



arcvoice

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Who will do ALL the Plenary Council discerning?

The next stage in the preparation for the Plenary Council 2020/2021 will involve Discernment and Writing Groups who will prepare documents designed to help shape the agenda for the first phase when the bishops meet next year. From the 400 or so people who applied, short lists were drawn up and interviews have been conducted to determine the best people seemingly based on quite specific criteria. The objective was to have six groups of around 8-10 people dealing with six defined themes. This has now been decided and we should reflect on the situation to this point.

So far, we have been given no significant analysis of all the information that has come from the thousands of people who have responded. The main report gives some examples of what has been said along with snapshots of themes and the numbers of respondents in age group cohorts. But the actual submissions have been kept confidential, a fundamental failure in good consultation process, hindering understanding of the detail of proposals raised. Hence there is no indication of the number of people who spoke about any particular issue that would show the strength of feeling about the well-known vital matters facing the Church today, contrary to what Fr Noel Connolly implies is sufficient for us to know in a summary (see page 14). Instead, the Discernment and Writing Groups will be asked to begin with pre-determined themes (more like labels) which could have been written before the whole process started. How were these determined and by whom and how do they really relate to the matters raised and proposals put forward by all those people?

Given that over 400 of those people, presumably with a great variety of religious, social and professional backgrounds from across Australia, applied to be leaders and/or members of the Discernment and Writing

Groups, it is curious that each of several interviewing panels consisted of just three people from a diocesan office. Since the objective was to set up groups with a balance of skills and experience, could it not be expected that the interviewing panels would reflect a similar balance, including some with professional skills who are independent of the Church administration?

A number of interviewees consulted said that they felt that the interviewers were more

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focussed on getting through their set questions than attempting to draw out skills or experience that would enable them to discern effectively. I certainly gained that impression in my interview. Were the essential criteria that interviewees addressed the basis for recommendations concerning selection or were other unknown factors more important? Did the bishops who actually made the selections have different criteria? There were too many well-credentialed committed Catholics and advocates for the accepted need for Church reform or renewal who applied and were rejected, many without an interview.

In this edition (page 3) Fr Eric Hodgens asks the question: “Where Do We Find the Authentic Catholic Voice”? He points out that the Australian

Church has been held back by the strong influence of senior bishops supported by very well-resourced ideological right-wing groups. The Plenary Council was hailed as the opportunity for us to glean what might be called the “authentic Catholic voice”. This cannot come through if the process of obtaining it is not open, equitable and transparent and seen to be so. There are now significant questions being asked and confidence that the Plenary Council will deliver what it promotes is gradually being eroded. The actual submissions of the people have not been published and the selection process appears tainted. The people were asked to discern, but it appears that the bishops alone will do all of the discerning.

John Buggy

Letters to the Editor

The June Edition of ARC was once again a brilliant edition which I could not put down until I had read cover to cover. I was particularly taken with Dr Keith Suter’s summary of the four areas requiring action. He might have originally written this for the Uniting Church; however it is just as applicable to the Catholic Church in Australia.

Father Rex Currie (now retired) and I have been proposing something along these lines for the past ten years but these proposals have fallen on deaf ears. Let us hope that proposals of this nature do not fall through the cracks of the Plenary Council.

Kevin Doherty

An excellent issue. I am sure you will have accorded criticism, which the respondents will regard as relevant comments. Would that more saw such observations as timely.

I doubt if I ever told you how much I owed to Pell and thyself. The Cardinal came out with one of his statements—this time about HIS position in determining what OUR consciences should decide.

It was too much for me and I knocked out 1500 words or so and you published them. The effects of your kindness have been far-reaching on my subsequent research. I will be ever grateful to you.

John Hillier

NOTE: The four scenarios suggested by Keith Suter for the Uniting Church are:

- (i) **‘Word and Deed’** (the amalgamation of parishes into a small number of big parishes, providing both spiritual and welfare services);
- (ii) **‘Secular Welfare’** (just letting the congregations die off and concentrate on the expanding welfare work);
- (iii) **‘Early Church’** (letting the welfare agencies go their own way and, instead, return to the thinking of the early church, such as the use of house churches);
- (iv) **‘Recessional’** (winding up the Uniting Church and letting the thriving parts go their own way, such as the Uniting Church private schools, hospitals and aged care facilities).

Where Do We Find the Authentic Catholic Voice?

Eric Hodgens

Posted on *Pearls & Irritations* 19 September 2019

A Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region will take place in Rome in October 2019. Its aim is to identify new paths for the evangelisation of that region. The working document for the synod was issued in June this year. The main preoccupation of the synod is the Amazon and its people.

The evangelisation of the people has, in turn, raised some secondary issues such as the ordination of married indigenous men and the role of women. These secondary issues rang the alarm bells of the reactionary faction of the culture wars currently bedevilling the Catholic Church and, indeed, much of the Western World.

Pell has been a prominent voice of the right-wing faction all his life – dogmatic and authoritarian. Though convicted and in jail for paedophilia, he has used a letter to his supporters to add his voice to opposition to the Amazon Synod.

Pell's style is reaction. That style echoes in statements of his protégés, the archbishops of Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Recent Australian legislation has given them material for reaction on the three hot button issues: same-sex marriage, standardising abortion legislation and assisted dying. These are the issues that really get them going – not refugees, immigration or climate change.

