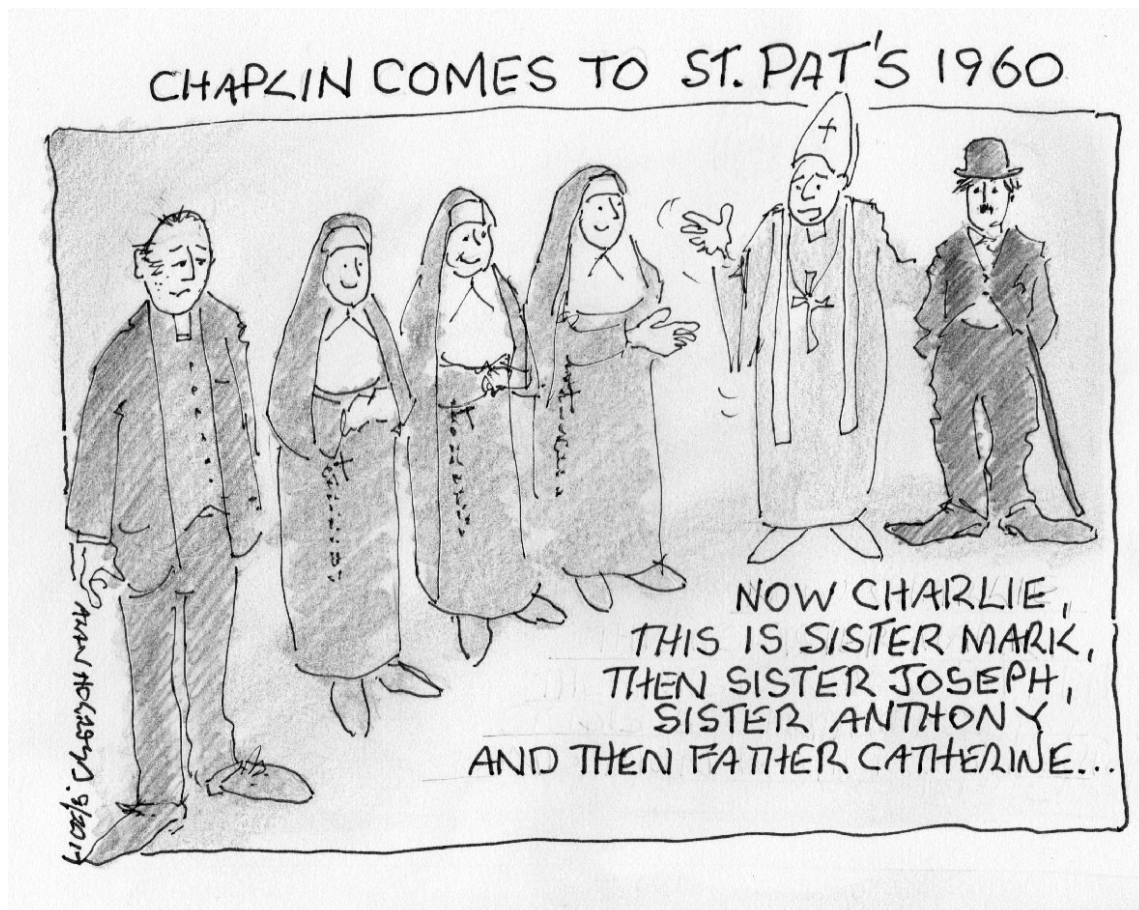
My simplified bibliography includes the 1999 *Macquarie Dictionary*, the *Collins Dictionary of Quotations*, the *Holy Bible* (my old pre-Vatican II,

1950 edition), *Father Ted* (1995-1998), Monty Python (1969-2014), Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977), Mark Twain (1835-1910) and today's Google (1995). The movies and television referred to are accessible using sites through Google.

Macquarie lists humour as the quality of being funny, melancholy or black bile and cardinal humours...? Now, 'cardinal' links to: of prime importance, from Latin's *cardinalis*, a hinge, a chief. Humour it seems has medical origins as well as does cardinal and black bile.

