



arcvoice

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What is Needed for Genuine Church Reform?

The extent of clerical sexual abuse and cover-up gradually being revealed across the world has drawn out many opinions about action to be taken in order for the Church to recover from this appalling scandal. Several contributions enclosed in this issue point to key improvements that could be put under three general headings: reduction in clerical power, more equitable governance and credible doctrine. But where should the priority be when initiating reform if we expect the practice of the Catholic faith to thrive again with integrity?

Clericalism is a renewed level of focus, highlighted by the findings of the Royal Commission. Many people emphasise that the Church will not change while clergy maintain their exalted status (as ontologically different and therefore closer to God), a status often accepted, at least unconsciously, by the majority of conservative laity. The structural monarchy of the Pope, supported by Canon Law, adds to this, illustrated by the manner in which John Paul II and Benedict XVI could obstruct the whole spirit of Vatican II. Only the Pope can fix this lack of accountability.

There are those who give priority to achieving better governance by having lay men and women exercising major decision-making roles. But the question remains whether they would be simply helping to govern an ever-diminishing Church, especially in the western world. The cohort of the laity pressing for this appear to be mostly middle-aged or older and reasonably comfortable with Church doctrine. In light of the imbalance of power mentioned above, it is hard to see even diocesan councils having enough influence when it comes to significant change.

While not denying the above factors, there are those who have come to realise just how much outdated Church tradition, teaching and doctrine drive and support the practices that prevent the institutional Church from changing in order to remain relevant. The power of the clergy is upheld by the theology of the 'male only' priesthood. Scriptural scholars and enlightened theologians are not encouraged to further question dogma and teaching when we now have much more knowledge enabling us to interpret things differently.

None of this can be sustained in an increasingly educated and socially e-connected world. The consequence is that younger generations, in particular, question the very basis of the Church and their absence from its pews does not appear to be

because of inequitable decision-making power or poor governance. They see hypocrisy in celibacy, abuse and cover-up; in lip-service to equality while women are excluded; in 'love for everyone' while LGBTIQ people are shunned; in espousing compassion while ignoring the ambivalence in teachings that do little to alleviate poverty and over-population. These are the people whom we expect to support the teaching and practices of the Catholic Church of the future. Should we be surprised if they prefer to dismiss the Church and follow the inspiration of Jesus in alternative ways?

John Buggy

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Pell Conviction a Wake-up Call

Eric Hodgens

The first standoff between Christian leaders was between Paul, the travelling missionary, and James the leader of the local church in Jerusalem. Both were Jews to their bootstraps, but Paul's tours were in the gentile world. If gentiles found faith in Jesus as The Lord, he accepted them directly into the fold – not expecting them to become Jews first. Baptism replaced circumcision. James was not happy, so Paul went to Jerusalem to have it out. He won. Ultimately Christianity became a separate religion from Judaism.

The standoff was over whether we go beyond accepted barriers or see the signs of the times and branch out in a new direction. The question only arose because new opportunities beckoned. If Paul's policy had been successfully blocked, Christianity would have remained a sect within Judaism and probably faded away. Two green lights were necessary: Paul's vision of expansion and James's final acceptance – bipartisanship. It is wise to be cautious; but refusal to adapt is death.

Factional confrontation has endured in Christianity to this day. The liberal faction is committed to moving with the needs of the times. The conservative faction does not like change and wants creed, rules and structures to stay the same. This outlook is *reactionary*, and sometimes *restorationist*.

Christianity became institutionalised early. Structure, doctrine and laws developed. A movement of faith became an organised religion. It *began* as a movement imitating Jesus' way of life; it *became* a large organisation with systematised beliefs and laws. It developed a priesthood which controlled the beliefs and laid down the laws. It became literally hierarchical (priest-ruled).

Power is seductive and became a point of division as the hierarchy's power expanded. Some hierarchs still gave priority to the Jesus way of life, but most gave priority to controlling the organisation – a tension.

Power is maintained by *control*. Church hierarchy:

- Controls the ideology and propaganda;
- Controls the law;
- Controls the liturgy and
- Controls the selection of bishops.

The last of these has been a major tactic in the Catholic Culture Wars. The Catholic Church is still an old-style monarchy. The bishop runs his diocese answerable only to the Pope. He is the sole overseer of doctrine, law and administration in his diocese. There is no separation of powers, no accountability, no transparency.

Since the start of the 20th century the Pope has claimed the sole right to appoint all bishops. Since Vatican II the popes have used this power to control the church. Paul VI used this power to reign in the Dutch Catholic Church. He saw it as too liberal too fast. He appointed conservative bishops Adrien Simonis to Rotterdam and Jan Gijzen to Roermond against local recommendations. The Dutch implementation of Vatican II was the most visionary and energetic in Europe. Paul's appointments crushed that movement. He won the battle but lost the war. Rank and file Dutch Catholics simply turned their backs and walked away. Gone forever.

John Paul II turned episcopal selection into an art form. Benedict XVI continued the policy. Wear the clerical collar, oppose contraception, women's ordination and general confession. Toe Wojtyla's line or be dropped; no consideration given to pastoral commitment.

The result is a world-wide episcopacy high on compliance, low on leadership and heavily skewed to the right. It's unfair to blame them because they were chosen precisely for these qualities.

George Pell has had ever-growing influence in Rome since the 90s when he was appointed to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. For years he was also on the congregation that selected bishops.

Pell has been in the vanguard of the ideology and propaganda battles of the Wojtyla era. The Theology of the Body, with its excessive weight on sexual ethics, became a key descriptor of living the Christian life. Institutions like Opus Dei, The JP II Institute for Marriage and the Family, The Napa Institute in California and Notre Dame university, Sydney promoted the ideology supported by conservative writers like George Weigel, Ross Douthat and John Haldane.

Pell's conviction will probably lessen his influence, but his legacy will continue. Most Australian episcopal appointments for the last thirty years are clearly his choice. His ghost haunts the two main sees of Sydney and Melbourne. Both archbishops are his protégés, educated in his ideology. Both could hold their posts for 20 years.

His hand can also be seen in English and USA episcopal appointments.

The whole English-speaking world is saddled with a Mass text produced under the control of Pell's Vox Clara committee. An ideological victory, but a liturgical disaster and a pastoral deterrent.

The present management structure of the Church has failed us. New, more representative management is necessary to prevent further implosion. Pell's conviction brings all this back to mind and into sharp focus.

