



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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Issue No. 69

Editorial

Sometimes just the right articles come through the ether, crying out to be included in *ARCvoice*. So it is that this issue, following on the news of the installation of the first Anglican female Archbishop, has a distinct emphasis on the need for gender equality—for which we make no apology. As long as the phalanx of males keep control of our church, it becomes more and more like a dinosaur in our modern society.

Like a gift from heaven, Chris Geraghty's book, *Jesus, the Forgotten Feminist* arrived—a serendipity moment indeed! Answering the question: 'How did Jesus treat women?' 'Geraghty delves into the scriptures and history, showing how Jesus practised a radically inclusive approach to women that challenged the inequitable beliefs and practices of his own culture and community.' The back cover blurb goes on:

Yet the Church has historically failed to follow its own founder's example, instead taking its direction from the early tradition of male-only apostles developed by misogynist Church Fathers. Today this attitude is still carried on by a leadership that sees women as inferior, decreeing that only males can represent Jesus in ministry and preside over the Eucharist. We can only conclude that Jesus would be in despair at the evolution of 'His' church from its humble origins in which women played many leading roles to the current male-dominated, all-powerful, extravaganza which stands for the Catholic Church today.

This learned, humorous, irreverent book reminds us that Jesus was a feminist and argues that the Church must repent and honour this in order to restore women's place as fully equal to men, in the Church and in the world.

Many years ago, a men-only bowling club operated in the Northern Suburbs of Sydney. When women were refused membership, they set up their own club and ran it very successfully. The men's club fell on hard times and had trouble recruiting new members. So they invited the women to join! Not surprisingly, the answer was 'No'!

Each week we are urged by the Bishop of Broken Bay to pray for vocations. Personally, I refuse to join in – there are plenty of women who believe they have a vocation to the priesthood. Indeed, there are already many women in Europe and North America who have been legitimately ordained by sympathetic bishops – but of course the establishment refuses to recognise them and even punishes those clerics who show any desire to have women ordained. How much

longer will the church deny that Jesus entrusted women to know about him and minister to others in his name in the same way as his male followers? So many Catholics despair of this obstinance.

In the short term, the ordination of women in Australia might not immediately reverse the trend of diminishing congregations, but it is obvious that Jesus' message would be promulgated and heard far more effectively than by simply plugging gaps with more male clerics from overseas.

Margaret Knowlden
Editor

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Plenary Council 2020-2021

We Need to Speak Up Now

The Catholic Church in Australia will hold a Plenary Council in 2020/21. The bishops acknowledge that there needs to be significant change in a range of areas resulting from the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. They point out that everyone in the Church will have the opportunity to be heard but give no indication that what is advised will influence their ultimate decision-making.

A process has been established and a website has been set up whereby individuals and groups can make submissions, largely by answering set questions. However, there is no sign, at this stage, that a dialogue that would lead to influence will come about. Some letters sent previously to the Australian Bishops Conference and to some individual bishops have not even received the courtesy of a reply.

We would encourage you, as an individual, to make your own submission or write to your bishop in the best way that you can outlining what you see as the vital changes that the institutional Church needs to embrace now, not just in 2020. As an organisation, we, the hundreds of members of Australian Reforming Catholics, should also write and speak out, not just on the need for critical reforms, but also about the ongoing processes that should be implemented now to address critical issues and to overcome the already identified dysfunctional clericalism that dominates the Church's culture.

As the Secretariat, we cannot act on your behalf with credibility unless we have discussed these matters directly with you. Therefore, we have set up an opportunity for us to come together, just as we have done many times previously, to discuss and outline what our agreed approach should be.

The agenda is a simple one. Firstly, we need to discuss and draw out what we need to do so that we can have an "effective" input to the Plenary Council. Secondly, we need to outline the critical issues and changes required in order that the Catholic Church in Australia can truly reflect the spirit of Jesus Christ. We can combine this effort with the business of our Annual General Meeting. Therefore, we urge you to place the following in your diary and prepare to discuss and help shape our approach to these very important matters.

"Plenary Council 2020-2021 - We Need to Speak Up Now"

**Dover Heights Parish Community Centre
corner of Dover Road and Napier St, Dover Heights
Saturday 6th October 2018
10.00 am – 4.00 pm**

If you are able to stay on, Mass will be in the church at 5.00 p.m. which gives us a rare opportunity as a group to celebrate our faith and commitment together.

(Note on public transport: The No.380 bus [showing Dover Heights or Watsons Bay] can be taken from Circular Quay, St James and Bondi Junction Stations. Get off the bus at the stop just before the corner of Dover Road and Military Road, turn right at Dover Road and it is a three-minute walk to the Community Centre.)

John Buggy

ROME HAS SPOKEN

Are these the last words on women's ordination in the Catholic Church?

Pope John XXIII (11 April 1963): Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons. The longstanding inferiority complex of certain classes because of their economic and social status, sex, or position in the State, and the corresponding superiority complex of other classes, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Pope Paul VI (1976) *Inter Insigniores*: The Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women.

John Paul II (1994) *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: In order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

Pope Benedict (Apr 5, 2012) restated the Church's ban on women priests in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: and warned that he would not tolerate disobedience.

Pope Francis (Nov 1, 2016): On the ordination of women in the Catholic church, the last word is clear. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was given by St. John Paul II and this remains.



Reverend Kay Goldsworthy becomes world's first female Anglican Archbishop

The sound of history in the making in Perth rang out as clear as church bells when Kay Goldsworthy became the world's first female Anglican archbishop.

The Most Reverend Goldsworthy became the eighth Anglican Archbishop of Perth in an installation ceremony at St George's Cathedral.

With a symbolic knock on the cathedral's doors to enter, Archbishop Goldsworthy was seated in her chair and handed a staff and cross — marking her place in the history books.