There are many quotes by the wise and witty. A worthy short one comes from American humourist and illustrator, James Thurber (1894-1961), 'Humour is emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity.' On wit, Mark Twain wrote, 'Wit and Humour – if any difference it is in duration – lightening and electric light. Same material apparently; but one is vivid, and can do damage – the other fools along and enjoys elaboration.'

One of the catalysts for taking on this subject began not so long ago. The media reported that somewhere in the Muslim world a man had been arrested and charged with blaspheming and dire



consequences were to follow. My goodness! Looking at all the cartoons I've done, thank heavens I'm a Catholic! We Aussie Catholics have inherited the sparkling electricity of the Irish Catholic sense of humour. Ah, remember the outrageously funny 1995-1998 TV series, *Father Ted*! Ah, bye-gone days.

Yet, in those bygone days, in the Roman Catholic Church, blasphemy was the subject in the Old Testament, Leviticus 24:10-16 where a man blasphemed and was brought to Moses, then to the marketplace where the assembly (men only), laid hands on the blasphemer's head and then stoned him to death. Jump forward now to 1979, the classic Monty Python scene in *The Life of Brian*, where the stoning scene was re-enacted, while provocatively, the Pythons had a woman dressing as a man – then taking to the stoning with glee, much to the horror of the John Cleese character when the woman's false beard fell off, exposing her gender! The launch of the movie as a whole caused outrage in its day, but survives as a remarkable satire appreciated particularly by both those who know the seriousness and the humour of religion.

Charlie Chaplin was acclaimed for his humour and social commentary. In *The Floorwalker* of 1916, his character, The Little Tramp, was a heroic foil for the bombastic, over-lord store manager (Eric Campbell), who together stereotyped the powerful over the lowly. This was a theme taken by Chaplin to focus on the prevailing social conditions of the political and industrial era in Britain and the USA,

which can be seen as a reflection of Jesus the man in his day. Chaplin used humour to shine a light on a serious social disorder.

Surprisingly, when Googling 'religion and humour', a page opened where numerous listings appeared. The first was a site for 'Scholarly Articles', with another site advertising an academic text book on religion and humour, which gives hope at least for academic religious readership. Scrolling down, there's a site for illustrated cartoons that relate to most mainstream religions with the Catholic Church well represented. Of course, scanning the cartoon site reveals a variety of creative approaches towards humour and religion – including those that are anti-religion, which is to be expected.

The ingredients of religion and humour have one important ethical value in common, and that is respect. Whatever the communication medium, ethical and clever humourists have respect for the sensitivity of religion. A good humourist walks a fine line; balance is critical while the applause will abound, because there is humour in abundance in religion and the religious. A quote by George Eliot (1819-1880), is truthful, 'A difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections'. So, humour is serious, while it is also a laughing matter.

ALAN HOLROYD has been a member of ARC from its foundation. He designed the ARC logo, and posted cartoons for *ARCVoice* and, before that, for *Online Catholics*.

Catholic Joke

The Pope and Donald Trump are on the same stage in Yankee Stadium in front of a huge crowd.

The Pope leans towards Donald and said, 'Do you know that with one little wave of my hand I can make every person in this crowd go wild with joy? This joy will not be a momentary display, but will go deep into their hearts and they'll forever speak of this day and rejoice!'

Donald replied, 'I seriously doubt that! With one little wave of your hand....Show me!'

So the Pope backhanded him and knocked him off the stage!

AND THE CROWD ROARED & CHEERED WILDLY and there was happiness throughout the land!

Models of Pastoral Care other than the Parish

Eugene Stockton

We are so accustomed to the parish in the structure of the Church that we take for granted that it is the only way that the ministry of the Church can reach out to the bulk of the faithful. Now we are hearing all too frequently the word ‘crisis’ as fewer, aging priests and the lack of vocations threaten the closure of parishes or their amalgamation into larger impersonal entities.