ERIC HODGENS is a retired Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. This article was first posted on *Pearls & Irritations* 14 March 2019.

Church reform must be swift, genuine and not left in hands of the bishops

Francis Sullivan

Yesterday's announcement of the conviction of Cardinal George Pell has been shattering for many and a relief for others. The fact the most senior cleric in Australia has been found guilty is devastating on many levels. Not the least because he was such a high-profile proponent for the safeguarding of children in the church and its provision of compensation to victims.

The Cardinal is no stranger to controversy. He revelled in the culture wars of the church and few ever wondered what he thought on matters of politics, religion and social change.

A lightning rod for discontent, the Cardinal soldiered through conflict after conflict with the resolve of an ideologue. His steadfast conservatism brought him institutional regard though it has been very divisive within the Catholic and wider community.

He is every bit a personification of the institutional church and is seen by the public as its head in Australia. Now he is convicted of crimes he has always denied. No wonder the reception in the Catholic community is so mixed.

The judicial process is set to run its course. What can't wait is real reform of the institutional church. And most tellingly, that reform cannot be left in the hands of bishops and religious leaders. For too long their change has been that they are part of the solution, not the problem. This has been blown apart by the revelations of the royal commission and, if it sticks, the conviction of Cardinal Pell.

The secrecy and obfuscation that has characterised the church's approach to the clerical sexual abuse of children cannot remain the default position when shocking news like the Cardinal's conviction arrives.

For too long victims were not believed and the might of the church silenced their cries. Where victims received money they were shackled by confidentiality agreements. In so many ways the church acted like a corporation in the business of risk management rather than responding in heartfelt and honest ways.

And all this was orchestrated by bishops, religious leaders and officials in the name of the church. Now that name, including its perceived head, is in public shame.

The sexual abuse scandal has revealed the obvious. It is about the abuse of power, position and privilege. Vulnerable children and adults have been prey to opportunists and pathological deviants.

The royal commission found that close to 7 per cent of priests sexually offended against children. Yet not one bishop or religious leader voluntarily resigned their post prior to the commission's revelations and none have since.

Unless the powers that be open the governance of the institution to lay people, including women, it is doomed to repeat the same culture of defensiveness and ideological positioning.

Since the commission handed down its report, the church leadership has appeared to retreat into its shell. Once again, it seems preoccupied with its image and interests.

It took little to see them out of the blocks when school funding was at risk but there has been precious little done to launch new rigorous standards on child protection or get going on an array of recommendations from the Truth Justice and Healing Council.

Many have wondered whether the clerics are reclaiming the ground they begrudgingly ceded during the commission years. If so, this doesn't bode well for my church.

These days there are fewer Catholics practising. The drift risks becoming a tidal shift. More than indifference, Catholics are finding their church irrelevant and, with this news, corrupt at the highest levels. Where lay Catholics seek to take responsibility and proffer a reform agenda they are too quickly dismissed or treated as dissidents.

This arrogance must be purged, otherwise the decay and disillusionment will continue to fester.

FRANCIS SULLIVAN was the chief executive officer of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council of the Catholic Church from 2012 to 2018. The council co-ordinated the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This article appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 27.2.19

The following is an extract from
John Shelby Spong:
Unbelievable
 – *Why Neither Ancient Creeds nor the
 Reformation Can Produce a living Faith
 Today*
 (Harper Collins 2019)

THE TWELVE THESES

1. **GOD:** Understanding God in theistic terms as ‘a being’, supernatural in power, dwelling somewhere external to the world and capable of intervening in the world with miraculous power, is no longer believable. Most God talk in liturgy and conversation has thus become meaningless. What we must do is find the meaning to which the word ‘God’ points.

2. JESUS THE CHRIST

If God can no longer be thought of in theistic terms, then conceiving of Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity has also become a bankrupt concept. Can we place the experience of ‘the Christ’ into words that have meaning?

3. ORIGINAL SIN

The Biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which we human beings have fallen into ‘original sin’ is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense. We have to find a new way to tell the old story.

4. THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The virgin birth understood as literal biology is totally unbelievable. Far from being a bulwark in defence of the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth actually destroys that divinity.

5. MIRACLES

In a post-Newtonian world, super-natural invasions of the natural order, performed by God or an ‘incarnate Jesus’, are simply not viable explanations of what actually happened. Miracles do not ever imply magic.

6. ATONEMENT THEOLOGY

Atonement theology, especially in its most bizarre ‘substitutionary’ form, presents us with a God who is barbaric, a Jesus who is a victim and it turns human beings into little more than guilt-filled creatures. The phrase ‘Jesus died for my sins’ is not just dangerous, it is absurd. Atonement theology is a concept that we must escape.

7. EASTER

The Easter event gave birth to the Christian movement and continues to transform it, but that does not mean that Easter was the physical resuscitation of Jesus’ deceased body back into human history. The earliest biblical records state that ‘God raised him’. Into what? we need to ask. The reality of the experience of resurrection must be separated from its later mythological explanations.

8. THE ASCENSION

The biblical story of Jesus’ ascension assumes a three-tiered universe, a concept that was dismissed some five hundred years ago. If Jesus’ ascension was a literal event of history, it is beyond the capacity of our twenty-first-century minds to accept it or to believe it. Does the ascension have any other meaning, or must we defend first-century astrophysics?

9. ETHICS

The ability to define and to separate good from evil can no longer be achieved with appeals to ancient codes such as the Ten Commandments or even the Sermon on the Mount. Contemporary moral standards must be hammered out in the juxtaposition between life-affirming moral principles and external situations. No modern person has any choice but to be a situationist.

10. PRAYER

Prayer, understood as a request made to an external, theistic deity to act in human history, is little more than an hysterical attempt to turn the Holy into the service of the human. Most of our prayer definitions arise out of the past and are thus dependent on an understanding of God that no longer exists. Let us instead think of prayer as the practice of the presence of God, the act of embracing transcendence and the discipline of sharing with another the gifts of living, loving and being.

11. LIFE AFTER DEATH

If we are to talk about eternal life with any degree of intellectual integrity, we must explore it as a dimension of transcendent reality and infinite love – a reality and love that, when experienced, let us share in the eternal.