Her installation was witnessed by the church's hierarchy including Anglican archbishops and bishops from Melbourne, New Zealand, Polynesia, Kenya and South Sudan as well as WA Governor Kerry Sanderson, WA Chief Justice Wayne Martin, City of Perth Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi and Perth Catholic Archbishop Timothy Costelloe.

She was among the first female priests to be ordained in the Anglican Church in 1992 and Australia's first female bishop in 2008.

Archbishop Goldsworthy, 61, is a married mother of two adult sons and most recently served as bishop in Gippsland, Victoria. Previously she spent nearly three decades in Perth.

The new Archbishop revealed last month she was daunted yet excited about her new role and was keen to listen to and address important issues in her diocese and give a voice to causes, including the campaign tackling violence against women and children.

Source: Kate Campbell *PerthNow* 10.2.2018

NOTE: The Catholic Church becomes more and more of an anachronism as it continues its ban on ordaining women—let alone consecrating them as Bishops/Archbishops. Surely it is time for the Church to admit that Pope John Paul's statement was not infallible, that it was wrong and that they should follow the signs of the times and the lead of other Christian Churches.

Editor

Jesus and Women

Noelene Uren

Recently, having dinner with a group of friends, the conversation ranged over many subjects and somehow stumbled into women's role in the Church. One of the men, a friend for whom I have a lot of affection and respect, came up with the hackneyed argument: No women among the apostles, therefore no women can be priests. He wasn't joking.

There seems to be a huge chasm between 21st century's embrace of advances in technology, medicine, law, the everyday conveniences of electricity, running water, ease of transport and so on. But none of these things existed in the time of Jesus. Should we then be thoughtlessly making use of them?

In the summer edition of *The Swag*, the magazine of the National Council of Priests of Australia, an article written (with thanks to Jose Pagola's *Jesus*) explores the status of women in Jesus' time. Society in Palestine then was completely patriarchal. A woman was owned first by her father, then her husband, who could divorce her simply by dismissal. During menstruation and after childbirth she was considered unclean and untouchable. Interestingly after childbirth the period of impurity was forty days after a male child but eighty days after a female child.

Women could not leave the cluster where her family lived unless accompanied by a male. Even to go to the well to draw water they had to go in a group with a male in attendance. In the synagogue women were segregated and forbidden to enter the inner parts of the temple. Two quotes from the rabbinical teachings cited in Jose Pagola's book are worth repeating.

- ◆ *Whoever teaches the Torah to his daughter teaches a libertine because she will make bad use of what she learns.'*
- ◆ and a prayer for men to say: *Blessed are you, Lord, for you have not created me a pagan, or made me a woman or an ignorant person.'*

This was the society Jesus grew up in. Yet He broke the rules and included women in His life: solitary women, prostitutes. All were blessed with His love. They were with Him in His suffering and execution; they were there when the men had fled; and they were the first to see Him after the Sabbath. Jesus valued women, made them a part of His life, unlike the society where outside the family cluster women did not exist. They were invisible. No, women were not part of the chosen twelve, but given the attitude to women at that time, how could they have been asked to go out and teach the Gospel.

St Paul taught that there is neither male nor female, slave or free in our faith. Yet much of the Jewish patriarchal society carried over into early Christianity and the remnants are still there today. In the Jewish culture men, and only men, could be priests and only priests could enter the inner sanctum. We no longer live in anything resembling that patriarchal Jewish society, but much of our clericalism harks back to that time in their thinking. Many of our clerics are happy to enjoy the fruits of our 21st Century progress and accept, maybe ungraciously, that women can now hold great positions of power, but they still hang on to that bit about Jesus only choosing men as his apostles.

From a female point of view I like the passage in Ba 3: 9-15. God is telling Israel that they have forsaken the fountain of wisdom: 'Learn where knowledge is, where strength, where understanding - but who has found out where she lives, who has entered her treasure house?' Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount said, 'Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, they shall be satisfied.' On this promise those of us who believe in the right of women to have full participation in the Church will continue to hope.

NOELENE UREN is a retired primary school principal and a member of the Frenchs Forest Parish, NSW

Would ordaining women save the Catholic Church?

Stephanie Dowrick

In our 21st century, and even allowing for widespread secularism especially in the West, about 2.2 billion people still call themselves Christian. Of these, about 1.2 billion are Roman Catholic. This number is only slightly smaller than the total number of Muslims (1.3 billion). The overall picture is clear: Catholicism is still a force to be reckoned with. What's more, its influence – for better and worse – goes well beyond the parish gate. So maybe you'd prefer to ask, 'Should the Catholic Church be saved (from itself)?'

My own relationship with Catholicism is complex. I am an ordained interfaith minister and have been for many years. I am also a 'sort of Catholic. (The challenging, radical, non-compliant kind who can't walk away entirely. And I suspect there are many of us.) I am also shaped by faiths other than Christian, especially Judaism and Buddhism. Within Christianity, I am familiar with the mainstream progressive Christianity found in most but not all Uniting churches. In fact, I led interfaith, spiritually-inclusive services for more than 11 years at one of Sydney's largest Uniting churches and am more than grateful for their welcome. I'm also familiar with the uncluttered worship and social justice practices offered by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). I owe much to the Quakers. And some of that drives my frustrations and hopes for the infinitely more influential Catholic Church.

It was, after all, early Friends who dared suggest that we don't need a priest, bishop or any intermediary between ourselves and God. 'High or low', 'male or female', we're all available to the literal 'moving' of the Holy Spirit within our minds and hearts. We can all be inspired in our conduct and valuing of life. The resolute simplicity of Quaker thinking and the conduct it calls forth demands as well as develops a high level of emotional and spiritual intelligence. Such thinking refuses and refutes dualistic notions of worthy and not-worthy, saved and not-saved and of any race, gender, culture as intrinsically superior to any other. 'Walk cheerfully over the world', urged the dissenter and Quaker, George Fox, 'answering that of God in everyone'.