This is not a crisis for the Church. It is a crisis for a certain model of Church leadership and ministry. The only model most of us are familiar with – the bishop in his diocese, the priest in his parish – developed as an ecclesiastical reflection of the civil authority structures of its time, beginning with the reorganisation of imperial administration under Justinian and consolidated in the feudal system of medieval Europe. There, the parish priest in his parish was the Church’s mirror of the Lord of the manor. The ecclesiastical structure has long outlasted its secular model. The numbers problem, i.e. of too few priests to ‘man’ all positions in the structure, is surely one of those signs of the time which alert us to the prodding of Divine Providence. Perhaps the model needs re-examining.

The history of the Church shows that models of leadership have varied greatly through the centuries, and none appears sacrosanct. The earliest model, attested to in the N.T. and *Didache*, had local churches enjoying both resident leadership (*episcopoi*, deacons) and itinerant teachers (apostles, prophets). An obvious danger in this arrangement was that of heterodox wanderers claiming to be prophets, but the Church had early established safeguards (*Didache* 11-13; cf Stockton 1982, 32-3).

From 5th Century Palestine comes a delightful account of how church ministry was remodeled, without complications, around the lifestyle of a newly converted people (Chitty 1966, 83-8). A tribe of pagan Arabs had fled from Persian Suzerainty and settled in the Judaeon Desert. The

sheikh, Peter Aspebet, brought his sick son to the monk Euthymius: the son was healed, the tribe was converted and Peter Aspebet was consecrated their bishop. The Bishop of the Arab Encampments (Parembolarum), together with his Bedouin clergy wandered with the nomadic tribe in its seasonal movements. Bishop Peter played an important part in the Council of Ephesus, appointed to a committee to negotiate with Nestorius.

As noted above, church organisation in general tended to copy the pyramid structure of the Roman Empire. At the same time, monasticism was also tending to pose a distinction between spiritual leadership (charismatic) and hierarchical authority (institutional). Congar notes instances in the East and in the West (1962, 129-30). In the East from the 8th Century, even surviving in the *staretz* up to 20th Century Russia, was the situation where a revered monk, rarely a priest, exercised a ministry of spiritual direction and confession, autonomously of the ordinary hierarchical structure. Similarly holiness, rather than hierarchical status, was the basis of authority in the Celtic Church up to the 12th Century.

‘There was no diocesan pattern, that is, there were no specific territories under the authority of bishops, but a whole complex of spheres of spiritual influence. A ‘saint’ had his own sphere of influence in which he was in a sense the permanent spiritual lord of a given place. A territory was affiliated to a holy man, and eventually, there was a grouping with a monastery at its centre and the jurisdiction belonged to the abbot who was often, but not necessarily, in bishop’s orders. Sometimes even, as at Kildare, jurisdiction was in the hands of an abess. Authority was attributed to the man of God, and not to a particular grade in the priestly hierarchy.’

(It is said that the local bishop may have been an ordinary monk, himself subject to an abbot or abess).

The crisis of the English Reformation, where the hierarchy as a whole failed the faithful, called forth a new mode of mission. One hardly supposes, in the circumstances, that searching questions were asked about jurisdiction and faculties. Danger of detection kept the priests ever on the move and limited their furtive ministry to Catholic households. Yet the Church survived and gradually returned to normalcy. This pattern was repeated in other countries during times of persecution, and also in the early stages of mission endeavour in North America and Asia.

St. Francis Xavier and his companions brought the faith to Japan in 1549 and there Christianity

flourished till persecution broke out and priests were executed or expelled. Two hundred years later missionaries returned to find 50,000 Christians still true to the faith, which had been handed down from generation to generation under the leadership of ‘baptisers’.

The Church in Australia was, from the first, one of laity (except for the brief ministry of the convict priest, Fr. Dixon in 1803), until the arrival of Frs. Therry and Conolly in 1821. In the meantime, Catholics were united around the Blessed Sacrament left reserved by Fr. Dixon in the Davis home.

