



arvoice

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The Church Beyond the 'Grey Hair' Era?

We will soon find out the agenda that will be set for the first session of the Plenary Council to be held in Adelaide in October this year. The Writing Groups working on the six 'themes' will complete their reports at the end of March which ostensibly will go towards formulating that agenda.

Reflecting on some of the last 'discernment' meetings held in parishes, one could gain the impression that many parishioners are a bit 'over it'. They have put a lot of effort into making submissions but perhaps their enthusiasm has been dampened by Archbishop Anthony Fisher's comment that 'not all is up for grabs', indicating that people should not expect too much change. He stated that we should 'look creatively outside the box but within what is already possible in our law and customs and theology'. In other words: stay within the box!

It also appears that the majority of those seeking to influence significant change in the Church are aged more towards the senior citizen cohort. Recently a major symposium was held in Sydney entitled 'Shaping the Future of the Church'. I was able to look across the gathering of around 250 people and counted only six people who would have been under 40 years of age, the majority being much older. The audience was reminded by a key speaker that change happens very slowly in the Church and that Vatican II, coming one hundred years after Vatican I, could more accurately be called Vatican I.1. One reason is because much of the progressive written content in the documents of Vatican II was denied in other sections, often within the same document (see Collins—page 4 of this issue). Progressives point to Vatican II's proclamation that the people are the Church, often forgetting, or perhaps unaware, that hierarchy and the power of the Pope and bishops was emphasised just as much.

We certainly hope that this realisation does not lead the more senior Catholics to become satisfied if only a few concessions to desired change come about through the Plenary Council process. They would be disappointed, of course, but may grudgingly accept that any change in the

Church is progress in the glacier-like movement that has occurred through the centuries.

Meanwhile, congregations decline rapidly. And it is not just the teenagers and post-teenagers who are leaving the Church behind. A majority of the 35 students in an astronomy course I recently attended consisted mostly of women around 30-40 years old. The question of God naturally came up. All but a few considered that the concept of God presented to them by Christian educators was so full of contradictions that they needed to look elsewhere for meaning or spirituality. Of those pursuing an understanding of God, church attendance did not appear to feature in that quest. The group in this case may not be a balanced sample, but would I experience similar reactions in any young educated group if ideas about God and religion were seriously discussed?

If we are going to be the prophetic People of God, then we really do have to think outside the box.

John Buggy

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Towards a Communique to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

John Buggy

On 3rd April this year, delegates from organisations making up the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) will meet in Canberra to discuss further input for the Plenary Council. On behalf of ARC, I offered to draw up a document for discussion outlining some key issues that will make it easier to formulate a communique following the meeting. Further material on subjects such as governance, co-responsibility, the role of women, etc., will be added by others. The overall content, approach and tone of the communique will be determined by those representatives of ACCCR who attend the meeting.

The Plenary Council 2020-2021 has been recognised as of critical importance to the ongoing life of the Church in Australia. Following the report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the credibility of the Catholic Church's leadership has been significantly compromised. This, when coupled with the increasing demand from Catholic people to have Church teaching and practices that more closely reflect the spirit of Jesus, the need for change has never been more evident.

You, the bishops of Australia, through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, have an onerous obligation to express clearly through this Plenary Council what you intend to do to restore confidence, to engage with people as pastors, and to reflect the considered views of the People of God, even if you do not agree with the majority of them on some matters.

Pope Francis has emphasised in almost all his writings that bishops must take a pastoral approach in drawing people closer to God and the sacramental life of the Church. Here are some very important and salient situations in which to fulfil that "pastoral obligation".

1. **Support for the divorced and remarried:** We realise that bishops are unable to give a general permission for these members of the Church to be given holy communion. However, we do need to know how you expect your priests to draw people into the practice of their faith when they are unable to openly offer them this sacrament. The internal forum and its relationship to

primacy of conscience must not be forgotten in pastoral counselling and practice.

2. **Support for LGBTIQ+ community:** The Church can no longer deny the reality of homosexuality for which no individual should experience discrimination or blame. Again, as bishops, you should be giving guidance to your priests on how to support those who genuinely wish to commit to a partner in a mature loving way. Why cannot their commitment to each other at least be blessed, given that they now have a legal right to enter into that commitment?
3. **Compassionate approach to marriage annulments:** The extraordinarily high and ever-increasing instances of domestic violence indicate that there are many situations where commitment to marriage was defective. Bishops should ensure that the annulment procedure reflects a recognition that relationships fail and that pastoral support is provided for all parties affected.
4. **The sacraments are for the people** (emphasised by Pope Francis): Quite clearly the practice of individual Confession is rapidly falling into disuse. The large majority of practising Catholics are not in mortal sin but the sacrament of reconciliation is a grace-filled support. You, the bishops, should look to revive this sacrament by considering the pastoral benefits of the Third Rite and the opportunities it provides to educate about both personal and social sin (e.g. degrading the planet, discrimination, mal-treatment of the marginalised, etc).

Coming from the Plenary Council, Australian Catholics need to have clear answers from their bishops on their intended pastoral approach to these and similar matters of vital importance. Statements that simply outline what the bishops cannot do owing to current teaching or Canon Law will be most unsatisfactory if not accompanied by genuine efforts that clearly illustrate that no one must be excluded in just the same way that Jesus excluded no one.

In Plenary Council discussions you, the bishops, need to face seriously the fact that the practice of the faith in Australia is declining rapidly. It appears that little is being done to address the underlying causes that would indicate that this is not just a passing problem. Here are some realities to address:

1. **Younger generations are not identifying with the beliefs and practices of the Church.** This includes the large majority of those who have been educated in Catholic schools who give up going to Mass after leaving school.
2. **Better education influences what people are prepared to believe.** Advances in science, access to a huge variety of viewpoints through the internet and social media, and a better understanding of the limits on certainty leads to far more questioning. Dogmatic assertions that defy reason don't cut it.
3. **Teaching and preaching literal interpretations of scripture accelerates faith rejection.** This is true, not only for young people, but for all those who expect some intellectual rigour from anyone speaking from a position of authority.