12. UNIVERSALISM

We are called by this new faith into radical connectedness. Judgment is not a human responsibility. Discrimination against any human being on the basis of that which is a ‘given’ is always evil and does not serve the Christian goal of offering ‘abundant life’ to all. Any structure in either the secular world or the institutional church that diminishes the humanity of any child of God on any external basis of race, gender or sexual orientation must be exposed publicly and vigorously. There can be no reason in the church of tomorrow for excusing or even forgiving discriminatory practices. ‘Sacred tradition’ must never again provide a cover to justify discriminatory evil. The call to universalism must be the message of Christianity. □

Cardinal Marx: church needs to seriously discuss celibacy, role of women and sexual morality

Zita Fletcher

Catholic News Service, America Magazine

15 March 2019

(slightly edited)

Cardinal Marx, president of the German bishops' conference, said that the Catholic Church in Germany is at a point where serious debate, including on priestly celibacy, the role of women and openness to doing things in a new way must be encouraged. The sexual abuse scandal and demands for reform have changed the German church.

He went on to say: ‘The church in Germany is experiencing a break. The faith can only grow and deepen if we are liberated from blocked thinking, in order to pursue free and open debates and the ability to take new positions and go down new paths. ‘The church needs a synodal advancement. Pope Francis encourages this. We will create formats for open debates and bind ourselves to proceedings that facilitate a responsible participation of women and men from our dioceses. We know about the cases of clerical abuses of power. It betrays the trust of people searching for firm footing and religious orientation. What must be done to achieve the necessary reduction of power and to construct a fairer and legally bound order will be to clarify a synodal path.’

Germany's bishops said they are still working on how to move forward following the sexual abuse scandal and other pressing issues. ‘Many voices can be heard saying that there must be a concrete list of measures. I can only say in reply that we have this catalogue and we are still working on the points named there,’ Cardinal Marx said. During the meeting, the bishops heard the analyses and opinions of theology professors, female administrators within the church and church officials on issues pertaining to the sexual abuse crisis, church law, women in church

administration and Catholic sexual morality. He said debates on celibacy require further study.

‘We treasure celibacy as an expression of religious commitment to God. How far it must adhere to the witness of priests in our church, we will find out.’ Cardinal Marx also said Catholic sexual morality is in need of development. ‘We perceive that we are often not versed in questions regarding modern sexual behaviour,’ He was aware that the results of the conference would not satisfy many people. ‘Not all of the findings of our discussions will meet with your understanding. For this reason, we ask for your accompaniment in prayer, your support and your critical voice. Only thus can we advance together as the people of God.’ He also acknowledged the widespread disillusionment among German Catholics. ‘At this assembly, we have seen, heard and experienced that you, the believers in whose service we stand and with whom we feel bound in community, accompany our consultations with criticism,’ said Cardinal Marx. He thanked the faithful for their prayers and their criticism. ‘We would like to tell you that we see and hear you. Your criticisms, worries, hardships, doubts and your demands,’ he said. ‘I tell you sincerely – we understand it.’

Cardinal Marx also commented on his experience attending the Vatican summit on protection of minors, convened by Pope Francis. ‘It (the conference) was not about a hastily assembled list of measures, but rather a globally realistic view and the awareness: We bear responsibility to the victims across the whole world,’ he said. ‘None of us can negate or completely taboo the problem any longer.’ During the conference, the bishops revealed that one of the steps in sexual abuse reform mandated by Germany's federal government has been postponed.

‘We have postponed work regarding monitoring areas of intervention and prevention in recent months, not least of all because we just held a major Catholic-oriented symposium last November on the theme of monitoring,’ said Bishop Stephan Ackermann of Trier, spokesman for the bishops' conference on child abuse issues. Bishop Ackermann explained that church officials, diocesan abuse prevention staff and an independent commission had participated in the previous year's discussion. □

The Clergy Club

John Crothers

I don't remember a lot of detail about my ordination ceremony back in 1985. It was all a bit overwhelming, and much of it passed in a blur. But there is one thing that has always stuck in my mind, and that was at the sign of peace when one of the concelebrating priests put his hand on my shoulder and said 'Welcome to the club'.

It didn't take me long to realise that the priesthood is indeed a club, a very elite club, characterised by exclusiveness, aloofness, and an exaggerated sense of one's importance. You can see it in the way many of the clergy act towards the laity, often in a way that can be quite dismissive and even rude. As a member of the club myself, I have seen it at close quarters and, like every priest and bishop, I have at times acted with an attitude of self-importance and exclusiveness.

Where does this clergy club attitude come from? How do those who profess to be of service to the laity, end up expecting, and at times even demanding, to be served by them? Why is it that so many of the clergy end up seeing themselves as more important than those who are not ordained?

The seeds of the club mentality are many. It begins with a Catholic culture that places priests and bishops on a pedestal. Certainly in the past, and still today, most young men who enter the seminary go in with this attitude. Then, in the seminary itself the students are constantly told how special they are. The theology itself reinforces this perception. The notion of ontological change, for example, is still taught in the seminary. It states that through ordination the priest is changed in his very being, making him fundamentally different from the laity.

The student is told that, as a priest, he will be an *alter Christus*, another Christ, in a way that a lay person can never be another Christ. His life is sacred, not secular like the laity. It is not hard to see, then, how a club mentality can develop in the clergy that disconnects them from the laity both psychologically and emotionally.

It is not only in the Church, of course, where a club mentality develops among those at the top. It is in every organisation, large and small. But in the Church it is exaggerated because of other factors. Firstly it is an all-male club, and the continued exclusion of women from ordained ministry reinforces the exclusive club mentality. It is a celibate club, at least in the Latin Rite, and so priests and bishops have no family, and no children, to keep them grounded.

In addition, the rigid hierarchical structure of the Church keeps the clergy in a closed system, living in a clerical bubble. Also, there is no system of professional appraisal for the clergy, no checks and balances, and so the club mentality becomes more and more entrenched.

Will it ever change? To be honest, it is often hard to be optimistic. No pope is ever going to wake up one morning and decide it is time to look again at issues like optional celibacy, women's

ordination, homosexuality, contraception, divorced and remarried Catholics, and the like. It will only happen when the clerical culture changes, when bishops and priests start to look at the world in a way that is less in keeping with Church theology and law, and more in keeping with people's lives and needs, as Jesus did.

But I remain hopeful. That's why I wrote the book.

The Clergy Club is available directly from John Crothers for \$30 including postage. Just email him at john.crothers@sydneycatholic.org with your postal address.

It is also available online from outlets such as Garratt Publishing and Amazon.com.au
It is published by ATF Theology, Adelaide, 2018



On the Receiving End of Clericalism

Margaret Knowlden

John Crothers' very timely book reminded me of personal incidences of clericalism which have had their impact.