Village communities in some Orthodox Churches offer a model which respects the principle of local leadership and recognises the occasional need of theological expertise. When the old *papas* dies, the village people elect their new pastor and send him to a seminary for a few months training (mainly in liturgy). He returns with the enormous advantage of close links with his people and with sufficient formation to perform the liturgy and to look after the ordinary pastoral needs of the villagers. At the approach of big feasts, the more

highly trained ‘theologian priests’ circulate through the countryside to hear confessions and to attend to the more demanding pastoral needs.

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Concerned Catholics of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese

Concerned Catholics reform movement grows

4 September 2017

Another enthusiastic turnout to a public meeting of Concerned Catholics is strengthening the lay movement to reform the clerical, male-dominated Church.

An estimated 200 people attended the second forum, hosted last Thursday night (31 August) by Concerned Catholics of the Canberra Goulburn Archdiocese, to hear talks by lay and clergy leaders and discuss latest developments in pressing the case for a greater role for the laity in the Church.

The chairman of Concerned Catholics, Professor John Warhurst, said:

‘People’s responses at the meeting and afterwards indicated there is a growing mood for change in the wake of a disappointing response by bishops

so far to calls for a greater role for the laity, particularly women, in decision-making and for a more transparent and inclusive church leadership.

‘At the meeting, comments from the floor called for greater inclusion of young people, women, Aboriginal people and people from regional parishes including the Wagga Wagga diocese, in the lead-up to the 2020 Synod.

‘Several speakers from the floor urged that action on reforms start now rather than waiting for 2020, to build a sense of empowerment among lay Catholics in order to ensure the Synod’s decisions truly reflect the views of the faithful.

‘Archbishop Christopher Prowse has appointed an archdiocesan interim working party to advise on the 2020 Australian Plenary Council.

‘I am one of the people included on what was initially a six-person team, including one woman. Another two women were added to the group after

Continued.....

the lack of gender balance came under fire at last week's forum.

'The unilateral process employed to select these appointees was also evident in the appointment of a separate national executive committee to advise on the Plenary Council. This in-house decision-making by the church hierarchy, in preparation for what is billed as a major step forward for the Church, indicates that the inward-looking mindset of the leaders continues.

Australia's bishops are suggesting that the 2020 Plenary Council will provide a way forward after the ignominy afflicting the Church as a result of the damaging evidence of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse.

Concerned Catholics is fortunate in that many well-qualified people have offered their advice and support as to how we develop our aspirations for a renewed and community-based Church and harness support for that renewal.'

Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn is a group in the Archdiocese concerned about a number of governance, cultural and structural issues arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We seek an effective voice for lay people in the administration and direction of our church.

The next public forum will be held on Thursday 15 March 2018 following the release of the Royal Commission's final report. Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council will be the sole presenter.

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The Judas Iscariot Lunch

Documentary shown on ABC Compass

This documentary, directed by Teresa O'Grady-Peyton and produced by T J O'Grady-Peyton, tells the story of Columban missionary priests 'who took the brave, honourable, and risky decision to leave the active ministry and set out on totally different and difficult life journey'.

They were branded 'Judas Iscariots' by Pope Paul VI. 'We never saw it like that ... we see ourselves as pioneers!' *The Judas Iscariot Lunch* is a story about faith, religion, love and life after the priesthood.

13 Irish ex-priests, who meet for regular lunches, speak candidly about how they came to be missionaries in East Asia, the Pacific and South America in the 1960's and 70's. Most had joined the seminary as teenagers and their training provided no input on the countries to which they were being sent. There were no lessons on anthropology, social science or even economics – to help the people out of poverty.

Worst of all, they were given no advice on how to cope with their celibacy, especially in the Philippines which had a very different sexual ethos from Ireland. It is a country full of beautiful women where the population basically regarded celibacy as a bit of a joke and many women had no reservation in trying to attract priests. However, immersed in their new situations, these young idealists resonated and developed much broader ideas about God, their own humanity and needs, and about faiths, cultures and economies.