You need to urgently initiate programs for all priests and religious educators to ensure that they teach and preach from a sound knowledge of how scripture is to be interpreted. You need to be prepared to select or change the set readings in the liturgy in order to amplify religious meaning. For example, there is no point in liturgically celebrating the Genesis story of creation in the Easter Vigil (a time when more than the usual number of Catholics attend Mass) when almost everyone accepts evolution as a fact.

Sermons, prayers and readings that that contradict how we now understand the universe inhibit the

growth of a mature spirituality as people strive to better appreciate the mystery of God. It is imperative that the People of God know that their bishops are pastors who share this journey.

Finally, it has become clear through the feedback from our many members and the various parish discernment meetings we have attended that the People of God in Australia simply reject as unsound many of the arguments put forward against key changes desired in the Church. This is what the majority of them strongly hold:

1. **Bishops and priests are not changed ontologically through ordination:** There is no basis for claiming that this change occurs and even its meaning is questionable. It implies that the priest is on some kind of higher plane that justifies a privileged status. This also supports clericalism and the inappropriate exercise of authority which must be recognised and eradicated.
2. **Celibacy is not essential for ordination:** Apart from its spiritual aspect, everyone knows that obligatory celibacy is only a Church law and there are many priests who are not bound by it. Evangelisation and ministry are much higher gospel demands and priorities that should not be hindered by a law that can be reasonably changed.
3. **There are no reasons why women cannot be ordained as priests –** the vast majority of the People of God agree. Credible theology and scriptural studies support their view.

The credibility of the Church itself is further diminished when spurious reasons are maintained to support the contrary viewpoints in instances such as the above.

You, our bishops, may not feel comfortable addressing these issues and may prefer not to raise them at the Plenary Council. It would be better if you didn't rather than reiterate the reasons against change that we have already heard many times. Whatever the case, it is imperative that our convictions must be presented to Rome even if you refuse to address them in the Plenary Council.

Lay community key to reforming Catholicism

Church conflict has become corrosive and toxic

Paul Collins

One of the most extraordinary recent examples of commitment is the loyalty shown by many post-Vatican II Catholics to the church. Despite their steadfast support for the emphases of that Council, these lay Catholics, supported by many priests, are often seen as a ‘nuisance’ by senior church leaders whose real focus has been protecting their own positions and clericalist ideology.

Their commitment has been further tested by the sexual abuse scandals and the abject failure of many bishops in dealing with them.

The forthcoming Plenary Council (PC) of 2020/2021 will be a further test of the loyalty of these Catholics. How serious are the bishops when they call on Catholics to ‘engage in an open and inclusive experience of listening, dialogue and discernment about the future’ of Australian Catholicism? Will they really listen to those who have remained loyal to the teachings of Vatican II?

Catholics for Renewal is one of several groups of Vatican II Catholics. It prepared a detailed submission for the PC and has now published that submission as a book, *Getting Back on Mission: Reforming Our Church Together* (Garratt Publishing, 2019).

Robert Fitzgerald, one of the Royal Commissioners into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, talks in the book about the causes of abuse and says that ‘poor governance, inadequate leadership and an unhealthy culture that preferences secrecy and the church’s own interests’, as well as ‘the absence of females and their participation in leadership roles’, all contributed to the bishops’ abject failure in deal with sexual abuse. Fitzgerald speaks of the hierarchy’s ‘fear of the non-ordained, especially women’, and an ‘arrogant assertion ... of the unique privilege of an ordained class’. In other words, clericalism. Fitzgerald emphasises especially the importance of ‘good church governance’.

This goes to the heart of *Getting Back on Mission*. As the title indicates, for too long the church has been ‘off mission’ in a self-engrossed, self-righteous, clericalist miasma that has led to massive disaffiliation of Catholics, a catastrophic fall in Mass attendance and sacramental practice.

People feel alienated from bishops who, in turn, have retreated into their bunkers. To cap it all, faithful Catholics have had to witness the scandal of sexual abuse and the secretiveness of the bishops in dealing with this crisis. As I know from personal experience, anyone in the past who called attention to these issues was accused at best of exaggeration and at worst of being a ‘Judas’.

Getting Back on Mission correctly points out that until the church accepts good governance characterised by accountability, transparency, inclusion and a recognition of the equality of women, it will continue its culture of clericalism and secrecy.

Accountable to the whole community

At the heart of the argument are the theological principles of the radical equality of all the baptised and the *sensus fidelium*, the intuitive sense that the faithful have to discern the belief of the church. That is why Saint John Henry Newman challenges the hierarchy to consult the lay faithful ‘in matters of doctrine’.

The reality is that the pope and bishops don’t own the church and don’t govern according to some type of *Führerprinzip*. They are accountable to the whole community. As the First Letter of Peter says: ‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light’.

Vatican II recovered this communitarian vision of the church in the first two chapters of *Lumen gentium*, the Council’s primary document on the church, and it is to this vision that post-Vatican II Catholics have faithfully adhered. It is many in the hierarchy who have continued to hang onto the absolute monarchy model of church that evolved primarily in the post-Reformation period and that was given its definitive form by Saint Robert Bellarmine in his *Controversies* against the Protestants and confirmed by the First Vatican Council (1870). This is the model presented in the third chapter of *Lumen gentium*. Here the church is seen as a clerical hierarchy under the control of the pope whose primary task is to shepherd the sheep, the laity.

In fact, *Lumen gentium* represents a compromise between the large majority of bishops at Vatican II who espoused the dynamic image of church presented in chapters one and two, and a small minority whose uncompromising emphasis was on the hierarchical model. Since Vatican II, Catholics have been caught-up in the disjunction between these two models.