The episcopal voices are supported by ideological, right-wing activist groups such as Sydney-based Notre Dame University's Institute for Ethics and Society, the JPII Institute in Melbourne, the Christopher Dawson Centre in Hobart.

These institutes are part of a world-wide collection of similar organisations pushing the right-wing, ideological agenda. Italy has the Dignitatis Humanae Institute promoted by Steve Bannon. The USA has the Napa Institute promoted by Timothy Busch and supported by Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia, and an array of others including George Weigel. These movement are highly organised and well-funded.

Polls show that, while Australian Catholics have mixed opinions on the morality of these issues, a heavy majority are against *criminalising* them.

Catholics, in the main, appear to be at home in a pluralist, secular society, and judge that it is not right to force their opinions on others. They have a different ethical standard to the bishops and a more compassionate moral compass.

The days of coercive intervention by bishops are over. This explains why Archbishop Comensoli got such heavy fire when he vetoed Sr. Joan Chittister from speaking at a national Catholic Education Conference in Melbourne. This Pell-like intervention was met with a “who does he think he is?” reaction. Being a bishop carries little weight in public debate anymore – even with Catholics.

Vatican II shifted the centre of gravity of the Church from the hierarchy to the People of God. This *decentralising* movement led on to a new doctrinal development—*Reception Theology*. For a doctrine or moral opinion to be authentic it must be *received* by the body of the faithful. In disputed matters, what Catholics *believe* is as important as what the hierarchy *proclaim*. *Humanae Vitae* was the watershed moment. The pope proclaimed that contraception was sinful; the Catholic body did not receive it.

So, where can the voice of the faithful be heard? Movements for continuing the renewal started by Vatican II have grown in number and strength. Examples include the Voice of the Faithful in the USA, the Pastor's Initiative in Austria and Catholics for Renewal in Australia. Originally treated with disdain by bishops, these are now mainstream movements. Bishops are routinely ignored these days. Maybe some will come to realise that they need to take notice of what their people believe.

The decision of the Australian bishops to hold a Plenary Council in 2020 has brought a surprisingly large number of submissions from Catholics – surprisingly large because most Catholics under 50 have given up.

Catholics for Renewal have produced a booklet of their submissions, *Getting Back on Mission*, published by Garratt Publishing. The situation is fluid. It is a plenary council of the *bishops*. The laity is signalling where they stand. If the bishops ignore them, they could well see a re-play of Paul VI's 1968 encyclical and its aftermath of departures from the Church.

World-wide the lay voice is being formulated and speaking out. It is imperative that the bishops get theologically up to date and realise that the lay voice is part of the game.

ERIC HODGENS is a priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne living in retirement.

German bishop says only a new theology can save the Church

Heiner Wilmer of Hildesheim diocese says clerical abuse of power is destroying Catholicism

One of Germany's most recently named bishops has raised eyebrows by calling for a 'new theology' as an urgent response to revelations of the clerical abuse of power. 'We still haven't fully realised that the crisis of confidence is charging into the Church's timberwork with unmitigated force,' warned Bishop Heiner Wilmer SCI in a recent interview in the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Although the 58-year-old has headed the Diocese of Hildesheim in Northern Germany only since last September, this is not the first time he has made headlines with his outspoken views. Wilmer, who was superior general of the worldwide missionary and teaching order known as the 'Dehonians' (Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart) before becoming bishop, drew criticism just three months into his new job when he told the *Kölner Stadt Anzeiger* that abuse of power was in the Church's DNA.

'I had reckoned with criticism, but not that so many people would be quite so distressed,' he admitted in this latest interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which was published on June 12. 'My statement (last December) hit a nerve, admittedly more painfully than I had imagined. But I stand by it,' the bishop said. Abuse of power, as old as the Gospels, must be tackled theologically.

He argued that the Church had forgotten that abuse of power was as old as the Gospels, pointing to several examples in the New Testament, including how the disciples quarrelled over who was first among them. Wilmer noted that the Church's reaction to the abuse crisis up to now has been to apply discipline and canon law, improve prevention and communications and work together with the judiciary and state authorities. 'That is all good and right, but we have not yet got around to tackling the problem fundamentally,' he said. In his view that will require the Church to ask itself what the power abuse crisis means for 'the way we speak about God, the Church and the way we proclaim the Gospel'.

He claimed that hushing up clerical sexual abuse was the consequence of an excessive exaltation of the Church's sacrality. Since sexual violence was seen as something that sullied the holiness of the Church, it had to be covered up. 'We must come down from there and see the Church's sinfulness but also tackle the problem theologically,' he said.

The Church must move from moralising to liberating people.

Bishop Wilmer, who studied at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome before earning a doctorate in theology at the University of Freiburg in his native Germany, argued that an overly exalted image of the Church was one of the reasons that had led to the terrible extent of sexualised violence that had now come to light. 'We were far too interested in polishing the Church's image and failed to see the human being. I find that truly terrible!' he said. The bishop lamented that over the past century the Church had 'slid' into a way of proclaiming the Gospel that had led people to see simply an institution centred on sexual morality. 'We allowed the Church to deteriorate into a moral institution focused on what may or may not take place beneath the sheets,' he said, while also stressing that the sixth commandment is not the only commandment. Wilmer said Jesus Christ's message was 'not primarily a moral (message),' but aimed at liberating and redeeming human beings. 'In Saint Matthew's Gospel he does not say, "If you pull yourselves together, you will be the light of the world" or "if you conform to sexual rules, you will be the salt of the earth". He uses the indicative and not the conditional or imperative and says, "You are the salt and the light as you are"', the bishop said. He pointed out that Jesus had a wonderful sense of beauty. 'He saw a fantastic beauty in a cripple and made him feel this beauty and lift his head.'