If you missed the showing of this very thought-provoking film on ABC Compass, it may be still available on I-View.

Part 1: iview.abc.net.au/programs/compass/RN1611H004S00

Part 2: iview.abc.net.au/programs/compass/RN1611H005S00

Wonderwomen and Reform

Gideon Goosen

This is the story of the wonderwomen of medieval and later times – the Beguines – who offered an alternative religious life to female religious orders. The Beguines lived in community (in a building called a Beguinage) but took no vows and had jobs in the commercial world. They accepted women, young and old, single or widowed. An innocent looking book (*The Wisdom of the Beguines: The Forgotten Story of a Medieval Women's Movement*, by Laura Swan, BlueBridge, 2014) has some sharp lessons for contemporary church life in the context of Reform.

Let me identify just three. The first lesson is that of a degree of religious independence. Today we can look at their way of life and learn much about reform in the church. In today's church too many are still too dependent on the clergy for their religious life. Some still live with the absolutes and authoritarianism of recent centuries. Some believe their role is to 'pray pay and obey'. One of the big obstacles for those who remain in the church is to overcome the clericalism that Pope Francis and other bishops have identified.

In today's church, many have resented the attempt by church officials and by priests who want to control everything, to tell them what to do. So they turn their backs on the institutional church. Those who stay often continue a form of clericalism whereby the priest dictates their religious life. A

healthy degree of freedom from the institutional church might be what is required today.

The second lesson is the need to develop a particular spirituality. The Beguines in their day organised their own religious life: following the scriptures, praying the Office and doing meditations. The reality of the Crusades meant that, in the absence of men, the women had to become more self-reliant. This meant earning a living and making decisions about daily life. This contributed to the development of those brave women called the Beguines. This self-reliance and independence spilled over into the religious life too. They dared to be their own spiritual authority! This made some clergy annoyed because the Beguines seem to be religiously independent. The priest and institutional church lost their power and, with hurt pride, tried to retaliate with heresy charges. In the same way contemporary laity/parishioners must assume more control of their own spirituality. (Some did in 1968 with *Humanae Vitae* which proved a turning point in church authority.)

The third lesson is the need to discuss power in the Church. Pope Francis often talks about a ministry of service of priests, not power, not control, not careerism. In many cases, service has long given way to power over and status.

In seeking reform we need to take account of the loss of power for some priests and their struggle to adjust. We need to have open discussions on ministry, power and control. At the local level of ministries in parishes, I have yet to hear anyone discuss power and control.

Gideon Goosen is a Sydney-based theologian. His latest book is *Hyphenated Christians*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011)

Overworked Priests?

The following is an excerpt from a book by the Chinese scientist and reformer, Fang Lizhi, entitled *The Most Wanted Man in China* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016). It is about becoming a university vice-president, but could equally be applied to overworked priests looking for reform:

'The first thing I learned was that many things didn't need any management. The university was full of educated people, and results were much better if you let people decide things for themselves than if you ran around trying to micro-manage. Of course this meant that you couldn't flaunt your know-it-all 'leader' image. But if you were okay with that, it also meant that your workload fell by about 40 percent.' (p.232)

Church teaching and the knowledge and understanding of modernity

Roger Lenaers SJ

Review by Jack Callaghan

A Belgian Jesuit, Roger Lenaers, has written a series of really interesting, and also challenging, books on the relationship between Church teaching and the knowledge and understanding of modernity. Lenaers challenges many traditional views based on pre-modern, mythological, non-scientific thinking – in which God is understood as inhabiting a world above, is interpreted anthropomorphically, and is approached like a powerful human ruler, instead of being seen as the God of Love operating intrinsically within the cosmos. Lenaers's view enables him to cope with the Neo-Darwinism of Richard Dawkins, agreeing with him (and others) that there is no God-in-Heaven. Nevertheless, his profound Christian faith shines through. He finds the God of Love intrinsically involved in the process of evolution, seen as the manifestation of God's love for the world and humanity, and realised most fully in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth.

