



arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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Women still Invisible in the Church

In 1963 Pope John XXIII stated that, 'Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity---demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties that belong to them as human persons.' This appeared to be the beginning of a positive change in attitude towards women's representation in the Church. But from then on, subsequent Pontiffs continued to declare that the Church, 'has no authority to confer priestly ordination on women'. Now Pope Francis has updated the code of canon law to include a revision that codified the 'grave crime of ordaining a woman', the punishment being excommunication.

Does not the Pontiff realise that the gender gap in the Church is both a cause and a consequence of the type of thinking that conceives of humanity as almost exclusively male? That ignoring women relegates them, at best, to being a sub-set of men? That codifying the ordination of women as a grave crime is an affront to women and all people of God?

The clerically-dominated structure of the Catholic Church has led to the side-lining of women in the Church's leadership. The equality and dignity of more than half the Church has been ignored. Even the wording of one of the Bishops' topics earmarked for discussion in the Plenary Council emphasises this thinking, 'How to draw on the gifts and talents of all the people of God, including women? Do we need to be separately included? Are we not automatically part of all the people of God?'

As Vincent Long, Bishop of Parramatta, wrote: 'The Church cannot have a better future if it does not listen to women's voice, wisdom and insight.' Women's problems are fundamentally different to men's. How can they

receive the support, understanding and sympathy they need from a priest who is male and celibate, no matter how sensitive and caring he is. In a culture biased against women, how can they feel that they belong? Pope Francis, in his latest move against the inclusion of women as ordained priests has not only failed to correct the historical gender gap, he has perpetuated it.

Noelene Uren

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Letters

Thank you for helping us make sense of a time in Church which is so contradictory and forgets the Gospel of Jesus.

Mary Maguire

This is the first time I have sent you a response for *ARCVoice*. I always enjoy the articles, but the front page article on Ecumenism in Issue 81 was very close to my heart.

With thanks *Pax et Bonum*

Sandra Petith

A Church for All:

A Guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond

This recently launched booklet by John Warhurst is available at a discount to ARC members because ARC is part of the coalition of ACCCR.

The major purpose of this booklet is to inform as wide a population as possible of the issues identified by renewal groups as critical to the Plenary Council's success.

The RRP is \$14.95 but **special purchase arrangements have been agreed for ACCCR.**

The discount price is \$12.71 per copy plus postage and orders must be submitted via a Garratt Publishing ordering form **at this Garratt web link:**

<https://garratt1.wufoo.com/forms/z3wmazy159m3b3/>

Simply indicate that you are a member of Australian Reforming Catholics in the "organisation" box.

New ARC Secretariat Members

We are very pleased to announce that Helen McDermott and Fr. John Crothers have joined the ARC Secretariat.

HELEN McDermott is originally from Wollongong and has spent the last 15 years, since retiring, in Gerringong. She extends her respect to the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation. She loves their land on which she lives.

Helen spent 21 years as a Sister of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict in many country towns around NSW and Queensland. In the second half of her career she worked for the Catholic Education Office in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

She says that she is challenged to keep finding the heart of her belief in the Gospel message and to promote those truths in the Catholic Church.

JOHN CROTHERS is a priest of the Sydney Archdiocese and author of *The Clergy Club*. He is a long-term member of ARC and is now retired and living in Kiama.

He is also a musician and singer, and has posted a number of songs on his 'John Crothers Singer Songwriter' YouTube channel, calling for a more relevant and inclusive Church.

These two wonderful ARC members have a wealth of knowledge and experience and will be able to add greatly to ARC's activities in its effort to reform and bring about the Church that we believe it should be.

Gentle Reminder

As the collector of all subscriptions to ARC I am very grateful to the members who paid their annual subscription which was due on 1 July. However, this time a substantial number have not done so as yet.

A yellow annual subscription form was included with the last issue of *ARCVoice*. If you no longer wish to receive *ARCVoice*, then please tell us. Assuming that you still support the aims and values of Australian Reforming Catholics we would very much like to receive your subscription for the 1/7/21-30/6/22 financial year but will still send it to you if you cannot afford the minimum subscription. Just let us know.