Post-Vatican II Catholics will have no memory of just how much clericalism pervaded our lives. If we wanted to eat meat on Friday (so as not to embarrass a hostess), attend a Protestant wedding or christening, miss Mass on Sunday or Holiday of Obligation, or send our children to a State school, we had to seek permission from the PP. Failure to do so, and to go ahead regardless, was a mortal sin.

The law of fasting from midnight before receiving Communion was also set in stone. So when my mother, nursing her tenth child, asked the PP if she could have a glass of water after midnight, he didn't know the answer but referred it to the bishop who (hardly an expert on breast-feeding) replied 'No'. Today it beggars belief that she even thought it necessary to ask the question. But this was in 1947, before Vatican II reminded the laity to be guided by the 'Primacy of Conscience', something which Cardinal George Pell dismissed as if the laity are incapable of knowing right from wrong without the clergy to guide them.

When the lay movements of Marriage Encounter and Antioch were suggested to our Irish PP, he dug his heels in and refused to allow them to be active in HIS church. One would think he might have been encouraged by such positive initiatives in faith renewal. He finally had to give in to Antioch but with Marriage Encounter, he remained adamant: 'You people are as bad as the Pentecostals!' We could (unsurprisingly) manage very well without him.

With the establishment of the first Parish Council, two women were grudgingly appointed. I was one. At its first meeting I asked if fans could be installed in the new church which was uncomfortably hot. The PP rubbished my suggestion, saying they weren't necessary (despite frequently mopping his brow during Mass). I suspect fans would have been installed immediately if the idea had come from a man. However, some weeks later fans were installed—a parishioner had fainted during Mass and there was fear of legal action. No credit was given for my suggestion.

When Corpus Christi church in St Ives was designated the Cathedral for the diocese of Broken

Bay, accommodation had to be built for the new Bishop. A levy was imposed on all parishes in the Diocese (often struggling themselves) for a lavish two-storey mansion with three garages—presumably a more modest home (or sharing with the PP in the Presbytery) would have been inappropriate for the Bishop's ego.

Some years ago, I was asked to produce a wedding booklet for a friend's daughter who gave me the draft outline provided by the church. To my horror I saw that the first reading was the appalling passage about Adam's rib—guaranteed to cast a cloud on any occasion, most of all a wedding. Instead, the bride-to-be and I selected a much more agreeable reading about the power of love. However, when the booklets had been printed and stapled, the priest ordered me to replace the reading with the one he had requested, saying he was answerable to the Bishop for what went on in HIS church (with no regard for the bride's feelings).

Since Vatican II, we have become accustomed to receiving Communion under both species: the host is accepted by the hand (no longer on the tongue) and the communicant chooses whether to drink from the chalice or simply dip the host into the wine. However, a deacon who often assists at Mass in our parish follows a not much publicised Vatican ruling: If the communicant who has taken the host in her/his hand then attempts to dip it in the chalice, the deacon intervenes, takes back the host, dips it himself and then places it on the communicant's tongue. Is this clericalism gone mad? Happily, our lay Ministers take no notice of the ruling.

ARC Members will recall how, on two separate occasions, two venues for conferences had to be changed at the very last minute because Cardinal George Pell put pressure (and threats) on the host organisations. In the first case, he also summoned two priests who were to present papers and ordered them not to speak at the ARC Conference. Cardinal Pell never made any attempt to find out what ARC was about but later indicated that he had banned ARC from being on church property because one of the conference speakers was homosexual. This was bullying clericalism at its very worst.

If ARC Members have been personally impacted by clericalism, please let us know your stories. □

The Real Crisis of Australian Catholicism

Paul Collins

Posted on Pearls & Irritations [2 January 2019](#)

It is patently obvious that Australian Catholicism is in crisis. The usual analysis is that this has been caused by the appalling mishandling and cover-up of child sexual abuse and the subsequent investigations of the Royal Commission. However, this is only a partial explanation. Catholicism's problems have a much longer history and go much deeper. They won't be solved merely by the application of the recommendations of the Commission. A much more radical root and branch reform is needed.

Yet, despite the abuse crisis, Catholicism is still enormously influential in Australia. In the 2016 census 22.6% of the population (totalling 5,291,834 people) self-reported as Catholic. The church employs more than 230,000 people, making it the biggest private employer in the country, bigger than Wesfarmers and bigger than all the banks put together.

It is a major player in the educational, health, aged care and social service sectors. Since the 1830s and for much of our history, it was Catholicism and the other churches that provided the lion's share of all these services. Government aid and participation was virtually non-existent.

Nowadays the Catholic Church maintains some fifty-two welfare organisations across a range of service provisions: homelessness, refugees, drug, alcohol, gambling, family violence, foster care, disability, counselling, overseas aid and employment. In 2016 the Saint Vincent de Paul Society had 20,736 members and 41,152 volunteers, making it the largest charity in the country providing an enormous range of services. Catholic schools educate some 765,000 students in 1731 primary and secondary schools, or 20.2% of all enrolments. It provides almost a quarter of health and aged care.

The striking thing about all this is that church and state work closely together in the provision of services across all these sectors, with the government providing about seventy percent of funding for all the church's ministries, except parishes and dioceses. This relationship is unique, with no real parallel anywhere in the world.

But—and this introduces us to the heart of the Catholic crisis—this vast ministerial superstructure is based on increasingly weak ecclesial foundations.

The simple fact is that the number of committed Catholics who do the bulk of the church's work is contracting at an increasing rate. You see this in terms of affiliation with the church. Conscious affiliation, as reflected in the number of self-identifying Catholics in the census, is falling. From a high in 1996 when Catholics made up 27% of the population, in 2011 this had dropped to 25.3% and in 2016 to 22.6%, a drop of 4.4% in twenty years.

You can dig a little deeper and take Mass attendance as a sign of more than nominal commitment. From the 1850s to the 1940s regular Mass attendance sat somewhere between twenty and thirty percent of all Catholics. Except for the immediate post Second World War period, when an extraordinary 75% of Catholics attended Mass on a weekly basis, affiliation has been steadily decreasing since the late-1960s, so that the 2016 figures show only about nine to ten percent of Catholics attend Mass regularly. Of these, 43% were born overseas and these new arrivals have saved Mass attendance figures from catastrophic decline. Even more worrying is the loss of young people: only 9% of 15-19 year-olds are regular attendees.