'Atheistic' modernity and its values

For Church leadership God appears as majestically ruling from on high, making laws like every monarch on earth – judging and punishing the guilty. Traditional ethics, supported by the Ten Commandments which God is supposed to have given to Moses on Mount Sinai, is and remains ethics based on law. In a modern Christian view, God is no longer seen as a law-giver from outside the cosmos but as dynamic fundamental Love appearing in cosmic evolution. In accordance with its nature, this dynamism unceasingly drives humans to act out of love and thus to grow in love. Here are some examples of where the modern view deviates from what we traditionally believed.

The virgin birth

To underpin his mythical story, Matthew, as he often does, looks to the aid of a Bible text: namely, Isaiah 7:14: 'Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and his name will be called Immanuel, God with us.' Some critical observations regarding these attempts at justification are necessary here. First, in general, about his procedure. It betrays a clearly mythological way of looking at the Bible. It presupposes that all texts of the Bible are 'God's word' and are therefore, like oracles, infallible communications from on high.

Finally, the Bible text of Isaiah 7:14 quoted above is completely unusable as an argument for the virginal conception and birth. Matthew, who wrote in Greek, uses in this case the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible – the so-called Septuagint – produced in Alexandria in 300 BC. But the Greek translator had at that time wrongly translated the Hebrew concept 'almah' – literally, young woman – as virgin. Thus the virgin birth notion is based on an error in translation.

Besides, the continuation of the text says that the birth of that 'Immanuel' was definitely to take place in 8 BC. It related to a political decision which King Achaz had to make at the time and not to things which would only come about some 800 years later. The Jewish scholars had already long pondered about who was meant by this Immanuel, but they had found no satisfactory answer.

The result of all this was that the text was well known. Matthew applied it to Jesus. The Christian scholars were only too happy to use the authority of the Bible – which the Jews did not challenge – to show that their preaching about Jesus could appeal to the unassailable words of the Bible. But the application of this text to Jesus is a personal choice of the author, and in the Old Testament context there is not a single suggestion to warrant this application, and certainly not to the coming of the Messiah. However, Joseph Ratzinger expresses the opinion in his Jesus book that in the Bible this Immanuel definitely means Jesus. His proof works as a process of elimination. Critical examination shows, he says, that not a single child in King Achaz's circle could come into consideration. He argues from this that Immanuel has to be Jesus. But this leap has no support in logic.

The new ethical imperative

Precisely this impetus is the root of the ethical imperative. The earlier ethics, based on law, has to make way for an ethics of love, the fundamental norm of which is: everything is good if it is born of love. There are implications for traditional morality regarding sex, property and obedience, a morality which is by now long out of date. But there are also consequences for bioethics.

Religion and sacrifice

Lenaers challenges St Paul's role in Church teaching: scandalized by the idea that the Messiah's mission seemed to be a failure – that Jesus was executed like a common criminal – Paul drew on Old Testament texts which he interpreted, dubiously, as prophecies that the Messiah would be sacrificed, whereas he was simply killed because he questioned the Jewish authorities and their rigid laws. If Jesus was not 'sacrificed' on the cross, the Last Supper was not a precursor of the Mass but Jesus' symbolic giving of himself to his followers. His followers today meet to continue this sharing of the spirit of Jesus with one another. There is no sacrifice as such.

Death and resurrection of Jesus

When killed by his enemies, Jesus was buried. By loving to the limit and abandoning everything, even his life, for his mission of love, Jesus has become fully one being with Eternal Love and participates fully in its creative power, and therefore, just as we can say of God that he lives without measure, being the Source of all life, we can say also that Jesus lives, no more in a biological but in an existential way and that we can reach him, and that he can reach us – and let us participate in his fullness. That is the modern answer to the modern question about how a man who is dead for already 2000 years can still reach us today and inspire and move us, and so be our saviour.