We have not increased the subscription structure in twenty years. The preferred method is by direct deposit to ARC's Westpac account: BSB: 032-089 Account No:14-7944. The bank will immediately issue a receipt to you and there is usually also a box where you can put in my email address: robertfbrian@gmail.com so that I know your subscription has been paid. Of course, you can still pay by cheque. If you have changed your address, please let me know via email or via the subscription renewal form.

Robert Brian

In Memory of Barbara Campbell Founder of Australian Reforming Catholics

Alan Holroyd (with Margaret Knowlden)

This time last year I wrote an article in *ARCVoice* entitled ‘ARC’s Early Days Remembered’ which looked back to 2001 when the first issue of *ARCVoice* was published, an initiative of the then recently formed Interim Secretariat comprising Barbara Campbell, Ted Lambert and Jim Taverne.

In the closing paragraph I wrote that Barbara had moved into a nursing home in Lithgow and looked forward to receiving *ARCVoice* and so keeping in touch with the organisation that the dynamic trio of herself, Ted and Jim had founded in 2001. Sad news came to Rob Brian that Barbara had died on 10 June 2021.

Editor Margaret Knowlden remembers that Barbara was a past student of Abbotsleigh Anglican Girl’s School at Wahroonga in Sydney and that she had worked in the United Nations office in Canberra. Barbara must have ‘converted’ as on two occasions she considered that she had ‘a vocation’ and took steps to enter a convent, but decided that her faith would flourish within ‘the laity’.

Barbara lived at Sydney’s northern beaches suburb of Bilgola, up on the plateau overlooking the beach, and being an enthusiastic swimmer and belonging to a surfing group, most mornings she went down to the beach all year round and joined the team for a stimulating time enjoying the surf. The house at Bilgola was a joint venture with her brother who was a pilot who unfortunately had crashed his aircraft, and so she was a devoted carer in his recovery.

Margaret thinks that Barbara, Ted and Jim started ARC inspired by a nun living in Adelaide named Roberta Heckendorf who decided to discontinue a reform group she had started named ‘Call to Action’—possibly an off-shoot of the American group of the same name. The ARC team of up to six or so members met regularly at Jim and Margot Taverne’s apartment on the Pacific Highway at Pymble and today, if readers check the ARC website, it is a tribute to see the advances which began from those humble beginnings.

Australian Reforming Catholics was a huge challenge made even tougher in the days when George Pell was appointed Archbishop of Sydney Archdiocese (2001-2014). Learning that ARC had planned a conference at the Mary McKillop Centre at North Sydney, he stepped in at the last minute and forbade the Sisters of St Joseph to allow the use of their premises for the meeting. So another venue was found in an old theatre nearby.

Two of the priests who were to give papers at the conference were called to Pell’s office individually and told that their contracts would be nullified if they spoke. However, they were able to give Barbara their papers and she organised volunteers to read them on their behalf. Sometime later another conference was organised to be held in Rose Bay parish hall with the full support of the parish priest. However, once more, Pell intervened and an alternative venue had to be found at the last minute. Barbara certainly had her hands full in dealing with George Pell.

And so the hallowed halls of Heaven will now be enriched by Barbara joining with Jim and Ted to reminisce on their ministries of attempting to reform the Australian Catholic Church and no doubt the chairs will be shuffled as Jesus approaches to join the trio.

PS By coincidence I am a fan of Australia’s singer songwriter, Paul Kelly, and as I sat to begin typing from the draft, I pushed the ‘play’ key on my CD player, and the disc I’d left in there began ...

In my house you’ll dwell forever

You shall not want for care

Surely goodness and mercy will follow you

Come and meet me in the middle of the air

I will meet you in the middle of the air’

From Paul Kelly’s Greatest Hits 2019

ALAN HOLROYD is the illustrator for *ARCVoice*

My Hope for the Plenary Council

Abundance of goodwill or the last throw of the dice?

Most Rev. Vincent Long Van Nguyen

With a few months to the first session of the long-awaited Plenary Council (PC2020), we are finally headed down the home stretch. The initial phase of listening drew nearly 220,000 people across Australia and 17,500 individual and group submissions. These submissions were distilled into the six national theme papers and then further distilled again into the working document and finally the agenda. Momentum for the Plenary Council ebbed and flowed during this process, which has been disrupted by the pandemic.