Almost 400 years later, the revolutionary notion of *God in everyone* still massively challenges us. It disallows prejudice, contempt or hatred. It disallows any form of dehumanising 'the other' or seeing difference as inevitably 'less than'. It disallows the notion that some are nearer and dearer to God than others. Or that some can read the mind of God and interpret it, while most (of us) cannot. It also disallows the belief that we can justify harming or killing others. 'Do no harm' becomes, in this context, quite literal.

Fox's revolutionary egalitarianism was both vertical and horizontal. It resonates in the way we view and relate to God, and to one another. As a lived experience, it transforms our very sense of self: how we respect and value our own lives as well as the lives of other people. Fox expressed this with almost unimaginable courage at a time when racial, class and particularly gender inequality was fiercely defended as God's plan by those with most to gain materially and ideologically. But Fox's ideas weren't new. Revolutionary egalitarianism is surely what Jesus taught. In the Hebrew Bible, too, you can find these lovely words: 'Do we not have just a single Father? Did not just one God create us all? Why then does humankind deal treacherously with one another? This betrays the teachings of our ancestors.' (Malachi 2:10) Mystical wisdom across all faith traditions holds that every life is of value and that our happiness and wellbeing depend absolutely upon our consideration of others – without exception. 'See yourself in others and others in yourself. You will have nothing to fear' is a teaching from Hinduism, a religion more ancient than Christ's own Judaism. But it was the early Christian, Paul, who wrote, 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile [or Greek], neither slave nor free person, neither male nor female. You are all one in Christ Jesus.'

Yet that potent message of inclusion (Galatians 3:28) seems soon lost as the early Christian communities of women and men, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, morphed into the highly masculinised, profoundly and unashamedly hierarchical Roman Catholic Church. For 2000

years, give or take a couple of centuries, and give or take some highly disputed anti-women remarks widely quoted and attributed to Paul. Male Christians have seen themselves as un-questionably ‘worthier’ than women not just to lead Christian worship and thinking, but to dictate it.

How tragic it is that for all its mighty, centuries-long and sometimes quite insane pursuit of ‘heresy’, the institutional Church failed to recognise its own heretical sexism, as well as its corrosive racism and religious prejudice. The ‘othering’ of women, of people of colour or of religions or denominations other than its own, brought devastating harm. And the time for that harm is over.

Unifying, loving, healing: that’s the work of religion (s). To be a clearer, cleaner channel of healing for the billion-plus people who look to it for spiritual sustenance, the institutional Church must heal itself. The sexual abuse scandals should be enough to wake those who sleep. But it is perhaps even more the distortions of spiritual power that allowed such abuse, such blatant gender prejudice, such appalling absence of care and insight, that must now end. At present, the least qualified male candidate can consider a call to the priesthood. The most qualified, willing woman cannot.

Welcoming women into the priesthood and the beating heart of the Church, re-framing a newly moral leadership with women and men as true equals, may not be enough to save the institutional Church – or the men who rule it. Perhaps in the West at least, entrenched sexism will reveal an organisation beyond repair. Yet I remain cautiously hopeful.

Alone among Christian denominations, the Catholic Church is also called ‘Mother’. A mother’s love – tender, humble and renewing – is surely what’s needed. If healing is to take place along with rebirth, it must be shared. We will rise only if we can rise together. ‘The hour has come to wake from sleep’, Paul wrote to the Romans (13: 9-12). ‘Love those with whom you share this world. Where love is present, no one is harmed. Love fulfils God’s longing for the world...Lay aside whatever lingers in the shadows...Live honourably... let your life be worthy of its light.’

Reverend Dr Stephanie Dowrick is the author of many books including *Seeking the Sacred, Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love, and Heaven on Earth*.

This article first appeared in “Pearls and Irritations” <https://johnmenadue.com>. It is published with permission.

<http://stephaniedowrick.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/StephanieDowrick/>

Catholic Women write an Open Letter to Pope Francis

Sign the letter via the [Catholic Women Speak](#) website

Catholic Women Speak and Voices of Faith are networks that campaign for greater participation and representation of women in the Catholic Church. They have also focused to get authentic voices of young Catholic women heard ahead of the Synod on Youth including two official representatives at the pre-synod meeting in March. They have jointly written an open letter to Pope Francis calling for more open dialogue between women and the Catholic hierarchy. As of Friday 18th May, the letter has been signed by close to 500 women around the world.

The letter cites the recently published **Statute of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life**. While expressing appreciation for the pastoral tone of the Statute, particularly with regard to some of the issues most associated with women such as procreation, pregnancy and abortion, the letter expresses concern about the use of the term feminine ‘genius’, which many women find problematic. It also suggests that qualities such as ‘specificity, reciprocity, complementarity and equal dignity’

referred to in the Statute have not yet been developed and interpreted in a way that accommodates women’s lived realities.

Catholic Women Speak is a global network of Catholic women and publishes collections of writings by women on themes relating to Synods of Bishops. It published the award-winning book *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Paulist Press, 2015) to coincide with the Synod of Bishops on the Family. This year, it is publishing *Catholic Women Speak: Visions and Vocations* (Paulist Press, 2018), in advance of the Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment. This book will be launched on 1st October at the Pontifical University Antonianum.

Voices of Faith works for a prophetic Catholic Church where women’s voices count, participate and lead on equal footing with men. The initiative campaigns extensively to promote women’s leadership in the Church. Voices of Faith organise the only International Women’s Day events ever held inside The Vatican. Ahead of the Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, Voices of Faith promotes the leadership of young women, including impactful participation of its representatives at the pre-synod meeting of youth in March 2018.