It's obvious that they are mutually exclusive and they have led to endless conflicts in church life between those who operate out of a hierarchical model and those for whom the priority is community. This conflict has become corrosive and toxic. Catholicism has to resolve this dichotomy. Unequivocally, the people of God image represented

by the first two chapters alone reflects the New Testament's understanding of the church, and this model is normative for us. This is also the key conflict underlying the Plenary Council as it plays itself out in the Australian church.

Getting Back on Mission provides us with an excellent understanding of this disjunction and plots a course to negotiate our way through it. It remains to be seen if the church's leadership has the courage to grasp the challenge that *Getting Back on Mission* provides.

Paul Collins is the author of 15 books, several of which focus on church governance and Australian Catholicism. Published by *La Croix International* Sept. 14, 2019

Australian bishops can't shy away from celibacy questions

The Universal Church's own history bears out the fact that priestly celibacy is not mandatory

Nick Brodie

By a seemingly providential quirk, the first pope's mother-in-law appeared just in time to set the record straight.

Thanks to the cycle of readings in the Catholic Church's lectionary, the Gospel of Mark's account of Jesus healing Saint Peter's mother-in-law was read from pulpits worldwide on 15 January 2020. This was the very day after the question of priestly celibacy exploded in Rome in a quagmire of Church politics, becoming a timely reminder of facts for Australia's Catholic Community.

News that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had co-authored a book with Cardinal Robert Sarah surprised many, most of all, it seems, the Pope Emeritus and those close to him. On 14 January, Benedict's private secretary clarified that Benedict did not co-author the volume and asked the publisher to remove Benedict's name from the cover. Of course, behind the covers was a debate about sex.

This scandal-causing book argues against possible changes to the rule of mandatory celibacy for Latin-rite Catholic priests. Its publication was rather transparently an attempt to thwart proposals coming out of the Amazonian Synod of 2019, where the idea of relaxing mandatory celibacy had been discussed. If Sarah's intervention hoped to dampen debate, his book has of course had the opposite effect.

Australian Catholics have a particular dog in this fight. Whatever the fallout from Rome over this book, it should not be allowed to scare Australia's bishops off from discussing the subject during the Plenary Council which is opening in Australia this year. In fact—and this is hard for a historian to say—the bishops should perhaps stop worrying about history quite so much. Habit should never trump tradition.

Debates about priestly celibacy and sexual continence are almost as old as the Catholic priesthood itself. Progressive-minded commentators will usually point out that the strict, universal rule for Latin-rite priests is of medieval European origin. In other words, for more than a millennium, western priests could be married until—as my former hometown country priest once put it with some exaggeration but also a sprinkling of truth—'monks became popes'.

On the other side, conservative-minded commentators tend to highlight that historic married priests were periodically discouraged from having sex until they gradually abandoned the habit of marrying in the first place, and that the last half a millennium bears witness to the ideal of sexual continence. For the record, in most of the Church's other rites there are married priests and long have been.

Continued.....

Rather than a clear-cut history, what the Church really has is a long-running argument about the nature of the priesthood, of which the continence and celibacy questions are a multi-millennia point of contention, and to which Sarah's book is merely one of the latest contributions. But what history does tell us very clearly is that circumstances matter.

The main reason the Catholic Church currently has priests who are not celibate is a function of the church having multiple rites. From the ancient Churches of the east to the Anglican Ordinaries brought into full communication by the Pope Emeritus only a few years ago, the Universal Church's own history does bear out the fact that priestly celibacy is not mandatory. A wealth of individual exceptions are merely the icing on an already really big and ancient cake.

Whether Australia's bishops are willing to discuss seeking a local relaxation of the rule of mandatory celibacy is one of the big questions of Plenary 2020. But if they are hesitant to broach this issue with the confidence of their Amazonian confreres, then they could at least take some inspiration from that timely reading from the Gospel of Mark. If Jesus had had a problem with Peter having a mother-in-law, he could have let the fever take her, and later generations would have been none the wiser.

NICK BRODIE is an historian and author. His recent works include *The Vandemonian War* (2017) and *1787: The Lost Chapters of Australia's Beginnings* (2016). He appears regularly on ABC24's *Matter of Fact* with Stan Grant. This article was published in *La Croix International* 16.1.2020.

Francis is dragging the Church, kicking and screaming, into the 20th century

Robert Mickens

The Church is 200 years behind the times, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini famously said in August 2012, just a couple of weeks before he died at age 85. In what was labelled his last spiritual testament, the Jesuit scripture scholar and former Archbishop of Milan said the Catholic Church was tired and listless; its clergy dressed pompously and its places of worship cavernous and empty. 'The Church is 200 years behind the times', he lamented. 'Why doesn't it rouse itself? Are we afraid? Afraid rather than courageous?'

Seven months after Martini made his *cri de coeur*, another Jesuit by the name of Jorge Mario Bergoglio—he, too, an archbishop of a major diocese, but from the South American country of Argentina—was elected Bishop of Rome.

In the nearly seven years since he appeared before the world as history's first pope named Francis, he has—in many ways—sought to bring

the Church up to pace with the Catholic people of this age and the rapidly changing world. How has he done so far?

'The pope is dragging the Church, kicking and screaming, into the 20th century', a friend likes to remind me. My friend is a former Franciscan who is now a senior Anglican priest. He has a very dry, and sometimes ironic, sense of humour. So, yes, he's well aware that we are already two decades into the 21st century. So by his estimation, Pope Francis is half way there in closing the 200-year gap that Martini indicated. And the sentiments of many Catholics—and others—seem to concur. Proof of this has been the various reactions to the pope's new rescript to abolish the 'pontifical secret' regarding clergy sex abuse.

While some commentators called it a 'monumental' and 'historic' development, others derided it as a public relations scheme and something that doesn't really change much of anything. What good is eliminating secrecy, one complained, if in places like Italy—where the pope is the head of the national Church—bishops and priests are still not required by ecclesiastical or civil legislation to report abuse to law-enforcement authorities? Prying things open or just smoke and mirrors?