Conservative Catholics usually blame this on the renewal promoted by Vatican Council II (1962-65) and its aftermath. This is a mistaken interpretation; in fact, the opposite is true. The world changed in the 1960s with a tectonic shift occurring that involved a radical change in the role and status of women and the advent of feminism, the ascendancy of science and technology, a new understanding of sexuality and of gender diversity and fluidity. Vatican II, particularly in the document on The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) opened-up Catholicism to these emerging realities and laid the foundation for a creative and critical interaction with them.

But then there was a catastrophic failure in leadership. Pope Paul VI really only half-heartedly introduced the Vatican II reforms. The failure was intensified by John Paul II, who introduced an agenda that reflected his own subjective and idiosyncratic vision of Catholicism. His twenty-seven-year-long papacy, followed by that of Benedict XVI, alienated many Catholics.

The bishops appointed by these popes reflected papal agendas and local Catholics increasingly felt, as I argued in my 1991 book *No Set Agenda*, 'leaderless and bereft' as the church lost many of its 'lay and priestly leadership cadre, the people who ... [were] essential for it to move into the future'. Many pastoral priests left the ministry, while frustrated lay leaders severed affiliation or drifted away.

Massive failures in leadership are at the heart of Catholicism's crisis. Pope Francis has lessened Rome's centralized, smothering grip on the local churches and encouraged local initiative. He has asked the bishops to get beyond their inertia, but they are still claiming that even minor decisions are "beyond their competence" or "inappropriate at this time". An example is that two and a half months after the Royal Commission handed down its report and recommendations, the bishops still can't agree on a response to the most damning report ever put together on Australian Catholicism.

Some bishops keep pointing to the 2020 Plenary Council of the Australian Church as the panacea for all Catholicism's ills. But that is still two-and-a-half

years away, and there are already serious divisions among the bishops about the Council and its deliberations. The irresponsibility of the bishops in all this is breath-taking.

Recently the *Australian Book Review* granted me a RAFT Fellowship (Religious Advancement Foundation Trust) to undertake a comprehensive survey of the church's ministry and its relationship with government funding. It is entitled *God and Caesar in Australia* and it expands on many of the issues mentioned here.

www.australianbookreview/subscribe/purchase-magazines

Historian and broadcaster, Paul Collins, has been working for the renewal of the church for forty years.

A response to Paul Collins' 'The real crisis of Australian Catholicism'

Brian Coyne

Posted on 7 January 2019

Paul Collins' recent commentary, 'The Real Crisis of Australian Catholicism', raises some contradictory challenges for the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

It is a massive contradiction that in so many ways the Catholic Church is in such a strong position – for example with the largest, most highly paid workforce it has ever had; with its physical infrastructure larger and possibly better maintained than it has ever been; financially it is probably in the best position it has been in its entire history in this nation – yet, at the parish participation level and regarding vocations, it is in a crisis situation. How do we explain and understand all this?

My sense is that the positive things are the legacy of a range of fortuitous decisions made back in the 1960s and 70s that led to the eventual huge injection of taxpayer funds into the education system, and the health and social welfare systems. But there has been an accompanying crisis of leadership with the best leaders being either forced out or 'seeing the writing on the wall' and leaving voluntarily. Even though the institution today has this massive workforce, they are also effectively gagged from providing effective leadership.

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have to shoulder a massive amount of the responsibility for this as they tried to impose a certain style on the institution with the sort of leaders they were selecting and promoting. It was just a futile dream that the vision and culture of Polish and Bavarian spirituality forged in the furnace of the totalitarian experiments of Communism and Nazism could be the 'saviour' of Catholicism in the rest of the world.

We have this deep culture in the Church that past popes cannot be criticised because that undermines the entire concept of the institution's 'infallibility' in the eyes of those Cardinal Ratzinger labelled the 'little people' and 'simple people' who need to be 'protected from intellectuals' and thinking. Ninety per cent of the adult population in this country who do not think of themselves as either 'little' or 'simple' have simply disappeared out the door. Getting them back to listening, and participating, is a task that will take centuries if it is possible at all. As the statistics for the exit from participation of young people show, even the brilliant and well-funded Catholic Education system we have in this country today is doing nothing to reverse the decline.

I've argued in the past that, given all the positive things in the institution's favour, it should be a relatively, or comparatively (to other countries), easy task to turn the situation around. What Francis principally needs is to find a few leaders with vision who can again 'inspire' their people – starting with this massive, and now largely lay, workforce. The massive challenge he faces though, given the crisis in vocations, is where in the dickens does he start to find such leaders with vision, and the necessary charisma, who can 'inspire the masses'?

Brian Coyne is editor and publisher of the website catholica.com.au

From Classical Christianity to Quantum Christianity

Peter Day

Christmas time is both very predictable and
inexhaustibly mysterious

A question might help: What do the biblical characters Adam and Eve and the 17th century mathematician Sir Isaac Newton have in common? An apple changed their lives and, in the mathematician's case, for the better! Newton's fruitful encounter took place in 1666. His first biographer, William Stukeley, recounted it thus:

After dinner, the weather being warm, we went into the garden and drank tea [sic], under the shade of some apple trees'... [H]e told me, he was just in the same situation, as when formerly, the notion of gravitation came into his mind. It was occasion'd by the fall of an apple, as he sat in contemplative mood. Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground, thought he to himself...

Newton's imagination and genius laid the foundations for *classical physics* which dominated the scientific view of the physical universe until the twentieth century. In essence, classical physics posits a physical world of smooth, orderly and predictable patterns – i.e. *deterministic*. This works well at the macroscopic level, but fails miserably at the microscopic: enter *quantum physics*. Nothing would be the same again.

The quantum world is one of unpredictability, randomness and uncertainty – i.e. *undeterministic*. Nothing is static, everything is fluid; waves (e.g. light) and particles (e.g. electrons) are no longer 'preached' as mutually exclusive – i.e. a wave can exhibit particle-like properties and vice versa.

The quantum revolution has turned science, and it's hitherto 'certainties', on its head. It continues to stop the great thinkers in their tracks, infusing them with a sense of awe and wonder, all the while exhorting them to leave the comfort of 'home', of what is familiar, and venture into the unknown – even into the unknowable.