The letter is open for signature by Catholic women on the [Catholic Women Speak](#) website

Why Women Matter

International Women's Day address by

Mary McAleese

Independent Catholic News—March 8th, 2018



'Historical oppression of women has deprived the human race of untold resources, true progress for women cannot fail to liberate enormous reserves of intelligence and energy, sorely needed in a world that is groaning for peace and justice.'

(extract from presentation by Professor Maryann Glendon, member of Holy See Delegation to the UN Conference on Women, Beijing 1995)

The Israelites under Joshua's command circled Jericho's walls for seven days, blew trumpets and shouted to make the walls fall down. (cf. Joshua 6:1-20). We don't have trumpets but we have voices, voices of faith and we are here to shout, to bring down our Church's walls of misogyny. We have been circling these walls for 55 years since John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* first pointed to the advancement of women as one of the most important 'signs of the times'; 'they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons' The longstanding inferiority complex of certain classes because of their economic and social status, sex, or position in the State, and the corresponding superiority complex of other classes, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

At the Second Vatican Council Archbishop Paul Hallinan of Atlanta, warned the bishops to stop perpetuating 'the secondary place accorded to women in the Church of the 20th century' and to avoid the Church being a 'late-comer in their social, political and economic development'. The Council's decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* said it was important that women 'participate more widely ... in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate'. The Council's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* said the elimination of discrimination based on gender was a priority. Paul VI even commissioned a study on women in Church and Society. Surely, we thought then, the post-Conciliar Church was on the way to full equality for its 600 million female members. Yes, it is true that since the Council new roles and jobs have opened up to the laity including women but these have simply marginally increased the visibility of women in subordinate roles, including in the Curia, but they have added nothing to their decision-making power or their voice.

Remarkably since the Council, roles which were specifically designated as suitable for the laity have been deliberately closed to women. The stable roles of acolyte and lector and the permanent diaconate have been opened only to lay men. Why? Both laymen and women can be temporary altar servers but bishops are allowed to ban females and where they permit them in their dioceses individual pastors can ban them in their parishes. Why?

Back in 1976 we were told that the Church does not consider herself authorised to admit women to priestly ordination. This has locked women out of any significant role in the Church's leadership, doctrinal development and authority structure since these have historically been reserved to or filtered through ordained men.

Yet in divine justice the very fact of the permanent exclusion of women from priesthood, and all its consequential exclusions, should have provoked the Church hierarchy to find innovative and transparent ways of including women's voices as of right and not in trickles of tokenism by tapping, in the divinely instituted College of Bishops and in the man made entities such as the College of Cardinals, the Synod of Bishops and episcopal conferences, in all the places where the faith is shaped by decision and dogma and doctrine.

Just imagine this normative scenario—Pope Francis calls a Synod on the role of Women in the Church and 350 male celibates advise the Pope on what women really want! That is how ludicrous our Church has become. How long can the hierarchy sustain the credibility of a God who wants things this way, who wants a Church where women are invisible and voiceless in Church leadership, legal and doctrinal discernment and decision-making?

It was here in this very hall in 1995 that Irish Jesuit theologian Fr. Gerry O'Hanlon put his finger on the underpinning systemic problem when he steered Decree 14 through the Jesuits 34th General Congregation. It is a forgotten document but today we will dust it down and use it to challenge a Jesuit Pope, a reforming Pope, to real, practical action on behalf of women in the Catholic Church.

Decree 14 says: **We have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women. And, like many men, we have a tendency to convince ourselves that there is no problem. However unwittingly, we have often contributed to a form of clericalism which has reinforced male domination with an ostensibly divine sanction. By making this declaration we wish to react personally and collectively, and do what we can to change this regrettable situation.**

'The regrettable situation' arises because the Catholic Church has long since been a primary global carrier of the virus of misogyny. It has never sought a cure though a cure is freely available. Its name is 'equality'.

Down the 2000 year highway of Christian history came the ethereal divine beauty of the Nativity, the cruel sacrifice of the Crucifixion, the Hallelujah of the Resurrection and the rallying cry of the great commandment to love one another. But down that same highway came man-made toxins such as misogyny and homophobia to say nothing of anti-semitism with their legacy of damaged and wasted lives and deeply embedded institutional dysfunction.

The laws and cultures of many nations and faith systems were also historically deeply patriarchal and excluding of women; some still are, but today the Catholic Church lags noticeably behind the world's advanced nations in the elimination of discrimination against women. Worse still, because it is the 'pulpit of the world' (to quote Ban Ki Moon) its overt clerical patriarchalism acts as a powerful brake on dismantling the architecture of misogyny wherever it is found. There is an irony here, for education has been crucial to the advancement of women and for many of us, the education which liberated us was provided by the Church's frontline workers clerical and lay, who have done so much to lift men and women out of poverty and powerlessness and give them access to opportunity.

Yet paradoxically it is the questioning voices of educated Catholic women, and the courageous men who support them, which the Church hierarchy simply cannot cope with and scorns rather than engaging in dialogue. The Church which regularly criticises the secular world for its failure to deliver on human rights has almost no culture of critiquing itself. It has a hostility to internal criticism which fosters blinkered servility and which borders on institutional idolatry.

Today we challenge Pope Francis to develop a credible strategy for the inclusion of women as equals throughout the Church's root and branch infrastructure, including its decision-making. A strategy with targets, pathways and outcomes regularly and independently audited failure to include women as equals has deprived the Church of fresh and innovative discernment; it has consigned it to recycled thinking among a hermetically sealed cosy male clerical elite flattered and rarely challenged by those tapped for jobs in secret and closed processes. It has kept Christ out and bigotry in. It has left the Church flapping about awkwardly on one wing when God gave it two. We are entitled to hold our Church leaders to account for this and other egregious abuses of institutional power and we will insist on our right to do so no matter how many official doors are closed to us.