Then there are the reactions to Francis' efforts toward financial reform at the Vatican. Many in the old guard believe he has gone too far in trying to bring transparency to institutions that have long operated as if they were offshore banks. Others think the Argentine pope's financial reforms are all smoke and mirrors.

And what about the pastoral reforms this pontificate has tried to introduce? For instance, he has asked the Church's ministers to change the way they care for the divorced and remarried, people in other 'irregular' marriage (or marriage-like) situations, as well as gays and lesbians.

He has also called for more incisive presence of women at all levels of the Church's decision-making levels. And he's opened up new studies on women deacons, including through a pontifical commission that he's promised to re-commission. Slowly moving forward.

But have things really changed much for women in the Church? I'm not sure many of them think so, especially those who are young. But there sure are a lot of clerics (and clericalist laypeople) who are bemoaning—and condemning—the fact that the pope has even opened up these issues to change. Most everyone would have to agree that Francis is moving the Church forward, even very slowly. In some ways, he's doing it in the manner that his late Jesuit confrere prescribed.

In his final interview, Cardinal Martini recommended 'three very strong instruments' for healing the Church from its exhaustion and overcoming the 200-year credibility gap.

Conversion is the first and most important instrument. 'The church must recognise its errors and follow a radical path of change, beginning with the pope and the bishops. The paedophilia scandals compel us to take up a path of conversion,' he said. 'Questions about sexuality, and all the themes involving the body, are an example. These are important to everyone, sometimes perhaps too important,' Martini mused. But he said they were a great challenge to the Church's credibility. 'We have to ask ourselves if people still listen to the advice of the Church on sexual matters. Is the Church still an authoritative reference in this field, or simply a caricature in the media?' he wondered. Engaging with the Word of God and learning discernment

The late cardinal said the second instrument for reforming the Church is **Sacred Scripture**. 'Vatican Council II gave the Bible back to Catholics... Only those who perceive this Word in their heart can be part of those who will help achieve renewal of the Church, and who will know how to respond to personal questions with the right choice,' Martini insisted. 'The Word of God is simple, and seeks to be a companion to a heart that listens. ... Neither the clergy nor ecclesiastical law can take the place of the inner life of the human person,' he continued. 'All the external rules, laws and dogmas are there to

clarify this internal voice and for the discernment of spirits,' Martini emphasised.

The third instrument of healing and reform, the late cardinal noted, are the Church's **sacraments**. 'The sacraments are not an instrument of discipline, but a help for people in their journey and in the weaknesses of their life,' he said. 'Are we bringing the sacraments to the people who need new strength? I think of all the divorced and remarried couples... They need special protection... If the parents feel like they're outside the Church, or don't feel its support, the Church will lose the next generation,' he predicted. 'The question of whether the divorced can receive Communion ought to be turned around. How can the Church help people in complicated family situations with the power of the sacraments?' he wondered

Cardinal Martini, who was one of global Catholicism's most credible spiritual leaders during his 22 years as the archbishop of Europe's largest diocese, was adamant that the Church needed to change. 'I advise the pope and the bishops to find twelve people who are complete outsiders for administrative positions,' he said. He actually said people who are *fuori dalle righe* (literally, 'outside the lines') who are 'close to the very poorest and are surrounded by young people who are trying new things'.

Pope Francis said from the start of his pontificate that he dreamed of a poor Church for the poor. He is a Vatican outsider—the first pope since Saint Pius X (1903-1914)—who never studied or worked in Rome. And he has begun to bring in other outsiders to take up administrative posts in the Roman Curia. Those anxious for change, reform, renewal and the actualisation of John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* (or up-dating) are probably not completely satisfied with the small steps forward that Francis has made so far.

But those who want no change and who cling to static structures and ways of doing (or not doing) things are actually distraught that the pope has taken even these modest steps. That's because they know that once things begin to move forward, there is no going back.

ROBERT MICKENS is senior Rome correspondent for *La Croix International*. This article was first published on 19.12.2019

Australian bishops have a transparency problem

The bishops must look beyond their impregnable position in Canon Law and take on a much more open mindset

John Warhurst

Australia's bishops have yet to demonstrate the new openness to the Catholic community necessary for a successful Plenary Council 2020. Their inclination to secrecy remains an impediment. They just don't get transparency as a virtue and they have twice demonstrated their adherence to old ways of doing things in recent months. Whether they realise it or not, secrecy runs deep in episcopal culture.

The first example came in the conduct of the restructuring of the central apparatus of the Australian church, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), which was decided last November at the biennial ACBC meeting. This restructuring involved an overall cut of 50 per cent to funding of the national church administration based in Canberra and some capital cities.

Grants to national agencies have been cut, including total removal of the long-standing central funding of Catholic Social Services Australia, and jobs have been lost in a shake-up of the general secretariat. One of the most notable casualties has been the stand-alone Council for Australia Catholic Women with the consequent loss of the Office for the Participation of Women and its executive officer, Andrea Dean. There is much more, including the disappearance of many jobs in executive support, research and journalism and funding cuts across many offices and commissions. The whole package is so substantial that both its general contours and its administrative detail deserves wider debate beyond the ACBC.

The bishops should take the wider Catholic community into their confidence and share the financial difficulties which have led them to take what ACBC President, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, has described as 'a difficult but unavoidable path'.

National church administration is funded by diocesan levies and many dioceses are clearly feeling

the pinch. Revenue is falling because of well-known problems such as falling attendance and an ageing church membership.

Expenditure is rising, including the significant contributions to the National Redress Scheme and Catholic Professional Services Ltd, the church body set up to implement the new child protection regimes. All Catholics need to own these problems, but to do that we need to know about them.

About the selection process

The second example is in the process currently underway for selection of diocesan delegates to the PC2020. This procedure, by which lay, clerical and religious delegates are being selected by each diocesan bishop, cries out for more transparency than is currently being allowed.