Just think: 13.78 billion years ago our universe is thought to have begun as an infinitesimally small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, *something*. After its initial appearance, it apparently inflated (the 'Big Bang'), expanded and cooled, going from very, very small and very, very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe. It continues to expand and cool to

this day and we are inside of it: incredible creatures living on a unique planet, circling a beautiful star, clustered together with several hundred billion other stars in a galaxy soaring through the cosmos – and all this out of nowhere, from nothing, for reasons unknown.

Christianity too is ripe for its own 'quantum revolution', something the renowned Jesuit thinker Karl Rahner hinted at over three decades ago: 'The devout Christian of the future will either be a "mystic", one who has "experienced" something, or cease to be anything at all.' Rahner's prescience points to a deep and pervasive problem that needs to be addressed: the failure of institutional Christianity to nurture and embrace its mystical roots, to embrace this 'quantum' reality: *God is Love; and God-Is-Love longs to dwell within, to be in communion with 'me'* – Note: the biblical word for 'Love' in this context is the Greek 'agape': to will the good of another. It is the highest form of self-emptying Love and is most powerfully manifest in the person of Jesus. He is what divine Love looks and behaves like. He is the 'evidence' of the existence of this transcendent, non-material God-is-Love reality.

Alas, what has emerged is a *classical Christianity* in which the liberating Truth of this God-is-Love reality has been supplanted by Dogma and Moralism, by Institution and Clericalism, by Power and Pomp: a church pre-occupied with the outside of the cup (the 'macroscopic'), rather than the inside of the cup (the 'quantum'). Thus, the sign-posts pointing to Christ have become our idols: we have worshipped and bowed down before the Well, instead of drinking its water.

It's as if Christians have been forced to enter into an arranged marriage: *we'll tell you who to love, how to love, where and when to love*; but what about being afforded the freedom and space to fall in love – or not to?

Further, an increasingly well-educated and literate culture is asking questions that classical Christianity can no longer address or answer. This is especially problematic in the area of biblical interpretation – not to mention, sexual ethics – where the pervasive intellectual poverty of fundamentalists, along with the superficial musings of part-timers, is writ large in public discourse.

It is little wonder, then, that three of the high priests of modern militant atheism; evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, neuroscientist Sam Harris and theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss have had a field day mocking, denouncing and humiliating the whole Christian project as they delight in picking-off the low hanging fruit planted by Biblical literalists: 'So, you Christians really believe that Jonah lived in the belly of a whale for three days; that Jesus walked on

water; that the universe was created in ‘six days’; that Noah built that ark; that homosexuals are doomed to hell... really?’ As the old adage goes: ‘text without context is pretext.’

What we are left with, then, is a superficial binary: ‘It’s either science or God: you choose because it can’t be both!’ Indeed, for Dawkins and company, what science cannot discover, humankind cannot know: science is the only way to truth.

This is Scientism, the poster child of The Enlightenment mark II, and it is determined not only to replace religion, but to eliminate it from the face of the earth. Intoxicated by their intellectual acumen and certainty, these secular fundamentalists mischievously refuse to acknowledge Christianity’s capacity to evolve, to nuance, to adapt; to re-consider. Instead, they wheel out on the world stage a caricature of ersatz Christianity, presenting it as the villain in their pantomime, all the while encouraging the audience to ‘boo’ and ‘hiss’ and ‘snigger’.

And what a villain their adherents are invited to mock: an anti-intellectual-anti-science-Evangelical-fundamentalist wielding the Bible like an axe. This fraudulent distortion – and, yes, there’s a lot of it about – is presented as the real deal: as the definitive manifestation of true Christianity.

Yet, any thinking Christian worth his or her salt knows: that the Bible, like a library, contains all types of genres including poetry, prose, history, metaphor, biography, parable; that the Bible is a collection of works composed within different historical contexts and across many centuries; that the Bible has aspects that transcend time and culture – e.g. the exhortation to ‘forgive constantly,’ to ‘will the good of your enemy,’ and to ‘love your neighbour as yourself; and aspects that are limited to a particular time and culture – e.g. the law of circumcision, the polygamy of the patriarchs, and the musings on wives and slaves in St Paul’s Epistles.

‘Theology is poetry plus, not science minus,’ says an old Swedish proverb. Extrapolating from this, scripture scholars tell us that ‘metaphor, parable, and myth are *the more* than literal meaning of language; they are not less than factual.’ Even Albert Einstein, when asked what he considered to be the most important aspect to his scientific pursuit, said: *‘Imagination, above all imagination’*.

The Bible is not an immutable proof text ‘handwritten’ by God. Rather it is an inspired living text that, *inter alia*, documents the evolution of religious consciousness: a text compiled by fallible human-beings grappling beautifully, sometimes even unsatisfactorily, with an ineffable Mystery. ‘The Bible is,’ as scripture scholar Raymond Brown has said, ‘the literary objectification of a faith that is a response to revelation.’

Indeed, central to the case against Jesus was that he himself defied literalist interpretations of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible): He ate with the wrong people, healed on the Sabbath, and challenged religious leaders who elevated mere human thinking to the realm of the divine: ‘In vain do they worship... teaching human precepts as doctrines. You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.’ (Mark 7:7-8)

Jesus could see the ‘more than literal meaning’ behind the inspired text. He opposed not only Holy Book fundamentalism, but the religious certainties codified in Holy Law and Dogma; and at great personal cost. But whatever about the unseemliness that abounds in this space, it is clear that something has to give. We can no longer resume normal programming: *classical Christianity* and its three pillars – dogmatism, moralism, and clericalism – has been found wanting, and abjectly so.

The task of quantum Christianity, then, is to take us beyond the surface, beyond what the eye can see; to set us free to leave ‘home’: that place of intellectual and spiritual comfort.

As Thomas Merton has said: ‘In order to be true to God and to ourselves we must break with the familiar, established and secure norms and go off into the unknown.’

‘Christian conversion,’ he says, ‘is turning to a freedom based no longer on social approval... but on direct dependence on an invisible and inscrutable God, in pure faith.’

Thus, like those committed classical physicists who re-oriented their gaze after their intellectual order was turned upside down by exposure to the quantum realm, it is time for those of us committed to classical Christianity to gaze elsewhere: to venture into the dark night and explore the extraordinary, ineffable mystery that pervades the cosmos and humanity: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ (John 1:1).

This ‘Word’, this articulated ‘Truth’, became flesh. Spiritual author Richard Rohr puts it well: ‘The eternal pattern of reality took on physicality – became human.’ Like the seemingly miraculous interchangeability of the wave and the particle, God and man are indistinguishable: spirit and flesh, ‘heaven’ and earth become as one.