From mere survival to arousing fascination with the Gospel

Bishop Wilmer said it is crucial for the Church to become a community that uplifts people. And he said that, most decisive for him, is that the Gospel be proclaimed in a way that fascinates people. 'We must get the embers under the ashes to glow again and begin with people's longings for security and peace. We must give them room to grow, scope to develop and enough breathing space,' he said. He warned that those who are only

interested in the Church's survival 'have already lost.' The most recently named head of a German diocese also spoke hopefully of the synodal procedure the national bishops' conference has begun. He said engaging the laity in discussions about clerical power, the Church's sexual morality and the priestly lifestyle would not be easy. But he said he was convinced that it would prove successful. However, he said it's going to take a lot of courage on the bishops' part to be able 'to walk shoulder to shoulder' with the laity and discuss issues such as priestly ordination, celibacy and the place of women in the Church. Wilmer, who has been a priest for some 32 years,

said he is 'passionately' committed to celibacy. But he said, 'it must be made to shine more radiantly'. The best way to do that, he argued, was to make it voluntary, rather than mandatory as it is today.

At the same time the bishop said it is crucial that women be put in leading positions in the Church and given greater responsibility. 'We can no longer simply say that the question of women's ordination has been decided once and for all, full stop,' Bishop Wilmer said. He concluded by warning that if the Church does not find a way of putting these reforms into practice, it will become marginal.

(Reprinted from La Croix – 25/6/2019)

Vatican II – Hope for a Definite Revival

John Buggy

In June of this year Pope Francis addressed the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy in Naples. In this address he outlined his vision for 'a theology of welcoming and dialogue' which would lead to an 'interdisciplinary theology' arising in a context of freedom and involving all the cultures that make up the people of God. According to this vision Pope Francis is offering theologians the opportunity to link up his teaching with a fresh look at the direction set by the Second Vatican Council, without quoting from the Council itself.

This address seems to have received little attention. It was announced in an article by Massimo Faggioli, the professor of theological and religious studies at Villanova University. It is very noteworthy because it opens up the pathway to expand on what was intended by that Council and, in theory, free it from the constraints that have been placed upon it by reactionary forces in the years that immediately followed.

Professor Faggioli reported that in June this year a large group of theologians and church historians met and set up an international initiative to explore

the connection between Vatican II and the teachings of Pope Francis who has advocated a more global approach to Catholicism. This conference was organised by the members of a steering committee who are at work on a new twelve-volume commentary on the documents of the Second Vatican Council that will be published in German and English.

This is a very significant initiative. The first commentaries were mostly written by participants in the Council itself who were priests and bishops—males with a European theological formation. This new commentary will draw in scholars from all over the world, including lay male and female theologians from multi-cultural traditions. Five of those volumes will be produced by a five-member team of theologians from every continent. This project has been endorsed by three cardinals: Reinhard Marx (Munich, Germany), Luis Antonio Tagle (Manila, Philippines), and Baltazar Porras (Merida, Venezuela).

Like all documents of this type, the teachings in the writings of Vatican II cannot be fully understood without addressing the history of those documents. They must be understood, taking into account the expansion of the Church beyond the Western World. We can only imagine and hope for what might arise if the doors are opened and we gain many new insights through wider theological thought. This could well be part of the 'ongoing revelation' that was espoused at Vatican. II □

Australian Catholic Church – reform or die

Michael Sainsbury

Posted on *Pearls and Irritations* 7 May 2019

Australia's Catholic bishops appear to have ceded control of the direction of wholesale reform in the church, with the announcement of a sweeping and unprecedented review into the management of dioceses and parishes by a group whose six members include just one member of the clergy and three women including a nun.

The terms and membership of the review have been set by an Implementation Advisory Group, which was created by the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference and Catholic Religious Australia in May 2018. It is likely to pave the way for a new governance model for the Australian church that would see the laity—and especially women—play a key role in how dioceses and parishes in Australia are managed.

Such a review was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sex Abuse (16.7) yet it is more than 18 months since that body handed down its recommendations. Only now do we have a document (a five-page outline) that details the scope and some of the intent of the review—well over two years since the Royal Commission finished its hearings.

There was initially a confused and non-unified approach to the sex abuse crisis by the Church. The Melbourne Diocese, under then Archbishop George Pell, formulated its own response and the Jesuits were outliers, taking some years to join *Towards Healing*, the unified response of the rest of the church's dioceses and religious orders. Yet Australia has been at the forefront of dealing with this tragedy, so the Catholic world is watching.

This review is critical not just for the future of the Australian church but for the future of the entire global church. And, while they may not see it this way, after taking close to a year to respond to the Royal Commission, Australian Catholic Bishops' Council has effectively ceded its moral authority to the Royal Commission and with this central plank of its recommendations now finally underway, it seems the vast majority of the Commission's recommendations will at last be undertaken by the church.

Still, it is worth noting that there has been fierce debate inside the church over the recommendations of the Royal Commission. This has been especially of whether to hold a review of church management, the formation of clergy, voluntary celibacy and the sanctity of the Seal of the Confessional. So getting the review underway was not a forgone conclusion and it a victory for reform-minded Catholics over clericalist leaders.