Small numbers of delegates, four to eight from each diocese according to its size and status, are being chosen from each diocese, formally by the diocesan bishop but presumably on advice from his administrators.

Expressions of interest have been called for by late January/early February, through Catholic media advertisements and parish newsletters. Those interested have been asked to submit a short explanation of their interests and credentials as well as the usual personal information.

This is always a difficult time of the year to take critical decisions, much less the tumultuous end to 2019, and the church must make its choice of delegates open and transparent if community trust in PC2020 is to be established.

But information about the selection process itself is scanty at best. Representation of lay Catholics, especially women, must be a high priority.

The possibility of a change of mindset about transparency lies mostly with the bishops themselves, individually and collectively. Instruments of accountability are largely lacking.

The diocesan Catholic media, impotent or uninterested, are useless in this regard. The bishops must look beyond their impregnable position in Canon Law and take on a much more open mindset. The Catholic community is crying out for it.

There are easy remedies available in both the above examples and the solutions would not be difficult to implement.

In the case of the ACBC restructure it is not too late for the bishops to issue a full explanation, in clear language, of exactly what they have done and why they have done it.

This would involve a detailed explanation of ACBC income and expenditure, preferably couched in a full analysis of the income and expenditure of the whole Australian church, and a complete

explanation of the organisational changes, cuts and restructuring, made to the central secretariat, commissions and councils.

In the case of the selection of PC2020 delegates, when the announcements are made during February of the appointed delegates from each diocese they should be accompanied by a note explaining how many expressions of interest there were, how and why the particular choices were made and, if there was a selection panel to advise the bishop, who was on it.

Transparency should be essential in church affairs. The bishops should begin 2020 by turning over a new leaf.

JOHN WARHURST is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn. He has submitted an expression of interest in being a PC 2020 delegate from the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn. This article was published in *Eureka Street*, 28 January 2020.

Letter to the Editor

Over the years I have read your informative newsletters with great interest, and not the least with some despondency. How will it ever be possible to actually reform our Catholic, or better, Roman Catholic Church?

Jesus said: ‘The Kingdom of God does not come with pomp and circumstance. God does not look at outer appearance; but the Kingdom of God is within you.’

He also said: ‘No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old cloak, otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear occurs. And no one puts new wine into old skins, otherwise the wine will burst the old wineskins and the wine is lost, and so are the skins. But one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.’

The analogy: old, worn out cloak; old wine skins:

Long rote prayers, hats, etc. to impress people; Cannon Law. (See *Catholic Weekly*: big pictures of dressed-up bishops in every issue.)

The new wine, new wineskins, new garments:

The WORD OF GOD as it comes to us in the Gospels, NT and OT is simple, humble and full of life and strength. Jesus said: (John 6:63)

‘It is the Spirit that gives life;

The flesh is useless.

The words I have spoken are spirit and life.’

Let us build the new church on the rock of GOD’s Word. Then the house built on sand will eventually crumble.

*Elisabeth Roth
Mascot*

Pope Francis Abolishes the Pontifical Secret Over Child Sexual Abuse

Kieran Tapsell

Posted on *Pearls & Irritations* 20 December 2019

On 17 December 2019, Pope Francis abolished the pontifical secret over child sexual abuse by clergy. This was the first step in returning the Catholic Church to its 15-century-old tradition, which it abandoned in 1917, of regarding child sexual abuse as a crime that needed to be punished by the State. Francis has still not gone far enough because the restoration of that tradition requires the imposition of mandatory reporting to the civil authorities, as demanded by two United Nations Committees.

In its Final Report of December 2017, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that canon law's pontifical secret for child sexual abuse by clergy still applied where there were no applicable civil reporting laws, and recommended that it be abolished.

On 17 December 2019, Pope Francis abolished it in a document entitled *Instruction on the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings*. Archbishop Scicluna, who has been at the forefront of reforms, is reported to have said: 'Local dioceses and religious congregations have the right and duty to share information with victims and with the civil authority as the pontifical secret cannot be invoked to impede or hinder that.'

The abolition of the pontifical secret for cases of child sexual abuse by clergy certainly gives bishops and religious leaders the right to report the allegations to the civil authorities, but nowhere in the Instruction does it say that they have the duty to do so. The footnotes to the Instruction attach commentaries by a number of Vatican officials, but none of them say that there is a canonical obligation to report such allegations to the civil authorities, a demand made by the United Nations Committees for the Rights of the Child, and against Torture in 2014.

The excuse given by the Vatican in the past against mandatory reporting was that different legal systems make a universal reporting law impossible, and that imposing one could endanger the Church in places where Catholics are a persecuted minority.

The Vatican did not seem concerned by this problem in 2010, when it announced that bishops would be required to report child sexual abuse allegations to the civil authorities where there was an

applicable civil reporting law. There was no exception made for countries like Saudi Arabia where the Church is a persecuted minority. That requirement to comply with civil reporting laws is repeated in the 2019 Instruction, but still no exception is made.

Even if that concern is now genuine, there is a very simple solution. Every legal system creates exceptions to general laws where their application would be inappropriate, and the *Code of Canon Law* creates such exceptions 1,300 times. Canon 87 of the *Code* also allows for dispensations to universal laws.

In 1842, there was a universal law of the Church that penitents should denounce priests who solicited sex in the confessional. The Holy Office under Pope Gregory XVI issued a decree relieving the faithful of this obligation in the lands of 'schismatics, heretics and Mohammedans,' the regimes of the time under which Catholics could expect persecution.

Further, Canon 455 allows for the making of local canon laws, and the Vatican did this in 2001 for the United States when it provided an exception to the pontifical secret to allow compliance with State reporting laws. Canon law on reporting can easily be moulded to suit every country. It's easy, and it has been done many times before in the history of the Church.

This failure to require mandatory reporting creates a headache for Pope Francis if he is serious about making bishops accountable for cover-ups. A fundamental principle of every legal system is that no one can be punished unless they break the law. This principle is expressed in Canon 221§3 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*. If bishops are not breaking

canon law by failing to report to the civil authorities where there is no civil reporting law, then they cannot be held accountable.