What, then, of Rahner’s Christian of the future? A story:

I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. (Matthew 11:25)

A friend spent many years ministering to homeless

men in inner-city, Melbourne. One man, in particular, grabbed his attention: ‘Johnny’ was the quintessential hobo. He slept in bus shelters, carried his belongings in a shopping trolley, while his body was graffitied with street grime. What stood out amidst the misery and emptiness of Johnny’s dog-eat-dog world was his deep sense of respect for others; his warm, peaceful countenance. This inner-beauty seemed so incongruous, so confounding to my friend. In the end, curiosity got the better of him, and he posed a simple, if clumsy question: ‘Johnny, your life isn’t exactly a bed of roses, so why are you so content; why are you so kind to others?’ After a quiet, thoughtful pause, Johnny turned and said gently, knowingly: ‘God is very fond of me.’

This childlike *knowing* – as opposed to simply ‘knowing about’ – is the essence of Christianity: it is at once deeply rational, yet also unprovable. As Oxford Professor of Mathematics, John Lennox says, ‘My Christian faith consists not as a leap of faith into the unknown; it’s an evidence-based commitment, otherwise I wouldn’t be remotely interested in Christianity.’

‘Johnny’s’ inner experience of divine affection ennobled him and shaped his interactions with others. Science has nothing to tell Johnny about this experience; nor does Johnny’s experience have anything to tell science. To try and do so would be to participate in a discussion infused with category errors.

The essence of Christianity is not to prove the existence of God – that is a fool’s errand; nor is it to prove Who or What created the universe. No, the essence of Christianity is to be ennobled by a Love, by a ‘fondness’ whose source is ineffable, unknowable: a Love that sets us free to manifest a self-emptying mercy and compassion.

And while this inscrutable reality cannot be investigated or proved by science, its effects can be readily seen and rationally experienced: just ask ‘Johnny’; not to mention the young Jewish carpenter.

Peter Day is a Catholic Priest living in Canberra
This article was posted on *Pearls & Irritations*, 19 December 2018.
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Anthony Fisher’s message of ill will at Christmas tide

Allan Patience

Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher OP is the nominal head of the Australian Catholic Church – despite the fact that Melbourne is the largest and arguably the most intellectually lively diocese in the country. Fisher is seen by many as an authoritative spokesperson for his brother bishops, priests and religious. So, his 2018 Christmas message offered him a golden opportunity to reach out inclusively, positively and generously to his fellow Catholics and to all people of good will across the wide brown land. In the event, he managed to disappoint, even anger, just about everybody except for the small reactionary clique gathered around him and around like-minded cronies in the hierarchy.

If ever the Australian Catholic community needed a hopeful Christmas message in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse, it was in the immediate run-up to Christmas 2018. Everyone knows that morale in the Church is at a devastatingly low ebb. Many among the Catholic laity are shell-shocked, demoralised, deeply hurt, even alienated. For a large majority of Catholics and non-Catholics alike, Church leaders have been found seriously wanting.

Whatever moral authority the Church had in the past is now fast withering on the vine. The Catholic lay faithful (a dwindling lot) are struggling through very dark times.

Is it not therefore the prime responsibility of ordained leaders in the Church to exercise the most sensitive pastoral care to those struggling, against huge odds, to remain true to their faith? In addition to being treated with respect and compassionate pastoral care by the hierarchy, lay Catholics today deserve immense humility from their bishops, priests and religious.

If we judge him by his 2018 Christmas homily, Anthony Fisher appears either blindly unaware, or arrogantly dismissive of the laity’s anguish and increasing alienation from purblind clerics who persist in ignoring the crisis facing the contemporary Church.

No doubt Fisher is reeling from the double whammy that hit him and his ilk over this past year.

First there was the excoriating experience of the Royal Commission and its recommendations. Fisher used his homily to rail against the recommendation that the seal of the confessional should be unlawful when the protection of children is a matter of concern. Admittedly this is a difficult issue, but why be so confronting about it when what is needed is cautious thought and sensitive diplomacy? The old adage about speaking softly to hear soft echoes appears lost on Archbishop Fisher.

Second was the fact that a very substantial majority of Australians – many of them Catholics, including

priests and religious – voted Yes in the same-sex marriage plebiscite. Fisher was one of the theological cheer leaders for the alt-right in the Australian parliament who imposed the plebiscite on the Australian people, despite the fact that it was a devious attempt to pervert the will of the people. It certainly blew up in the faces of those surly reactionaries!

How should a wise leader respond to this double whammy? This is the question Fisher could have asked himself before composing his homily. As it turned out, his homily was one long whinge. He started out by complaining about “hard-edged secularism.” By secularism he probably means a society in which the Church is not *ipso facto* the moral arbiter on most if not all things. He needs to face up to the fact that this has been the case for many years now.

Today, the Church is only one voice among many. It is not a privileged voice for all sorts of reasons, good and bad. Many of the bad reasons can be found in the unnecessary war Church authorities have waged for at least 200 years against the encroachments of modern secular society. Their mistake was to go to war rather than to find an accommodation that could benefit both sides.

The blinkered view of the anti-secularists is that the Church’s rightful authority has been undermined by secular values (in particular, democracy) and secular knowledge (in particular, science). The Church’s sustained fight against modernising its own systems of governance, its own understandings of the gospel, and its Canute-like defence of its undeserved privileges means that modern thought across a vast range of ethical, philosophical and cultural matters long ago surpassed the sclerotic orthodoxies of the Church.

Fisher proceeded in his homily to defend ‘religious freedom’ which he claims (against substantial evidence) is under threat in contemporary Australia. By this he is apparently saying that Catholic schools and other institutions should have legal protection to discriminate against gay teachers and students – presumably by excluding them. If this was the purpose of his homily, it

is unduly defensive. It is also the very antithesis of the ‘love and service’ that he claims for the ‘Christian message of hope and healing’.

What would a good homily look like in these circumstances?

First, a much humbler approach is needed. Fisher should have acknowledged (as he must do for the rest of his preaching days) the appalling moral mess the Church is now floundering in because of the failed leadership of bishops and others not unlike him. He should have begun by asking the St Mary’s congregation for their forgiveness. No more clericalist arrogance, please! More humility, please!

Second, he could have lifted the self-regarding demand for special treatment for the Church out of a self-serving and narrow defence of religious freedom by outlining a theologically-informed argument for a charter of human rights and freedoms for Australia, to be legislated by the federal parliament.