The terms of the review have been set out in a six-page Project Plan for Review into the Management of Dioceses and Parishes, released by the IAG that outlines reasons, scope and time-line for the review. It will focus on issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and lay participation and be conducted by a panel of six prominent Catholics, four of whom are lay persons and three of whom are women. the Project Plan noted in its introduction:

The appalling revelations of widespread sexual abuse of children by clerics and in Church organisations and the mishandling of complaints of abuse have been a lightning rod attracting and focusing attention on calls for cultural and practical renewal and reforms as an essential part of the response to the tragedy. If there is to be a restoration of trust and credibility in the Church in a way that will make it a safe place for all who come to it and that will enable it to proclaim its Gospel mission, there must be 'real social and cultural transformation'. This can only occur if all of the People of God are involved in the way the Church is governed.

Sr. Monica Cavanagh rsj, president of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) which jointly announced the review with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), spoke admirably plainly saying:

The Royal Commission uncovered some practices that could have exacerbated the abuse of children and hampered the response to that tragic reality. The establishment of this panel is another step in our serious response to the Royal Commission and will help establish a way forward for the Church into the future.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the ABCB, was less forthright, no doubt having to pander to more conservative colleagues when he noted that some of the Church's structure were devised 'centuries ago', adding:

We cannot ignore the wisdom that the Church has handed down through the years, but we must also be mindful that some of our

practices fail to acknowledge and draw upon the best practice of other large, contemporary organisations.’

The truth is that religious orders have been a long way ahead of the central church hierarchy on governance.

The review will be chaired by former Western Australian chief justice, Neville Owen who is former chair of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, which facilitated the Church’s engagement with the Royal Commission. He is a member of the IAG and is a current member of the Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors.

It’s other members are Mr Jack de Groot, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, chair of IAG, as well as:

Ms Pauline Connelly, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Adelaide, deputy director of Centacare Catholic Family Services, Adelaide;

Rev Dr Brendan Daly, lecturer in canon law, Good Shepherd College, Auckland, New Zealand;

Sr Professor Isabell Naumann ISSM, president, Catholic Institute of Sydney;

Adjunct Professor Susan Pascoe AM, president and chair of the Australian Council for International Development, former Commissioner of the Australian Charities and Not-for profits Commission and former executive director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria;

Professor John Warhurst, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn.

The review comes as preparations for the Australian church’s first Plenary Council in more than 80 years continue, with the ACBC preparing to announce on June 9 the main themes of the council which will shape its second phase. In pre-empting that announcement from the ACBC, the IAG has already set a high expectation that governance will be a major theme.

The move cements the positions of de Groot and Owen who are arguably Australia’s most influential Catholics following the demise of Cardinal George Pell, who is now in jail for child sex abuse – the first time lay people has even been in this position.

Jack de Groot told me in a report in Catholic News Service in the US:

The establishment of the Governance Review Project is hugely significant to the Church both in Australia and in other parts of the world. Australian Church authorities (Bishops, Religious and PJPs) are supportive of this work. The child sex abuse crisis and the Royal Commission in Australia demonstrated the weaknesses of governance in the Church. Governance that is transparent, open to participation and leadership by the laity and focused on accountability is crucial.’

De Groot is has also said the review will take its cues not just from existing Canon Law but from Vatican II. He is confident that there are structures existing within the church that point the way to the future, specially the governance of schools, hospitals and other charities where religious work collegially with lay experts in sound governance models.

The review comes as the operations of the government-run National Redress Scheme, the most significant recommendation of the Royal Commission up until now, has come under a cloud.

In April, a Committee of Inquiry of Australia’s parliament handed down a wide range of recommendations for changes to the NRS, including raising the maximum payment for victims from \$150,000 to \$200,000, a simplification of the application process and other major changes.

But these recommendations are on hold as Australia is now in the midst of an election campaign that could see a change of government after the May 18.

The six-member panel will produce an interim report by the end of October. A final report should be provided to CRA and the ACBC in the first half of 2020, ahead of the first of the Plenary Council’s two meetings in late 2020 and mid 2021.

The unprecedented scope and urgency of this review is a sign that, finally, the leaders of the Australian church have at last taken the adage of ‘adapt or die’ to heart.

This comes in a broader context of a declining church in Australia, the self-defeating side-lining of women in leadership roles and serial critical leadership failures, underscored by the insistence by too many senior clerics of clinging to outmoded ways of thinking.

Parishioners will hope that this welcome change of direction that is fundamental to the future of the Catholic Church in Australia has not come too late.

A case for Re-evaluation of the Catholic Attitude to Homosexual Marriage

Alan Clague

Modern medical science has revealed the complex nature of sex, gender and sexuality, but the Catholic Church has remained unmoved in its condemnation of homosexual marriage. This is based on Church traditions and, more fundamentally, on the Bible. Modern biblical interpretation has long since moved on from a translation of St Jerome's vulgate Latin into other languages, and many earlier biblical interpretations have been changed, or at least more subtly nuanced. Changes are often due to improved translations from the original Greek and Hebrew and a better understanding of circumstances in the latter half of the first century AD, when the New Testament was written, or in the times of the Old Testament stories.