The Instruction and its commentaries also deal with requests to the Vatican for documents about clergy sexual abuse by courts and commissions of inquiry. The Murphy Commission in Ireland and the Australian Royal Commission had difficulty obtaining documents relating to canonical proceedings against Irish and Australian priests. Andrea Tornielli, one of the commentators, states:

This means that any reporting, testimony and documents produced in canonical trials related to such cases of sexual abuse...which until now were subject to the pontifical secret, can now be handed over when requested to lawful authorities in their respective countries. This is a sign of openness, transparency, and the willingness to collaborate with the civil authorities.

This is disingenuous. The pontifical secret is not like the secret of the confession. It can be dispensed with by the Vatican under Canon 87, and that could have occurred in respect of both the Murphy Commission and the Australian Royal Commission. If the abolition of the pontifical secret means that there will be a new broom of openness from the Vatican, well and good. There are two current Royal Commissions dealing with child sexual abuse, including within the Catholic Church, one in the United Kingdom and the other in New

Zealand. It will be interesting to see what response they get from the Vatican for the production of documents from canonical trials of priests in those countries.

The abolition of the pontifical secret over child sexual abuse by clergy, first introduced in 1922 and known then as the secret of the Holy Office, is at least a first step in the Church returning to its traditions of 1500 years of regarding the sexual abuse of children by clergy as a crime that must be punished by the State. The second step is to return to the position prior to 1917 when Pope Benedict XV, in promulgating the first Code of Canon Law, abolished the decrees of three popes and four Church Councils which required clerical sex abusers to be stripped of their status as clerics and handed over to the civil authorities. Handing them over is no longer necessary as we have police forces to which they can be reported. Mandatory reporting under canon law will return the Church to its own tradition that it abandoned in 1917 with disastrous results for the children of the world.

KIERAN TAPSELL is a retired civil lawyer and the author of *Potiphar's Wife: The Vatican's Secret and Child Sexual Abuse* and of a submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: *Canon Law, A Systemic Factor in Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*. He was also a member of the canon law panel before the Australian Royal Commission.



Hopes and Challenges For the future church in Australia

Bishop Vincent Long

Melbourne, November 15th 2019.

INTRODUCTION *Behold, I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.*’ Isaiah 43:19

These words of the prophet are an extraordinary prophetic utterance in the midst of profound disruption in Israel’s history. The capture of Jerusalem and the subsequent destruction of the Temple as well as the exile constituted the worst crisis that the people of God had yet to face. But the astonishing reality of that ancient disruption is that the matrix of brokenness became the venue for new possibility. Against the background of loss and hopelessness, of utter humiliation and disgrace, Isaiah speaks of the new things that summon the people to a new future.

Isaiah’s prophecy enlightens and challenges us as we seek to understand and to live the meaning of our experience in the church and in the world. In so many ways, we feel like the Jewish exiles facing the monumental task of rebuilding from the ground up after the devastation of the clerical sexual abuse crisis. We witness the passing of the old and the emergence of the new in our own time.

Like Israel before the exile, the church has failed to be a place of promise and freedom, of covenanted communion and solidarity. It has not fully lived out the radical vision of powerlessness of the Servant Lord. Its dysfunctional and destructive culture of clericalism has betrayed the Gospel. There is a sense in which the church must change into a more Christ-like pattern of humility, simplicity and powerlessness as opposed to worldly triumphalism, splendour, dominance and power. Christians in the post Royal Commission are like the Jews after the exile. The future of the church, like the new Jerusalem Isaiah speaks of, will not be revitalised by way of simply repeating what was done in the past. It will not be simply a restoration project or doing the old things better. Rather, we must have the courage to do new things; we must be open to the Spirit leading us to new horizons even as we tend to revert to the old ways.

The church in Australia is also facing a disruption of biblical proportions. The Royal Commission, coupled with the incarceration of Cardinal George Pell, created something like ‘ground zero’ for us. It has made sure that we cannot go on the way we have. It has exposed the Shakespearian rottenness in the state of the church. We must humbly and boldly address the biggest challenge of our time and build a healthier church for future generations. This disruption calls for deep discernment and courageous action rather than fear, intransigence and defence of the *status quo*. Like the ancient disruption, this unprecedented crisis can catalyse the church into a new era of hope and possibility. Out of our ‘ground zero’, like a phoenix the church can rise again with a new life from the ashes of its old shell.

The Demise of the Old Paradigm

It is becoming increasingly evident that the clerical sexual abuse crisis is a symptom of a dysfunctional, corrosive and destructive culture in the church. It is not just a question of individual manifestations of clericalism. Indeed there were and have been great priests who lived and ministered heroically even within the constraints of the old mould. Still, it is a question of clericalism inherent in the very culture of the church, which we must look at very honestly. In his letter following the Chilean scandal, Pope Francis wrote: ‘It would be irresponsible not to go deep in looking for the roots and structures that allowed these evil acts to happen and simply to go on.’

The culture of clerical hegemony has been solidly entrenched in the Catholic Church ever since it took centre stage in the Roman Empire. It is a by-product of the model of church, which sees itself as self-sufficient, superior to and separate from the outside world. Its security, reputation and internal relationships are the centre of attention. The church in this model becomes the church of the ordained at the expense of the baptised. As a result, the ordained becomes an exalted and elitist club that protects the interests and privileges of its members. This explains the obfuscation and cover-up, which is so endemic to this club mentality. It is a far cry from the model of the Humble Servant that Jesus exemplified and this celibate clerical club provides the ideal condition for the disease of clericalism to fester.