At the start of his papacy Pope Francis said 'We need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church'— words a Church scholar described as evidence of Francis' 'magnanimity'. Let us be clear, women's right to equality in the Church arises organically from divine justice. It should not depend on ad hoc papal benevolence.

Pope Francis described female theologians as the 'strawberries on the cake'. He was wrong. Women are the leaven in the cake. They are the primary handers on of the faith to their children. In the Western world the Church's cake is not rising, the baton of faith is dropping. Women are walking away from the Catholic Church in droves, for those who are expected to be key influencers in their children's faith formation have no opportunity to be key influencers in the formation of the Catholic faith. That is no longer acceptable. Just four months ago the Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin felt compelled to remark that 'the low standing of women in the Catholic Church is the most significant reason for the feeling of alienation towards it in Ireland today'.

Yet Pope Francis has said that ‘women are more important than men because the Church is a woman’. Holy Father, why not ask women if they feel more important than men? I suspect many will answer that they experience the Church as a male bastion of patronising platitudes to which Pope Francis has added his quota.

John Paul II has written of the ‘mystery of women’. Talk to us as equals and we will not be a mystery! Francis has said a ‘deeper theology of women’ is needed. God knows it would be hard to find a more shallow theology of women than the misogyny dressed up as theology which the magisterium currently hides behind.

And all the time a deeper theology is staring us in the face. It does not require much digging to find it. Just look to Christ. John Paul II pointed out that: ‘we are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women..... Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness....As we look to Christ.... it is natural to ask ourselves: how much of his message has been heard and acted upon?’

Women are best qualified to answer that question but we are left to talk among ourselves. No Church leader bothers to turn up, not just because we do not matter to them but because their priestly formation prepares them to resist treating us as true equals.

Back in this hall in 1995 the Jesuit Congregation asked God for the grace of conversion from a patriarchal Church to a Church of equals; a Church where women truly matter not on terms designed by men for a patriarchal Church but on terms which make Christ matter. Only such a Church of equals is worthy of Christ. Only such a Church can credibly make Christ matter. The time for that Church is now, Pope Francis. The time for change is now. □

Mary McAleese barred by Vatican from conference on women

Event organisers respond by inviting ex-president
to be keynote speaker

Patsy McGarry—Feb 2, 2018

The Vatican has barred former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, from taking part in a conference to mark International Women’s Day which was originally due to take place in the Holy See. The list of potential speakers required approval from a cardinal, but Mrs McAleese was not granted permission to participate. As a result, the organisers have moved the ‘Why Women Matter’ Conference on March 8th to premises outside the Vatican, and have also invited Mrs McAleese to be keynote speaker. She had previously been asked to take part in a panel discussion at the event. The conference was organised by the Voices of Faith group, which is seeking to convince the Vatican that women ‘have the expertise, skills and gifts to play a full leadership role in the church’.

The inclusion of Mary McAleese and two other speakers on its program was opposed by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. A Dubliner who spent most of his clerical life in the US, he is the most senior Irishman at the Vatican. □

Moments

Helen Kearins rsm
Extract from *Walk the Edges*

REFRAIN

*Remember who you are
And sing your song,
Let your ‘No’ re-echo
Making every woman strong
Speak, your truth
And bring your brothers home*

1. Too many years in silence
Seen but never heard
A language formed to keep us
On the fringe without a word.
Listen to the silence
Hear your sisters cry,
As each one tells her story
The others learn to fly.
2. A word demanding answers
Keeps happening in my mind;
Trouble-making questions
Such truth, so hard to find;
And in the new awareness
Of the way that things have been
Comes an anger at oppression
That can still remain unseen.
3. The dawning of a new day
Means dying to the old
To images and patterns
That can never make me whole.
Time to curse the darkness,
Mourn each other’s pain.
And in the power of grieving
Resolve to live again.
4. Hands no long holding
Dreams of yesteryear,
Are free to hold another’s
And to show a different way
Power once unknown
At the bottom of the pile
In the bonding of a circle
Will reform the single file.
5. The bonding power of woman
Brings new hope upon the earth;
The hollowness of empires
The timelessness of birth.
Begin the celebrations
Give image to the real
Full consciousness of Being
Only woman can reveal.

The Great Divide

Bernard Thorogood

As an old ecumenist I look back at the last century of work and prayer for the healing of our divisions, thankful of the progress made – slow progress, patchy and hesitant, but movement nonetheless. The great question remains. Will we ever feel able to heal the great divide of the Protestant Reformation? We cannot answer it in my few remaining years but I long for my grandchildren to know that this is not just a possibility but the will of the Spirit of God.

Such a healing will inevitably mean that both Protestants and Catholics will have to change; that is to accept elements of the faith and practice which are not part of their tradition. There will be difficult compromises on both sides. But rather than concentrating on these, I hope that we will be enabled to seek together the wholeness of the faith and the wholeness of the Christian family.

We will value unity and diversity

The whole story of the development of life suggests that diversity is life-enhancing; the diversity of species is of the greatest value. Protestants have been rather too keen on this, from the days when Luther and Zwingli argued about the elements in the Mass. There has indeed been a richness in the range of Christian devotion from the Quakers and Moravians to the Presbyterians, from charismatic groups to Anglican cathedrals. But some of the diversity has been problematic, with the loudest voices leading schism.

Catholics have been entranced by the unity, revealed in a pyramid structure of obedience, as though a great monolith best expresses the great wind of the Spirit. The structure has indeed preserved a global unity of the form of the church, and for that we all are immensely thankful. But the cost has been great as all dissident voices have been silenced, the clergy separated from the laity and the tradition, always fallible, treated as sacred.

So clearly we all have to move. I think that Protestants will need to recognise that diversity is not a solitary good; it is good when married to a sense of the wholeness of the body. (St Paul in I Corinthians 12 seems to me to have got this balance

exactly right.) Groups, schools, parties, denominations and religious communities may have gifts to share but they are only effective when lived out in the whole fellowship. Going it alone is not an option.