Original sin

Lenaers questions the now traditional interpretation of the Garden of Eden story in Genesis as an account of original sin. This interpretation of the Genesis text was not established in the teaching of Jesus' followers until several centuries later, in the writings and teaching of St Augustine, who died as late as the fifth century AD (430). The resulting negative effect on Church teaching about sexuality is only too well known and is still proving hard to eradicate.

The Word of God and Church authority

The Bible was not directly available to the vast majority of Christians until relatively recent times – i.e. after the invention of the printing press. Even then, most ordinary Christians were dependent on the bishops and priests for the authoritative interpretation of the text. For modern-thinking Christians the problem is the nature of this authority. Where does it come from? From on high? But if there is no 'on high' in the traditional sense?

For the modern faithful, while the Bible will be seen as a book with words of human beings, these are often words in which mystically gifted authors have tried to express their intense experience of the transcendent Wonder. For that Wonder continuously expresses itself in the cosmos and especially in those human minds that are receptive to it. But human minds are always minds with personal and cultural limitations which are reflected in their words and are a source of deficiencies and even errors. Because of this mixture of divine inspiration and human deficiencies; because of the deep cultural gap between those authors and modern readers; and because of the frequent misunderstandings that arise from that gap, we should read the Bible with a critical mind.

The church considers her Bible as a book of supernatural revelations and calls it the 'Word of God'. As faithful Christians who belong to modernity, we need a new approach to that 'holy book'. For we can no longer call the Bible word(s) of God. Why not?

Because words are the result of human speaking, and we can no longer say of the Ultimate Reality that it can speak. A speaking God is a fully anthropomorphic being. Indeed, to be able to speak one needs a human physiology with lungs, vocal cords, mouth, tongue etc. Moreover it presupposes a human language system and every such system is dependent on human conventions.

The Church today

For Lenaers, the mythological thinking that is still largely unquestioned by Church leadership is inevitably leading to an increasing exodus from the Church and to fears about what will eventually be left of the Church unless Christians integrate what modernity has discovered. Lived union with Jesus of Nazareth – as the supreme manifestation of the loving God – is the future for Christianity.

For anyone who might wish to read more of this 93 year old Jesuit living in Leuven Carysfort Press have translated three of his books from the German.

Jesus of Nazareth, A Person Like us? (2016).

Living in God without God (2017)

A Believer's Farewell to Religion will be published later in 2017.

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The ‘Our Father’ (deconstructed)

Extract from

Gerard Windsor: *The Tempest-Tossed Church – Being a Catholic Today*

Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2017

For all its familiarity the Our Father is a curious prayer.

At first glance it seems to be a list of petitions – after all that’s what we understand prayer to be, praying *for* something – but the opening of it is gently disguised praise and acknowledgment of God. ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.’ We believe these outcomes are certain, eventually.

Such wishes are not in the same category as ‘give us this day our daily bread’, where we know that, for many people, much of the time, they won’t get their daily bread. Furthermore this particular nutritional petition has to represent the overwhelming majority of prayers that we make; for ourselves or for others we want things for – health, livelihood, success in exams or business or sport, fine weather for the big day – none of them is an item that have any relish of spiritual salvation about them.

Then we ask for forgiveness, but it’s couched as a reminder that we must be merciful ourselves.

And we plead that God will not lead us into temptation – which is a cheeky way of saying that we don’t want to sin.

As is the final request, ‘but deliver us from evil’; we know that God won’t be delivering us from broken bones or financial loss or marital failure or any of the thousand natural ills that flesh is heir to. We don’t know that God actually wants us to be free of those evils. The only thing we can be absolutely sure of is that he doesn’t want us

ensnared by the evil of sin. In brief, there’s not much similarity between this model prayer and the spontaneous, homely petitions that all human beings, left to themselves, actually come up with.

In a way the Lord’s Prayer is talking to ourselves, not God. Yet it’s focused on him because we’re reminding ourselves of his nature, our dependence on him and our obligations to him.