We really need to once and for all jettison the clericalist model of church with its by-product of the exclusive elitist clerical club. It has served us well beyond its use-by-date. The church as understood and articulated by the Second Vatican Council sees itself as a pilgrim People of God, incarnate in the world. It is a new paradigm—one that is based on mutuality not exclusion, love not fear, ‘smell of the sheep’ not elitism, engagement with the world not flight from or hostility against it, incarnate grace not dualism. It is the church going out of itself as opposed to closing in on itself.

The time has come for us to embrace and implement unambiguously and decisively the vision of the pilgrim church that the Second Vatican Council entrusted to us. The time has come for the church to embrace a new paradigm based on a discipleship of equals, so that all the People of God can create a new culture of humility, accountability and service.

The model of the church based on clerical hegemony has run its course. Insofar as it is deeply embedded in patriarchal and monarchical structures, it is incapable of helping us to meet the needs of the world and culture in which we live. We have long moved out of the *ancien régime* and the age of absolute monarchs. We are on this side of the secular state and the rise of democracy. Yet it seems that the deeply entrenched patriarchal and monarchical structures of the church have failed to correspond with our lived experience.

For the church to flourish, it is crucial that we come to terms with the flaws of clericalism and move beyond its patriarchal and monarchical matrix. What is urgent is that we need to find fresh ways of being church and fresh ways of ministry and service for both men and women disciples.

It is worth noting that at the recent Synod on the Amazon, the synod bishops say they consider it ‘urgent’ for the church to ‘promote and confer ministries for men and women in an equitable manner’.

‘It is the church of baptised men and women that we must strengthen by promoting ministeriality and, above all, the awareness of baptismal dignity’, they state. Beyond these generic statements, it remains to be seen how women can share in the decision-making power and institutionalised ministries in the church.

The church cannot have a better future if it persists in the old paradigm of triumphalism, self-reference and male supremacy. So long as we continue to exclude women from the church governance structures, decision-making processes and institutional functions, we deprive ourselves of the richness of our full humanity. So long as we continue to make women invisible and inferior in the church’s language, liturgy, theology and law, we impoverish ourselves. Until we have truly incorporated the gift of women and the feminine dimension of our Christian faith, we will not be able to fully energise the life of the church.

New ways of being Church

It is possible and indeed necessary to speak about new ways of being church as we leave behind any remnant of the Christendom. Australia was not part of the Holy Roman Empire or the Papal States. But the way of our being church has been steeped in the old paradigm of clerical order, control and hegemony. There was a reluctance to break with the past and thus, for a time, there was an effort to hold on to the old paradigm. Interestingly, this holding on resulted in what was known

as restorationism or the reform of the reform, rooted in traditional theology and practices. The result has been at best an ambivalent reception of the Second Vatican Council and, at worst, an attempt to re-establish the old order.

New ways of being church is grounded in a People of God ecclesiology. It is, I believe, at the heart of Vatican II and now being reclaimed decisively by Pope Francis.

A humble, healing and merciful church

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the church was understood to be on its way to becoming a perfect society in and for the world. It was a defensive, fortress church. Other Christian Churches were considered aberrations from this road map, not to speak of other religious movements. However, *Gaudium et Spes*—the guiding document of the Council—presented a new paradigm: the church is not an enclosure which protects its members against the sinful world. It is a fellow pilgrim with the men and women of our age. It is a church incarnate in the world. Therefore, it is time not of fearful retreat, disengagement and self-referential pomp, but of accompaniment and engagement.

Being merciful is at the heart of Catholic identity. It is not simply a matter of acting with mercy and compassion to those in need with our position of power and privilege intact. Rather, it is a radical discipleship of vulnerability and powerlessness in the footsteps of the humble Servant of God. It is an existential stance in favour of the weak and the vulnerable. It is about building up people and relationships rather than profit and size. It has to do with the Kingdom mentality rather than the empire mentality.

A church that goes to the margins

Pope Francis constantly calls us to move beyond the security of status quo and take the risk of going to the periphery. The church must be the church of the poor. The church must go out of itself in order to be close to those in need.

If one can detect the direction of Pope Francis’ pontificate, it has something to do with the movement from security to boldness, from inward-looking to outward-looking, from preoccupation with our status quo, from safeguarding our privileges to learning to be vulnerable, thereby conveying God’s compassion to those who are on the edges of society and church. It is that precarious liminal space where the true cost of our discipleship is counted, because we dare to walk with the Samaritans of our time, just like Jesus did before us. The crisis of diminishment that we face allows us an opportunity to divest ourselves of all the unnecessary trappings, to focus on what is our core mission, to act more prophetically and to live more fully, more creatively, more boldly, more at the periphery.

continued.....

A listening, synodal and inclusive church

As we move to a more pilgrim community model, it is also necessary to foster a culture of encounter and dialogue. Pope Francis speaks of an ‘inverted pyramid’ which is a radical way of exercising power and authority. It is not a top-down and centralised approach reminiscent of the monarchical model. Rather, it is a synodal church at every level, with everyone listening to each other, learning from each other and taking responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel. Vatican II already spoke of the key principles: collegiality, subsidiarity and *sensus fidelium*, all of which pointed to a more listening, dialogical and inclusive church.

The recent synods in Rome gave us a window into his vision of a synodal church. They were often marked by disruption, chaos and drama but also by a deep sense of dialogue and a boldness to strike out new pathways. In the end, it was the journey of synodality that energised the church. It was the unleashing of the energy long locked up beneath the ice of institutional security that truly matters. The energy that had been trapped in a rigid control was released by boldness, freedom and ‘*parrhesia*’.

What the church needs is not simply a renewal or an updating of methods of evangelising. Rather what we desperately need is an inner conversion, a radical revolution in our mindsets and patterns of action. Gerald Arbuckle speaks of re-founding as opposed to renewal. This re-founding means going to the very cultural roots and a hope-filled journey into the paschal mystery for mission under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Unless we genuinely repent of institutional failures and unless we convert to the radical vision of Christ and let it imbue our attitudes, actions and pastoral practices, we will not be able to restore confidence and trust in the church.