The first change lies with the story of Lot and the Sodomites (Gen 19:1-29). Christian tradition held that the sin of the Sodomites, which led to their destruction by God, was their demand for Lot to give up his male guests so that they could be raped. Hence, 'sodomy', i.e. male homosexuality, was a grave sin. However, consideration of those times reveals that homosexual rape was not considered primarily a sexual act, but an act of hostility and subjugation performed on defeated enemies. What could be a better illustration of this nexus between sexual dominance of an enemy and their defeat than David bringing 100 foreskins of defeated Philistines to Saul (1 Sam 18:27)? The rape of defeated soldiers and populations was a common tactic of subjugation (and continues to this day). The actual sin of the Sodomites, for which God destroyed them, was a hatred of strangers and a lack of hospitality to them.

The book of Leviticus contains two comments on male homosexuality, the law in Lev 18:22: 'You shall not lie with a man as with a woman' and the penalty in Lev 20:13: 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death'. The overriding sentiment of chapter 18 is expressed in

verse 24: 'Do not defile yourself in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves'. An underlying concern was the common practice in other societies of temple prostitution. Leviticus 23:17 addresses this: 'None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute'. The Jewish society of those times, with its emphasis on family households, did not consider the possibility of a homosexual marriage, just the defilement of God's chosen people by male prostitution within an idolatrous religion, or rape of a subjugated male.

Homosexuality is addressed in three epistles. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul condemns the actions of people who worshipped false gods and as a result engaged in orgiastic behaviour: 'God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural. ... The men were consumed with passion for one another.' This condemnation of idolatry-induced orgiastic behaviour is not a model of homosexual marriage. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 we read a statement in English that sounds unambiguous: '... adulterers (*moichoi*), male prostitutes (*malakoi*), sodomites (*arsenokoitai*) ... none of these will inherit the kingdom of God'. The problem in knowing what Paul actually meant lies with the language of those times. For first century Greeks, '*malakoi*' literally meant 'soft ones' and referred to young or effeminate men engaged in male prostitution. '*arsenokoitai*' is more difficult to translate correctly. It is a compound word made up of '*arsen*' meaning 'man' and '*koite*' meaning 'bed' – 'man-bedders'. It is usually translated as 'sodomites', 'homosexuals' or similar. It occurs in the Bible only here and in the pastoral epistle 1 Timothy, not actually written by Paul, in which a similar group of sinners is condemned. However, in the group of sexual sinners the author has placed it between 'fornicators' and 'kidnappers' (1 Tim 1:10), and it is likely that he was referring specifically to the practice of kidnapping boys to become homosexual prostitutes. It seems more reasonable to infer that Paul and the author of 1 Timothy were specifically condemning homosexual prostitution, and were not commenting on a situation similar to contemporary homosexual marriage, and the 'man-bedders' were clients of the male prostitutes.

Where does this leave the Catholic Church? Western society has evolved in one generation from one in which homosexuality was illegal, and committed homosexual couples were persecuted and had to live furtively, to one in which homosexuality

is legal and, in many places, homosexual marriage is also legal. In Australia, this was supported at a plebiscite by a majority of Catholics. Much of what is written here on biblical interpretation is contentious, and was certainly not the main reason for acceptance of homosexual marriage in the Australian Catholic community. Given that the Bible is the major basis for the prohibition of homosexual marriage by the Catholic Church, but the Church's interpretation has been queried by some modern scholars, and given that, in a changed social milieu, this prohibition is now being queried by its members, the Church should re-evaluate its biblical rationale for condemning homosexual marriage.

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of ARC's Secretariat

Indulge me – never!

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain defined conditions through the Church's help when, as a minister of redemption, she dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions won by Christ and the saints.

(Indulgentiarum Doctrina - Norm1 – Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul VI, 1967).

Anyone who grew up in pre-Vatican II days would appreciate the major changes in attitudes and practices amongst Catholics since that momentous Council. Ladies no longer had to wear hats in church; the priest faced the congregation; missing Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and eating meat on Friday were no longer mortal sins; the list goes on.

But most of all, the Council taught us to think for ourselves, to be guided by our own consciences and to discard practices which make no sense. Amongst these would have to be Indulgences—plenary and otherwise. These, we were taught, were brought about through prayers which, when uttered, would grant X number of days remission for a soul in Purgatory. Frequent prayers and acts of penance were encouraged, with a guarantee of personal eternal salvation being achieved by attending Mass on the First Fridays of nine consecutive months. On All Saints Day we were told that each visit to the Blessed Sacrament would secure the release of one soul from Purgatory—so we competed with each other by going in and out of the church door in order to score the highest number of visits and releases.

So when the Congregation of St Anthony in the Fields at Terrey Hills were recently 'treated' to a homily on Plenary Indulgences by an overseas priest, there was disbelief all round—surely practices like the above should have been dealt a final blow at Vatican II.

There are remarkable flaws in this belief and practice:

- ◆ No human can know the mind of God or dictate to God what She/He/It is supposed to do when a person dies;
- ◆ There is no recording angel adding up the number of prayers/rosaries/personal sacrifices made by each individual—what about the millions who die with no beliefs or no-one to pray for them?
- ◆ We have no idea what happens after we die and the concept of purgatory, measured in earthly time, is pure man-made fiction;

The concept conjures up the image of a very nit-picking, number-crunching, vengeful God—certainly not the loving creator I prefer to think of.

Surprisingly, Pope Francis has granted plenary indulgences to those who attend large devotional gatherings of the faithful such as World youth Day. From the way he speaks about this it appears that he sees the indulgence as a bountiful outpouring of grace that will inspire those present to do good works. While we assume that he does not endorse the flaws outlined above, it would be most helpful if he could state more clearly what indulgences mean for him.