Catholics will need to think through what are the essential limits to diversity. The past stories of quashing the liberation theologians are not encouraging. If the great family of Christ is to hold his followers together there must be room for those on the edge, those exploring the mystery of God, those who are moved towards extravagant witness, those battling demons of political and economic tyranny. It's a big house.

Our faith will be changeless and ever-changing

There is something rock-like in our faith, based as it is in a historical event which we cannot change. It would be so convenient if we could re-make Jesus to suit our own private commitment. The social activists could make him the cleanser of all human temples and tax offices, while the scholars could exalt the Jewish reformer, the inheritor of Moses. But it does not work like that. The figure and the teaching of Christ are more paradoxical, more indicative, both of his time and timeless, so that we cannot capture Christ in our personal interest. Nailed to the cross he asks us: 'What can you see?'

So the church is witness to an unchanging faith that the entire Christ-event is a self-revelation of the God of eternity. Yet the faith is changing always and everywhere. We are not first century people and we cannot think of the human scene in the same way as the apostles. From their world of the Roman Empire, their trust in angelic voices and the flames of hell, from their confidence in an early return of Christ, from their class-ridden and paternalist society we have sailed away. We have to understand the Gospel witness in our world of psychiatry, astronomy, globalisation, the internet, wealth, and the collision of population growth with the natural world. A first century theology will not live.

When I was working with the World Council of Churches in Geneva I often questioned the use of the Nicene Creed as the great ecumenical text. Why should we take that statement, forged in heated political argument and written in the thought forms of the world of Constantine, and which omits all mention of the teaching and healing ministry of Christ as our key text? It may please classicists but it does not shape our faith.

And every human civilisation and culture changes the character of faith. Polynesian faith is communal, Chinese faith much more individual, the faith of black Africans more political and the Celtic faith more deeply imbued with the natural world. This is the richness of our human experience, a treasury of insight.

The Priestly Church and the People's Church

The priestly church trusts in clear boundaries, who is in and who is out, who may come to the Holy Table and who may not. It is professional, learned, often wise, very careful of its assets. It keeps its secrets and its laws quietly within the structure. It is confident of the apostolic tradition and the continuity of the episcopate. It is afraid that reform means revolution.

The People's church is much more vague about its membership; the Holy Table is open to all who love Christ. It treats all who are drawn to it as seekers and pilgrims; all serious questions can be asked and discussed. It trusts that all followers of Christ are called to a ministry, a service of love, with the ordained ministry as just one variety of that service. It is not impressive in buildings or assets.

There is something of the body of Christ in both these types; it is not a simple Catholic/Protestant divide. The Priestly church has been strong in devotion and prayer, in teaching and in global unity; these are not small gifts. But it has far too often failed to deal well with power; that is the constant temptation. The people's church is more alert to the winds of the Spirit, is more inclusive, has usually made progress towards the equality of women and

men in every aspect of church life and service, and engages all in decision-making. Can we hold these two strands together?

Just a few clues

The only leadership model we have is the Good Shepherd; we need no other. That means a pastoral heart, a rejection of all the trappings of power and the ability to lead towards the nutritious living bread of the spirit. 'Feed my sheep', was not an afterthought but the essence of ministry.

The Bible will remain for all Christians the foundation text, the window into the purpose and character of God. We can all sit before that text and let it speak to us, not making it an idol but a gift to be treated with respect, intelligence and openness of heart.

Humanism is to be celebrated, not decried, for human personality, talents and love are wonders of creation's story. The mission of God is far wider than the church; it is in all struggles for justice and all search for reconciliation, in all self-giving for others, in all daily faithfulness and in all the joy of children.

I see all this as something like an agenda for the next century of ecumenism. May our grandchildren bridge the great divide.

Bernard Thorogood is a retired Uniting Church minister (now 90). He was the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church in the UK and for six years of that he was chairman of the British Council of Churches. So he has been swimming in the ecumenical sea for a long time, and somehow it still seems the way to go. He is an ARC subscriber.



Who Owns Church Property?

Elizabeth Lonergan

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle has announced that it will be necessary to sell Church property in order to pay compensation to victims of abuse by some of the clergy. This is causing pain and some opposition in communities in the diocese, who have little or no say in the future use of these buildings. (*Background Briefing ABC RN 31.3.2018.*) This program gave me thought about the sale of church properties which has been niggling me for some time and applies to all denominations.

The communities who do not want their church buildings sold argue from an historical perspective that the property was funded and built by early settlers who later gifted the property to the diocese on the (unwritten) but implicit understanding that it would be held for benefit of the parishioners of the area in perpetuity. They are also asking: 'Should those who did no harm pay for the sins of those who did?' which raises another question which I will not deal with here.

There can be no question that congregations are dwindling and it makes good business sense to sell these buildings. However, I would argue that Churches of all denominations have accepted these gifts of property with willingness but have failed to appreciate the full responsibility of preservation and the obligation to the loyal parishioners over the decades for better or for worse. No provision has been made for this by way of special purpose funds and special management planning. But this is no excuse to now sell off these properties because it is all too hard. There is a moral obligation involved here, which the churches, unfortunately, fail to recognise.

I would argue that much of the property owned by Churches, even if not actually built by parishioners, has been provided and maintained by the sweat and pennies of parishioners, many of whom went without to make weekly offerings, gave up time for working bees, gave their skills without payment – all for the benefit of their Church communities which contributed in no small way to the wealth of the institution.

Therefore, I see an obligation on Church administrators of preservation in an historical sense, as these buildings are our early history of settlers battling to survive and seeking consolation in prayer and worship. The importance of Archival records should also be appreciated and be available for future generations.