Of course, this would be anathema to Catholic politicians such as Tony Abbott and Kevin Andrews. But it is precisely for this reason that the Catholic Church has to be a Church that it is not in ghoulish league with a reactionary political rump (as it was in the bad old days of the DLP). The hierarchy needs urgently to be in vibrant communion with the faithful laity who today are like the man on the road to Jericho who fell victim to thieves, with the bishops being the pious lot passing by on the other side. Is there a good Samaritan who will come to the aid of the faithful laity? If Fisher’s homily contains the answer, then clearly it is No.

Australian Catholics don’t deserve to have bishops imposed on them with narrow-minded and ill-considered views on issues like religious freedom. If only the laity could advise the Pope meaningfully about the bishops they need. That would help to overcome the yawning disconnect between the laity and their leaders – arguably the greatest peril confronting the Church today.

Allan Patience is a Melbourne academic

Accountability?

John Buggy wrote a personal letter to Archbishop Anthony Fisher on behalf of the twelve Church reform organisations that make up the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform.

John drew attention to the Archbishop’s Christmas message where he stated that there are “moves to make the celebration of the sacrament of confession illegal, to defund church schools, to charge an Archbishop with discrimination for teaching about marriage, and to deny faith based institutions the right to choose what kind of community they will be”. These are unsubstantiated assertions and it is quite reasonable for us to request an explanation as to why the Archbishop made them. To date there has been no reply.

Book review

Christa Murphy, *Our Holy Ground, to touch within*

SSpS Publications, 2017

Christa Murphy has five decades of experience in spiritual ministry in Australia and Papua New Guinea and she distils this into a series of reflections on crucial matters of christian theology and practice for the everyday lives of christians. These reflections are articulated simply and clearly. But don't be fooled by that. They contain within a series of deeper challenges that embody up-to-date thinking crafted to delight and unsettle the discerning reader. What seem innocent commentaries on the human experience are transformed into moments of mystery and surprise by their intersection with a life-time of living the gospel and integrating gospel values with the lives of christian believers.

Many of the themes for the reflections are predictable: such as God's naming, suffering, compassion, prayer, salvation and the Spirit. Christa is a member of the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit, so we might expect the Spirit to feature prominently. However, none of these familiar themes are dealt with in familiar ways. Through poetry, story, prose and reflective questions, the reader is immersed in a very personal journey of faith and yet is also clearly engaged with the wealth of centuries of tradition.

An Invitation

*Bring all your desires, longings, fears, struggles
to the Listening Ear,
the Loving Heart of God within you...
who loves you, desires for you,
longs for you, struggles with you
more than you will ever know or dream of:
In time,
you will recognise and trust
this Wondrous Presence Within
more than anything else
or anyone else
in your Life.*

Apart from the expected themes, there are two reflections that strike me as special contributions. These are deeply personal experiences Christa has had in her own spiritual journey. *An (Un) Forgettable Experience* recalls a simulation game on a course of spirituality for justice. Christa recalls being assigned to the marginalised group and becoming very agitated, loud and angry as she tried to make people hear her and found no one listened. It took some time to come back to herself after the game she was so distraught by this experience. She notes it was only a short time and only a simulation game. How much more must marginalised people feel angry when for them it lasts a lifetime?

She notes: *I began to understand why people who are oppressed in any way can turn to violence – especially when no one responds to their cries. My compassion for them deepened. And also my compassion for those driven to do violence to others* (p68). These are powerful insights. I think of the failure in compassion felt for LGBTI people whose voice was lost in the recent marriage equality debate; or the Aboriginal people whose work on the Uluru Statement was rejected by the Government; or the asylum seekers on Manus Island. Deep spirituality indeed.

The reflection, *Befriending the Enemy*, had a similarly powerful effect on me. Christa reflects on her 'inner work' done on her passionate sexuality and her ability to rudely talk over others when she gets excited. In a short page or two she describes the experience, the process, the integration and the giftedness of these seeming negatives in her life. When faced and integrated, she noted, they are expressed in gifts – her care for people and speaking out for justice.

This is a deceptively powerful little book. Recommended for everyday christians and spiritual guides.

Review by Rev Peter Maher
published in *The Swag*, Autumn 2018

Christa has donated twelve copies of her book to ARC.
If you would like to receive one, please contact
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Book review

John E. Ryan, *A Priesthood Imprisoned:*

A Crisis for the Church

Bayswater: Coventry Press, 2017

This book is worth reading. It is full of pearls of wisdom. Sometimes one reads a book that seems to go on forever from one topic to another. Not this one which is quite the opposite: it is focused on spiritual maturity for pastors and laity. It is very brief, succinct and extremely relevant to the current crisis in the Catholic Church.

The author is now a retired pastor from the diocese of Sandhurst in Victoria, but has been involved in the spiritual formation and renewal of pastors and others for many years. The richness of his life's experience and reflections is evident in this book.

His summary of a number of surveys which reported on the spiritual maturity or otherwise of the priests in the USA and Australia (only 9% reach high level of maturity) in recent decades, gives compelling evidence that something needs to be done regarding the preparation of candidates for ordination. It is clear from this book and the surveys cited, that seminary training is not fulfilling its aim. Many priests are not capable of being a spiritual director although one would think their training should provide that. What an admission! On the other hand, priests are not trained in financial management, but often spend much time dealing with parish and school finances. Nor are they trained in conflict management which seems an important part of their task as leader. It is also clear from this book that the spiritual formation in seminaries leaves candidates spiritually and emotionally immature.

The method of how candidates are prepared for ordination needs a thorough overall. Ryan clearly discusses what a model is and how they ideally give us a peep into the mystery of life rather than clear answers set in concrete. He deals with topics like power and control, truth, discernment, Christianity as a mystic religion, super-ego, moral training and moral education, sexuality. Underlying all this is the vision of the spiritual *life as a journey* requiring change and development.

One might think that this book is aimed at pastors only, but what is said about spiritual growth and maturity applies equally to the laity. The book would be most useful for group discussions in a parish. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Here are some pearls which give you a feel for the book:

- *Truth* is where the opposites meet;
- The priest is a *spiritual director* if he is anything, yet our training has not equipped us in this basic role;
- The problem involved in the use of *power* is the danger that it might be used to 'overpower' rather than to 'empower'.

Review by Gideon Goosen, author of *Saving Catholics*,
Melbourne: Morning Star Publishing, 2018

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