*Margaret Knowlden
Editor*

Can the institutional Catholic Church be saved? Getting it back on Mission

Michael Leahy

Posted on *Pearls & Irritations* 1 April 2019

The Catholic Church throughout the world is facing its greatest crisis since the Protestant Reformation, and particularly in the Australian Church. Already reeling from the exposure by a Royal Commission of crimes of clerical paedophilia and episcopal cover-ups, it has now been hit with the conviction on five such charges of its most senior leader, Cardinal George Pell. The credibility of the institutional Church, as provider of loving care to the vulnerable such as children, and announcer of God's word to a world yearning for moral and spiritual leadership in meeting challenges like climate change, violent conflict and unequal distribution of wealth, is approaching zero.

There have been attempts to address this crisis at various levels within the Church. Recently, the Pope called a 'summit' of national episcopal leaders to devise some basic strategies for dealing with clerical paedophilia. The Australian bishops have called a national Plenary Council – a national assembly of the Church – to re-focus on its mission, and to assess where it stands and where it needs to go in order 'to get back on mission'.

The calling of this Council is in itself noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, the convening of a national assembly of the Church for the first time in nearly 80 years is an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the crisis it faces. Secondly, the bishops are also admitting that they cannot deal with the crisis on their own but must involve the whole Church in that task.

To their credit, the national bishops conference has established, in preparation for the Council, a consultation process to which all Church members are invited to contribute. A universal commitment on the part of the bishops to such consultation would have seen them establish specific processes for this purpose in their own dioceses. Most bishops have contented themselves, as have many parish priests, to referring people to the national online process. To date, something like 80,000 submissions have been lodged by this means.

This consultation process is flawed not only by its openness to contamination by multiple submission campaigns but also for the absence of debate of difficult issues, debate which might form, and even change, people's minds on them. Consequently, many are speculating about the adequacy and accuracy of the mind of the national Church that will be presented to Plenary Council delegates.

These doubts are exacerbated by the structure of the Council itself. Although participation of members other than bishops has been allowed since the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), bishops still constitute the large majority. Worse still, only the bishops have a 'deliberative vote', one that counts in determining legislation by the Council; others having but a 'consultative vote'. There is a real danger that these structures and voting rules will doom them to replicate and perpetuate the bishops' hierarchical domination.

Many renewal groups of concerned Catholics have erupted throughout Australia to address that domination and the crisis in the Church. These organisations, of both lay people and priests, have refused to acquiesce in the drift of the institutional Church into irrelevance to the lives of contemporary human beings, and, most disturbingly, into the counter-witness to the Gospel borne by the clerical

paedophilia scandal. One of these groups, *Catholics for Renewal*, recently lodged a very substantial submission (146 pages) with the preparatory body for the Plenary Council. The submission is entitled *Getting back on mission*.

Getting back on mission points to the consequences of the Church's blindness to the signs of the times. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that the Church had placed the protection of its own institutional power, wealth and reputation before the protection of children. The Commission also found that the abuse of power by the Church and its personnel was rooted in 'clericalism', which connoted among other things a presumption of privilege and entitlement on the part of clergy and religious simply because of their religious status.

Central to the 'clericalism' malaise was the Church's dysfunctional system of governance. Power within the post-Vatican II Church was still reserved to the hierarchy, a male, celibate caste. There is minimal engagement with or accountability of leadership to the general community. The Royal Commission found dysfunction even within the hierarchy: each diocesan bishop was accountable only to the Pope and so was free to do as he liked in his own diocese regardless of the views of his fellows in the national body of bishops. *Getting back on mission* insists on accountability, transparency and inclusion at all levels of Church governance in line with the Church's authentic tradition of collegiality and synodality in pursuing its mission.

The Catholic Church is one of the few institutions in modern society to have so persistently refused to fully accept the implications of one of the most manifest signs of our times: the equality of women with men. *Catholics for Renewal* challenges the theology underpinning discrimination against women in the Church, very reasonably arguing that the bishops should not only press the case with Rome for reviewing the ban on the ordination of women, but should exercise their existing powers to appoint women to positions of authority within their own dioceses. This discrimination not only denies women the status to which their baptism entitles them, but also limits even their authority to exercise such ministries as pastoral associates.

The submission presents empirical data showing the substantial decline in the numbers of Catholics attending the sacraments, and in the numbers of priests and religious. It reports other empirical data showing that priests and people are increasingly seeing the sacraments as ritual performances rather than effective signs of their encounter with the divine at key moments in their lives.

Getting back on mission exposes the Church's failings and makes considered recommendations. As a reading of the Introduction and Recommendations will show, much is at stake in this Plenary Council for this group. Can the institutional church be saved? The Plenary Council must have one objective and that is to 'get the Church back on mission'. The challenge is enormous and cannot be achieved unless the Australian bishops listen carefully to the people of the Church.

MICK LEAHY was ordained in 1969 and served as an Assistant Priest in three different Melbourne parishes until leaving the priesthood in 1973. He taught religious education in Catholic secondary schools for several years and lectured in religious education on behalf of the Catholic Adult and Tertiary Education Institute of Western Australia in the WACAE (now Edith Cowan University).