By and large, there has been considerable goodwill, enthusiasm and even a sense of hope for the future of the Church in Australia in the post-Royal Commission period. Robert Fitzgerald who—among other prominent roles—is the new Chair of Caritas Australia, once enthused that the Plenary Council is the only game in town. For a country of about five million nominal Catholics, the initial response was quite remarkable. Perhaps, for many of the disenfranchised, it is the last throw of the dice. I wouldn't put all my eggs in one basket, though.

Some of you might have heard or even attended the first of the three convocation series organised by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR). There were 3,000 participants, including myself. We heard a powerful and inspiring address by Sr Joan Chittister. Catholicism 'must grow up', she said, 'beyond the parochial to the global, beyond one system and one tradition, to a broader way of looking at life and its moral, spiritual, ethical frameworks.'

That is the kind of stretching of the imagination and dreaming of the transformation of the Church that many Catholics are thirsting for. Few Catholics have any appetite left for cosmetic changes, mediocrity or worst, restorationism dressed up as renewal. We have struggled under the weight of the old ecclesial paradigm of clerical order, control and hegemony with a penchant for triumphalism, self-referential pomp and smugness. We yearn for a Church that commits to a God-oriented future of equal discipleship, relational harmony, wholeness and sustainability.

The revitalisation and convergence of many lay reform groups in response to the Plenary Council is no small development for the Church in contemporary Australia. It is a sign of the 'growing up' that Joan spoke about. Australian Catholics are growing up beyond the passive, subservient to the co-responsible agents for the transformation of the Church. In Germany, there is a lay body called Central Committee, which plays a key role in their Synodal Assembly, including having one of its

members as co-president of the said structure. Perhaps this unique feature is part of the legacy of the Reformation in the German Church.

Is the Church in Australia in pole position for deep reform?

The Church in Australia is uniquely positioned to move into a new fresh future. Yes, it is true that we have been humbled and reduced to near irrelevancy by the sexual abuse crisis. The Royal Commission, though being the lightning rod, has also served as a necessary wake-up call for Australian Catholics. Indeed, no other country in the world has conducted a similar national inquiry, which is as comprehensive in its scope as ours. This has brought about a heightened level of consciousness and an unprecedented momentum for deep reform.

In many areas, Australia punches above its weight. Could we be a leading light in the struggle for a more fit-for-purpose Church in this place and in this time? Could Australian Catholics rise to the challenge and co-create the synodal Church that Pope Francis has envisaged? While the Plenary Council may not address all of the issues of importance, it is certainly worth the effort in discerning the roadmap for the future.

Recently, Cardinal Marx of Germany tendered his resignation in a personal gesture to take responsibility for sexual abuses by priests over the past decades. In Chile, the bishops after a period of discernment offered to resign en masse for similar reasons. This collective act of contrition is totally unprecedented, and it shows the depth of the crisis in the Church. Whether or not we bishops of Australia should make the same radical gesture remains an open question. However, what is indisputable is the need for deep institutional change that will restore confidence and trust in the Church. Nothing less than a root-to-branch reform that will align our minds and hearts to the Gospel will do.

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 refounding as opposed to renewal. This refounding 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.

Conversion is one of the key areas on the agenda of the Plenary Council. It is framed in terms of our openness to learn and meet the needs of the world we live in. As a result, the questions revolve around our engagement with First Nations peoples, with the marginalised and the vulnerable. However, one wonders if conversion needs to be framed not just in terms of our openness to learn and meet the needs of others but also in terms of our examination of the Church's attitude and treatment of racial minorities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals and others.

Until we have the courage to admit the old ways of being Church, which is steeped in a culture of clerical power, dominance and privilege, we cannot rise to a Christ-like way of humility, inclusivity, compassion and powerlessness.

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 that the exilic prophets often speak 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.