There is a second dilemma posed by Christ giving us the Lord’s Prayer as a model. It’s an invocation addressed to the Father, not to the Son. Yet the Christian life focuses on Jesus. A curious disjunction has grown up in the believer’s advertence to the Divine. In general the Church, in its public, liturgical worship, addresses God (*Deus*), but the heavy implication is that this means the Father, not least because reference is then made to the sacrifice or redeeming work of his Son.

On the other hand the whole bent of popular, private piety has been to address prayers to Jesus. – or to his mother, Mary. The motivation for this seems clear; if we’re going to talk to someone, it’s easier if we can see him, or her, as a human creature, one of our own kind, who’s experienced the pleasures and sorrows of life as another rational creature of flesh and blood.

Paradoxically again, to get in touch with the Divine, you need to earth yourself as much as possible. Ignatius of Loyola, for example, the sixteenth-century Spanish

founder of the Jesuits, favoured two settings for his private prayer. One was to take a scene from the Scriptures, above all the gospels. The individual was asked to insert himself, to take stock of the situation, to watch and listen to all the players, and above all to Jesus, the central figure in the scene. The idea was to be moved and persuaded by what was being said or exemplified, to feel the power, the logic and the attractiveness of Jesus, and to respond to him in the way that he called for, the way that would also bring out the best in oneself. □

My brother Peter regularly prayed 'Give us this day our day in *bed*' and another child was heard to say 'Harold be thy name'. There must be numerous other examples of children's interpretation of the archaic and often meaningless language in this prayer.

How often do Catholics resort to saying, 'Let's say the 'Our Father'' (or the 'Hail Mary') when faced with some challenge (e.g. exams, illness, drought)? Perhaps it is time we seriously 'took stock of the situation' and ask ourselves if we really believe that parroting the *Lord's Prayer* will overcome or help whatever the situation might be.

I only once heard a priest say that the *Our Father* is a dangerous prayer to say if we still harbour resentments and refuse to forgive those who trespass against us. Surely it is time our Church grew up!

Editor

Wrestling with the Faith in Times of Scandal: Why belonging to the Church Still Matters

talk by Richard Gaillardetz in Melbourne

Brief summary by Rob Butler

Richard Gaillardetz, Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology, spoke well with a clear passion for his subject. He claimed to have vested interests in reform, not just as a parent trying to encourage his four children to continue to engage with the Church but, in a humorous aside, considered that, as things were going, he might well be out of a job, given that his particular area of expertise as a theologian was in ecclesiology.

He presented three factors which he considered to be relevant to the decline in Church commitment.

- ◆ The **first** was the scandal of sexual abuse and a decline in respect for the hierarchy. In criticism of the failure of the Church structure, he illustrated it with what he saw as a striking example: the 2016 statement of George Pell to the Royal Commission in which our Cardinal claimed that there was no need for change in the Church structure, blaming the scandal on individual failures rather than being an illustration of the need for structural reform.
- ◆ The **second** factor was considered to be the lack of acceptance of Church doctrine/dogma and noted '*Humanae Vitae*' as an example, together with current issues like the ordination of women and same-sex marriage.

- ◆ The **third** thing that he considered led to the decline in adherence to Christian faiths was what he described as the increased fragility of religion, with Christianity spread among numerous religious groups with a subsequent weakness in strength. There was significant migration, not only out of religious adherence, but in transfers between various faiths.

He offered a number of remedies for renewal, the first being the need for the Church to move from the former theological concentration on beliefs and a legalistic and authoritative implementation of its teaching. Rather, it should become the vehicle for formation of human desire for fulfilment and human development. He stated that teachings need to be relevant to the modern world. He felt that allegiance to a religion offered support to the individual person, seeking to fulfil their need to attain their goals and develop the love that God had bestowed. There was also a need for the Church to acknowledge its guilt and seek repentance.

He referred to the future Synod in Australia and had suggested to Archbishop Mark Coleridge that it would be a good thing to have a formal liturgy of repentance involving the entire Australian Church hierarchy as a prelude to the Synod.

Rob Butler
ARC Secretariat Member

Have your say!

ARC*Voice* 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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