Book Review

by John Collins

Frédéric Martel: *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality and Hypocrisy*

Frédéric Martel is a self-proclaimed openly gay, lapsed catholic, non-believer who seems set on proselytising his own convictions. The book is not easy to read. It is long and, unless you are a linguist, it is full of esoteric names that the reader has to skim over rather than engage in silent pronunciation. He makes his own predilections obvious by confessing: 'When I was staying in Rome I found a bible in the bedside table which I immediately replaced with *A Season in Hell*' (p.304). (*A Season in Hell* is a poem in prose by the French homosexual, Arthur Rimbaud, published in 1873.)

To gather data for his investigation, he reports he interviewed 1500 people from 30 countries: 41 cardinals, 52 bishops and monsignori, and 45 nuncios as well as many Swiss guards, priests and seminarians. He concludes that 80 percent of the clergy who work in the Vatican are homosexual and that the more vociferous they are in decrying homosexuality the more deep-set are their own sexual preferences. Further, he claims that 60-70 percent of seminarians are gay operating under a code where homosexuality is widely condoned whereas heterosexual practice is forbidden.

One of Martel's intentions seems to be to expose the lavish pomposity, opulence and aggrandisement of the lifestyles of many of the Cardinals in the Curia with their rings, scents, perfumes, oils and clothing and their richly adorned palatial residences. This he does very well although disparaging them in every way.

The seminary is said to be the breeding ground for homosexuality where immature young adults who are not sure of their sexuality can be harvested or where those who identify themselves as homosexuals can find refuge from the taunts of their peers about not having a girl-friend or not getting married.

The book covers the papacies of Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. He asserts that Paul, John Paul II and Benedict were homophiles, if not practising homosexuals, who to protect themselves were vehemently outspoken about homosexuality. To support this accusation he relies

on psychoanalytic theory, particularly sublimation and repression, to hide their inner predispositions. He is particularly vindictive of Benedict who is described as a rigid man whose reasoning was absolutely perverse and who was hated in the Vatican as no other pope in modern history.

Furthermore, he goes on to claim that Benedict was so overwhelmed by the revelation so many of the clergy were being convicted of paedophilia worldwide that he could not cope with the consequences and resigned. Francis started by laicising cardinals, bishops and priests who were convicted of paedophilia. But when it came to cleansing the homophobic Curia he realised that, for the time being, he could only contain them and bide his time.

The book is full of rumour, intuition, nuance, innuendo and allusions to support his claims. He relies on his own interpretation of subtle body language, 'anonymous first hand sources' and 'according to collaborative sources'. The text is replete with emotive claims, such as 'known to be,' 'proven to be,' 'shown to be,' 'suspected to be,' without any evidential support. The other ploy he uses is to employ pseudonyms for many of his respondents 'who wish to remain anonymous'. Respondents who object to his interpretations he accuses of using 'rumour, gossip, and hearsay without subjecting them to the process of analysis' (p.510). Yet the book is full of hermeneutical analyses which any quantitative behavioural scientist would find questionable. His own emphasis on rumour and scandal mongering is nauseous.

Although Martel's statistics may be conflated and his analysis dubious, there is so much detail in this book that some of his arguments could be persuasive and I am left with the impression 'where there is smoke there may be fire'.

Dr John Collins is an Emeritus Professor from Macquarie University and a member of St Anthony's in the Field Church in Terrey Hills.

“Fix It Please God”

Noelene Uren

In the March edition of *ARCVoice* John Shelby Spong, in his twelve theses, wrote that understanding God in theistic terms—that is a belief in the existence of a personal God who actively manifests himself in the world—can no longer be given credence. Bishop Spong, an eminent liberal Christian theologian, states that we need to have a fundamental rethinking of Christian belief away from theism and traditional doctrines. He wrote that Christianity must be constantly evolving and, ‘forcing the evolution is the dialogue between yesterday’s words and today’s knowledge’.

This echoed statements made in a lecture I attended earlier this year while in London. The lecturer was Edwin Curley, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan. His subject was Baruch Spinoza, the 17th Century Jewish-Dutch philosopher. Interestingly, Spinoza’s books were placed on the Catholic Church’s Index of Forbidden Books. He was branded an atheist, but he never refuted the existence of God. Rather he questioned the nature of the Divine. He saw God not as a being, but as a force of nature.

Four centuries after Spinoza wrote of his modern conceptions of self and the universe, we as humans are still trying to humanise God. By calling God ‘Him’ or ‘Her’ we are adding to this concept of God as akin to us. So we have ended up with a suspiciously human deity who can be cajoled into doing what we want, just so long as we rally enough people in prayer.

Is this then why we ask for prayers for the sick and why we have a long list of people to pray for in the parish newsletter? Recently a much beloved relative of mine died of cancer. In what was obviously the last weeks of his life his son said to me, ‘Pray for him, it’s all we’ve got left’. There is such sadness in the desperate hope that, if we pray hard enough, our human God will intervene and through a miracle cure our sick when all the 21st century medical skill has told us no more can be done.



So, when we are asked by our priests to pray for peace, for the poor, for the sick, for vocations and so on, are we attempting, in John Spong’s words, ‘to turn the Holy into the service of the human’. We were taught, ‘Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you’. We pray, believing God will intervene for us. However, should we not look more closely at this quote: ‘Ask, seek, knock’. In other words, act yourself. Or in the words of Barack Obama, ‘Do we settle for

the world as it is, or do we work for the world as it should be?’ And I can’t help adding as a perfect example: if instead of asking for prayers for vocations in every parish, if the Vatican would open the priesthood to women and allow priests to marry it might just be a case of problem solved.