I would also argue strongly that there is an obligation of preservation in a moral sense for a property held free of debt, for parishioners who maintained the buildings with working bees, donation of furnishings, the payment of stipends and the many other unknown services and hours lay people have given freely over the decades. I see these properties (while the diocese may be on the Title Deed) in a moral sense belonging both to the church and the people and this needs to be recognised, and any sale or change of use discussed with parishioners as co-owners with rights and responsibilities.

While a Sunday service may no longer be practical, these old Churches should be seen as our spiritual and sacred places, and a blessing to the community, a reminder that there is more to our lives than the physical. With some imagination and good management these buildings could be maintained and serve a useful purpose in every community, as well as continuing our connections to our past. For who knows what the future will bring – maybe a renewal of faith and worship when clergy and lay people are equally valued for their spiritual gifts, a time when these buildings will once again be needed.

The whole question gives warning to the generous, open-hearted people who plan to donate valuable assets to any church in the future. It would seem necessary to give thought to any future development which may see your gift used in a different way to your original intention, because unfortunately at this time our Christian churches have lost the sense of the spiritual, and worship at the altar of wealth and power.

Elizabeth Lonergan has been a Catechist for almost thirty years and sees the value of adult education in the Church which is still not taken seriously. She has a BA and had great hopes in the views displayed in Vatican II, followed by great disappointment at the failure of the hierarchy to implement them. She no longer attends Sunday Mass and will not support clergy of all ranks until serious reform is undertaken. But she feels her spiritual life is still rich and thriving! She lives in the Blue Mountains.

Why clericalism matters

Andrew Hamilton

Eureka Street 27 February 2018

In the Catholic Church clericalism is now the whipping boy of choice. But what it embraces is less clear.

It is a pejorative word, used by people of others but never of themselves, and is normally defined ostensibly by reference to examples of it. We know who is a clericalist even if we are not sure what he is. So it is worth pausing to reflect on clericalism and its significance for church and society.

Although clericalism is rarely defined, it is possible to reconstruct a perfect case of clericalism by enumerating the various attitudes and practices that critics find fault with.

The perfect clericalist always dresses formally in a style that identifies him clearly as a Catholic priest. He is also formal in address, addressing and speaking of other priests as *father* and bishops as *my lord*. He insists, too, that others address him as *father* or *my lord*. His pastoral relationships with laypeople are formal and asymmetrical.

This asymmetry is based on a strongly hierarchical understanding of the Catholic Church in which authority and power are centralised in bishops and local power in the priest. Boundaries both within the Church and between the Church and the surrounding world are clearly marked out by clear and binding rules governing Catholic allegiance. It is the job of the priest to insist on and police them.

The interest of the perfect clericalist is narrowly focused on the internal relationships, practices and customs of the Church, and particularly on the conduct of worship of which he sees himself as custodian. He shows little interest in the outside world except when he sees it intruding on the rights and freedom of the Church. His conversational style is didactic. He does not easily engage in dialogue, and is more comfortable issuing authoritative judgments and final decisions.

Common to these traits is the urge to control — to have self control, control in relationships, control

over the beliefs and practices of his congregation, over the language of faith, and over boundaries.

‘We need good leaders at every level who will leave aside claims based on special knowledge, dignity of rank, difference from the people they serve. They will focus on consultation, on the claims of a common humanity and on the recognition of shared uncertainty.’

Such is the perfect clericalist — the sum of the qualities attributed to the accused by their critics. Some critics have tried to explain clericalism by psychological analysis of these traits. To my mind the attempt is misguided and unfair. The perfect case by definition does not represent the living people identified with it. In reality people will display some of these traits and not others, and their life and behaviour will be as complex as the rest of us.

Furthermore, the perfect clericalist is a construction of his critics. To try to psychoanalyse him is to do what many Catholics of an earlier generation did to Communists. By using such a method you would expect to identify both as psychopaths. But the psychopathy might just be your own.

A more helpful form of reflection is to set the attitudes and behaviour of the perfect clericalist within a broader historical and cultural context. If you read popular English novels of early last century you will find the same formality of dress and address, the same deference to authority, the same assumption that people of a particular class and education have a right to judge and rule, the same didactic style of many people in positions of authority and the same insistence on boundaries.

At a time when the Catholic Church was growing quickly, was relatively homogeneous in migrant origins, and marked by tight social boundaries with other churches and more privileged groups of society, economic groups, and by an educational gap between the clergy and the vast majority of their congregations, priests with some of the qualities and attitudes attributed to the perfect clericalist could be reasonably viable provided they were also pastorally inclined. They had much in common with leaders of such other social groups such as judges, police, military, churches and schools.

They could fit in a world of stable relationships and strong sense of community. But that world has gone, replaced by a more fragmented world of rapid technological and social change and an emphasis on flexibility based on individual choice and of egalitarian instincts in dealing with it.

Today, however, the boundaries between the Catholic Church and society are porous, its ability to win its young is largely lost and it has lost much of its moral authority through clerical sexual abuse and its cover up.

In such a world the attitudes and qualities identified with clericalism are both odd and counterproductive. An inflexible formalism in dress and address, a strong emphasis on the boundaries between church and society, a non-consultative exercise of authority, a fussy preoccupation with rules and customs and a claim to wisdom founded in office are seen by Catholics and others as evidence of alienation and of unwarranted presumption. We might wonder, too, if they are consistent with Jesus' instructions to his disciples.

But it is better to light candles than to curse the darkness. It is common to complain of the lack of strong leadership both in public life and in the

Catholic Church. That comes in part because of the difficulty of reading the world we are entering and identifying good ways through. In such circumstances we need good leaders at every level who will leave aside claims based on special knowledge, dignity of rank, difference from the people they serve. They will focus on consultation, on the claims of a common humanity and on the recognition of shared uncertainty, in order to identify the ground on which they stand and ways forward.