Pope Francis has envisioned a church where the lay faithful flock will sometimes ‘strike out on new paths,’ and lead the church forward. He has encouraged Catholics to ‘assume always the Spirit of the great explorers...not frightened by borders and of storms....May it be a free church and open to the challenges of the present...’

Pope Francis has really lived up to his vision of the church daring to break loose from its comfort zone and self-referential mentality. He has challenged us to be a compassionate, merciful, open and inclusive church. He has privileged a style of leadership, which involves more deep respectful listening and collective discernment.

CONCLUSION

There is a sense that we are being cut loose from the safe and secure moorings of the past. But that has been the pattern of the Judeo-Christian story even since Abraham and Sarah left the land of Ur to go to where the spirit beckoned. It is in their DNA and ours to read the signs of the times and follow where the river flows. It is not in yearning for or holding on to the known and the familiar but in reimagining the future and venturing into the unknown chaos like the old exodus that we shall find new life. We can react with fear, despair or denial in these unsettling times. This was the way many Israelites reacted when faced with the barren desert. I suspect many of our contemporaries do the same with respect to the crisis in the church. There is something hauntingly similar between the Israelites’ penchant for certitudes of Egypt and many of Pope Francis’ critics’ demand for dogmatic clarity.

The time that we are living in can be likened to Holy Saturday in the Gospel. It is a liminal interval, a time in which one stands between the old and the new. Our task is to live the creative tension between the pain of the present and the hope of the future. The Catholic Church in this country will face diminishment and decline as a result of combined forces such as the secularisation of our society, the institutional malaise and, of course, the impact of the Royal Commission. There will be collateral damage that will impact adversely on the church’s mission. But as long as we—like the midwives during the slavery in Egypt—know how to deliver and nurture new life in the face of painful transition, a better future awaits us.

It humbles us to know that God is with us in the mess and even in the perceived irrelevancy of the church. It comforts us, too, to know that the church was not at its best when it reached the heights of its power in what was known as Christendom. It was the church of the Catacombs that shone forth its best rays of hope, ironically when it was poor, persecuted and powerless. In Christendom and for the most part of history, we have tried to be great, powerful and dominant. This liminal time may turn out to be the best time to be part of a humble, inclusive and servant church. May we have the courage to move from the old paradigm of triumphalism, power and splendour to the new ways of being church that will convey the freshness of the Gospel.

I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation (*Evangelium Gaudium* 27).

* * * *

Why the way we live is more important than what we believe

Gretta Vosper

(An Extract)

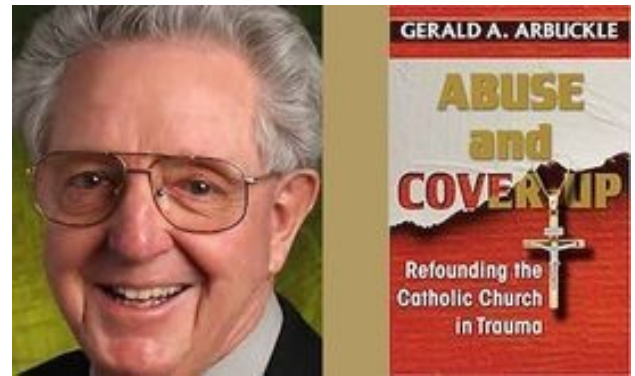
In a workshop on critical thinking offered at a conference hosted by the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, a group of clergy and laypeople were asked to compile a list, using non-religious language, of what they considered to be of utmost importance in life, what they would not want to risk losing, what they hoped their great-great-grandchildren would still be living by. The list is by no means exhaustive but, as I read it again, I am deeply aware that, should we lose even one of these things, the world would be a very different place:

hope, peace, joy, innocence, delight, forgiveness, caring, love, respect, wisdom, honour, creativity, tranquillity, beauty, imagination, humour, awe, truth, purity, justice, courage, fun, compassion, challenge, knowledge, daring artistry, wonder, strength and trustworthiness.

Not one of these values could be called dogma, doctrine or a theological term. All are common not only to most religions but also to all who embrace humanitarian ideals. When we look closely, we see that while a belief in a supernatural deity would not diminish the list, neither is such a belief necessary in order to embrace any or all of them. Some people may call them religious words, some spiritual, others human. They are, I believe, simply words that unite rather than divide.

A church that promotes the way of life portrayed in values such as those above rather than approved doctrines, holy books or teachers is what the future desperately needs. The church can go there. It's time. It must be time.

Source: Gretta Vosper: *With or Without God*
Canada: Harper Perennial, 2008



Abuse and Cover-Up:

Refounding the Catholic Church in Trauma

Gerald Arbuckle

Extract and Photo from *CathNews New Zealand*
7 November 2019

The Catholic Church is in its most challenging condition since the Reformation. The claim is made in *Abuse and Cover-Up: Refounding the Catholic Church in Trauma*, a new book by New Zealand-born anthropologist, theologian and international scholar, Fr Gerald Arbuckle SM.

Using the psalmist's image, Arbuckle says the Church was once a 'strong mountain of great prosperity', but that power and prestige previously granted the Church has all but disintegrated. Arbuckle describes the Church as the People of God who are demoralised and who are not sure what to do. 'The gap between Church rhetoric and reality is a chasm.' 'Lay people feel betrayed, disillusioned, and angry,' writes Arbuckle. He says the suppression of public grief has only intensified the sadness and rage in people's hearts, destroying people's trust in their leaders.

'The short-sighted fear of scandal has been, and is, the curse of the Church.... Because it is an easy and much-used cover for cowardice, it exploits the future in the interests of the present, preferring scandal of millions to come to that of hundreds now', notes Arbuckle; quoting 1907 'modernist' George Tyrrel. 'Pulling no punches', Arbuckle labels the culture of abuse and the system of cover-up as 'systemic corruption'. 'Sexual abuse cover-ups are systemic institutional evil because the culture of the church in this matter is corrupt', writes Arbuckle. □

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