Following on this line of thinking, to me the beauty of prayer is not that it is a means of constant supplication. Rather, when we pray alone it is a time of quiet meditation. When we pray together, it is an act of sharing, of mutual support, a coming together before God. Most of all, it is an act of love, for whether God exists as abstract and impersonal, or as force of nature, to us Christians, God is love.

Noelene Uren is a retired primary school teacher and a regular contributor to *ARCVoice*

A Unique Resource for the Australian Church

Noel Connolly SSC

This weekend we published the final report on the Listening and Dialogue stage of the Plenary Council, *Listen to what the Spirit is saying*. It is an honest and authentic document, a summary of the contributions of more than 222,000 Catholics about what they believe God is asking of us in Australia today.

Some of the opinions you may support; some you may find challenging. All are serious contributions of believers, and we must respect them.

What is marvellous about the document is that it is a unique summary of the *sensus fidelium* of the Church in Australia. It is hard to imagine a more comprehensive way of listening to the People of God.

We know the Church is not a democracy, but neither should it be a dictatorship. It works best when, as Cardinal Newman says, the magisterium and the people “breathe together”. Or, as Pope Francis says, when we are synodal, when we walk together, all listening to one another.

Our tradition has always seen the bishops as authoritative guardians of the faith. Before Vatican II, the image was juridical. The bishops promulgated laws and taught doctrine, and the faithful were to obediently accept these laws and teachings without making any positive contribution to their development. The bishops were teachers and the laity learners.

According to Vatican II, each believer, by Baptism, has a supernatural instinct or sense of the faith that allows them to recognise God’s word and to respond to it.

For Pope Francis, “The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.”

Bishops teach after listening to the sense of faith of their people. That is why Pope Francis insists on our being a synodal church, “a church which listens, which realises that listening ‘is more than hearing’. It

is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).”

Richard Gaillardetz outlines a *communio* model of reception.

1. The people of God express their faith in liturgy, devotion, daily Christian living, and in their sharing.
2. The bishops, who are also part of the people of God and close to and immersed in the life of their people, receive these expressions of faith and assess their fidelity to the apostolic tradition.
3. If the need arises, the bishops give a doctrinal teaching on the insights of the faith expressed by the community.
4. The Christian faithful engage this official teaching and, upon recognising its fidelity to the lived faith of the Church, appropriate the new formulation, and this appropriation, in turn, leads to new expressions of faith.

And the circle begins again.

The major difference between this *communio* model and the former juridical model is that the bishops are seen among the people of God dialoguing and listening to them. There is a reciprocal give and take between the bishops and their people.

In *Listen to what the Spirit is saying*, we have an exceptional expression of the sense of the faithful. We will need patient discernment to grasp the voice of the Holy Spirit among the enthusiastic, strongly held but sometimes contradictory voices of the people of God. We will also need humility and a generous openness to all. It is too easy for us to decide who has the *sensus fidei* and who should be listened to.

Individual believers who are committed to their spiritual lives and live a sacramental life will have a

special insight. However, few of us live full Christian lives. We all have blind spots. We also need to listen to our prophets. We need to attend to the victims of child abuse, to gay Catholics and divorced Catholics and all those who are marginalised and find themselves in ‘ecclesial exile’. Given the sins of the Church in recent times, there are many of these and many who have great faith.

We now move into the second phase of our Plenary Council journey: Listening and Discernment. It is encouraging that more than 222,000 of our brothers and sisters have given us their sense of the faith and the future of the Church in Australia. Now we must keep talking, listening and discerning, confident that the Spirit is with us.

Fr Noel Connolly SSC is a member of the Plenary Council Facilitation Team.

To read more about *Listen to what the Spirit is saying*, visit the Plenary Council website at www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au

Vale to the heart of CPRT The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought

It is just over 20 years ago that a small progressive religious discussion group started meeting in a private home in North Ryde. It consisted originally of four people who were looking for support from each other in their search for a more meaningful understanding of the Bible and a better way of worship. I think it was what now can be described as the heart of CPRT.

By 2002 the group had drawn together around fifteen like-minded persons who were meeting regularly but who had failed to find official acceptance within the structure of the church to which they belonged. On 23rd October 2004, the group hosted a wider gathering of approximately eighty people from within the Sydney region. At this meeting their guest speaker, Lloyd Geering, formally opened their enlarged and more inclusive regional activity. It was an independent non-church entity that would be affiliated with other progressive regional organisations around Australia. Hence the North Ryde Informal Fellowship gave birth to CPRT (Sydney).

After fifteen years of faithful service, CPRT (Sydney) has reached its use-by-date as a regional association and the valued roles of its many voluntary executive members have been played out.

Since we announced the closure, we have been deeply moved and overwhelmed by the host of appreciative testimonials that have been sent to us. We have been inundated by stories of how CPRT (Sydney) has performed a major role in their respective faith journeys—stories that have come to us from both local and regional members, churched and non-churched, christian and non-christian, past and present.

However, the discussion group will continue to meet every month on a Tuesday afternoon with speakers and defined topics to explore. They will usually gather in the home of Ted Nettle at 35 Pembroke Rd Marsfield. You are welcome to attend by contacting Ted on 0421 753 126 or ted@nettle.org

Ken Fletcher
CPRT

Have your say!

ARC*Voice* is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church.

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

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