And in their own demeanour they will shape symbols of a humble and shared endeavour. We should encourage them when we see them and demand them when we don't. □

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Chris Geraghty Jesus – The Forgotten Feminist

Extracts from *Pearls and Irritations*
8 May 2017

I have long been interested in why the officers of the Catholic Church have been so reluctant to consider involving women in the governance of their institution and in its sacramental ministry. So I decided to write a book about it.

In prosecuting their case and to 'explain' their antiquated unwillingness to even entertain the possibility, the popes and bishops have fallen back on a few old chestnuts. The church's theological hero, Thomas Aquinas, for example, used to teach his students that women could not possibly be ordained priests because they lack the pre-eminence which the office demanded. Female ordination was contrary to nature. Women obviously did not exhibit the necessary level of dignity, of gravitas which men were able to muster. Perhaps, in the light of the Royal Commission's findings, this consideration does not carry the same degree of persuasion today, but those in charge don't want to abandon it – at least not yet.

His behaviour as described in the Gospels was in complete contrast to what was expected of any Jewish man, especially of a preacher or teacher. Jesus had been a radical, counter-cultural figure preaching a message of inclusion, of equality, of forgiveness, love and non-discrimination. His life had been a moment of grace which, if grabbed with both hands, could have produced an entirely different cultural world – a moment of human history which was let slip, never to return. Jesus' behaviour and his attitudes had been in complete contrast with what I had been reading about women from the pen of Tertullian or in the letters of Jerome, from popes and prelates, poets and theologians. Before I wrote my book on the misogynist stream poisoning the traditions and practices flowing from the source, I had to prepare the ground with a book about the gold standard governing all Christian attitudes and behaviour.

Jesus – The Forgotten Feminist tells the story of this Jesus and his deeply personal relationship with his female friends and women in the marketplace. I have written it in an attempt to help reset the debate about the place and status of women in the communities of Jesus followers.

Chris Geraghty, theologian, former priest and former judge
of the District Court of NSW, now living in gentle
retirement

REVIEWS

Where did all the young men go?

Edited by Paul Casey

2015, FeedAread.com Publishing

This book is compelling reading for those interested in the austere seminary (at Springwood and Manly) education in the 1960's of a group of 23 young men with ambitions to become priests; the journey of 11 of those who left the seminary for various reasons before ordination: the 12 who made it to ordination and their subsequent parish appointments, and the nine who left the priesthood some years after ordination (one priest was suspended).

Paul Casey, the editor of the book, and a former priest himself had the conviction to put together these life experiences, which turned out to be a real eye-opener to the reader. He drew on his own class of 37 students from 1960-1967 and was able to get 23 of this cohort to contribute their stories. Each contributor wrote his story independently and none had access to the writings of others.

It is intriguing reading to learn about the motivations for becoming a priest, the individual

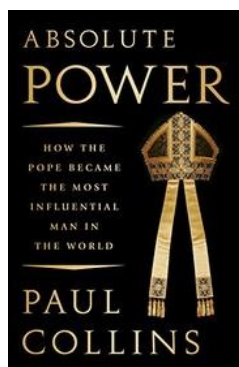
seminary experiences and practical life in the parish, as well as the various deep reasons for leaving the priesthood after so many years of study in trying circumstances. One gets the feeling that seminary education in those days was not a small contributor to departures from the priesthood. The curriculum seemed devoid of topics preparing these young men for the long challenges of all sorts of matters priests need to deal with in their daily duties.

In contrast to the seminary experiences of these 23 young men in the 60's, the April 2018 issue of *Broken Bay News* refers to the new seminary intakes for 2018. The Rector of the Seminary is assuring them that 'the Seminary is a place of love and prayer, where those in formation are encouraged to find their deepest happiness as they grow as human beings and as men preparing to be good and dedicated priests'.

If some of these principles had been applied more in the 60's, who knows how many of the 20 who left may have carried on to the end?

Herb Schoch

Dr HERB SCHOCH is a part-time academic at Macquarie University and a member of St Anthony's Catholic Church, Terrey Hills, in Frenchs Forest Parish, NSW

**ABSOLUTE POWER**

How the Pope Became
the Most Influential
Man in the World

by Paul Collins

KIRKUS REVIEW

Theologian and Vatican commentator, Paul Collins (*The Birth of the West: Rome, Germany, France, and the Creation of Europe in the Tenth Century*, 2013, etc.) delivers a critique of the last two centuries of papal history.

When Pope Pius VI died as a prisoner in France in 1799, the Catholic Church was at a low ebb, battered by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In this comprehensive history, the author explores the fierce intellectual battles over doctrine and liturgy that marked the papacy's transition from spiritually marginalised ruler of the Papal States to telegenic moral tutor of global stature, a progress about which Collins appears somewhat ambivalent. His title seems to refer to the Vatican I decree *Pastor aeternus* (1870) declaring that the pope is vested with 'the absolute fullness of supreme power' about which the author writes: 'There is something almost demented about such a claim.' It obviously doesn't refer to temporal power, and Collins rejects its application to spiritual power as well, as incompatible with the life and message of Jesus. Alongside internal political conflicts, this well-researched narrative presents struggles over subtle points of doctrine that may baffle or weary general readers but have been effective in harassing and suppressing would-be reformers. Throughout, the author rails against the hierarchical, centralised, legalistic church promoted by most recent popes as compared to the more collegial, decentralised pastoral church advocated by Pope Francis. Collins has little use for any of the popes in this period except John XXIII and Francis, believing that the others either acted directly to enhance the power and centrality of the papacy or were ineffectual place holders who permitted conservative cardinals to do the same. He is utterly contemptuous of the Curia, the Vatican's administrative arm, a 'bureaucratic incubus [that] should be summarily swept away'. The author concludes with a series of recommendations for reform of the church, focused largely on devolution. A thoroughly researched but tendentious history in support of a call for a radically different papacy and church.

Have your say!

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