Change of era and new way of being Church in the world

Many Catholics hope that the PC2020 will see a change in a number of priority issues such as greater inclusion of the laity, the role of women, clerical celibacy et cetera. While it is important that there is an openness and boldness to discuss these matters, what is more important is to envision a new way of being Church in the world.

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. New wine into new wineskins! The new wine of God's unconditional love, radical inclusivity and equality needs to be poured into new wineskins of humility, mutuality, compassion and powerlessness. The old wineskins of triumphalism, authoritarianism and supremacy, abetted by clerical power, superiority, and rigidity are breaking.

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 dominance. So long as we continue to exclude women from the Church's 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.

In the world where the rules are made by the strong and the structures of power favour the privileged, the Church must be true to its founding stories and responsive to the living presence of God. It must find ways to promote a community of equals and empower men and women disciples to share their gifts for human flourishing and the growth of the Kingdom.

Our founding stories are those of emancipation and liberation. It is the story of Moses and the movement of the new social order against the tyranny of empires that lies at the heart of the prophetic imagination. It inspires Mary who sings of the God who overthrows the powerful and lifts up the lowly. It is the story of Jesus who washes the feet of his followers and subverts the power structures that are tilted towards the strong. This narrative of the new reality that envisions radical reordering of human relationships was in fact the hallmark of the earliest Christian movement.

The Church must continue to embody the alternative relational paradigm. This alternative relational paradigm turns the world's system of power structures on its head because it is rooted in the biblical narrative of the new social order of radical inclusion, justice and equality. The Church cannot have a prophetic voice in society if we fail to be the model egalitarian community where those disadvantaged on account of their race, gender, social status and disability find empowerment for a dignified life.

Towards a Church of co-responsibility and synodality

Martin Luther King, Jr famously said that the arc of history is bent toward justice. The parallel statement I want to make is that the arc of the Church is bent towards co-responsibility or synodality. Let me explain.

The way of being Church has evolved over the centuries. When, after the early centuries of persecution, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the early tradition of egalitarianism gave way to a more clerical and hierarchical governance system that actually took on many features of the Empire. Throughout the long reign of Christendom and up to the Second Vatican Council, the Church often understood itself predominantly as a perfect society. Its institutional functions and dynamics were steeped in clericalism.

Ministries gradually became the domain of the ordained. They were all subsumed under a very cultic priesthood (set apart for the sacraments). Even the ancient ministry of deacon became a casualty of the process known as the '*cursus honorum*'. This means that no

one could begin ‘the course of honour’ unless he is destined and qualified for the priesthood (no married and certainly not women!). The shift towards the celibate priesthood as the normative form of ministry effectively deprived the Church of the richness of ministries as attested by the New Testament.

At the Second Vatican Council, there was a shift in the Church’s self-understanding. The dominant metaphor of ‘*a societas perfecta*’ gave way to a more biblical image of a pilgrim people. The priesthood of faithful was rediscovered along with the affirmation that the working of the Holy Spirit was granted not to the ordained only but to all baptised. Ecclesial ministries were understood in such a way as to fully honour what Paul says, ‘everyone is given the grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ’.

Pope Paul VI accordingly suppressed the minor orders and opened some of these ministries to the lay faithful. Now some 60 years later (talk about the glacial speed of change in the Church), Pope Francis took a step further with two recent important decisions. In January this year, he opened to women the ‘installed’ lay ministries of lector and acolyte, previously restricted to men. Then just a few weeks ago, he responded to an idea that sat untouched since the Council and established the installed ministry of catechist. The Pope called for ‘men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion.’

Pope Francis affirms that ‘this path of synodality’ is precisely what ‘God expects of the Church of the third millennium.’ He gave new impetus to the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, stating that the path of synodality represents an indispensable prerequisite for infusing the Church with a renewed missionary impulse: all the members of the Church are called to be active subjects of evangelisation and ‘missionary disciples’.

The Church has entered a new era that is characterised by a crisis of a top-down centralised ecclesiology. With Vatican II, the *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* led to a more biblical paradigm of a pilgrim People of God, called to be the sacrament of the Kingdom and the prophetic witness in the world. The emphasis on the superiority of the ordained gave way to an ecclesial communion based on common baptism.

Pope Francis has applied a critical lens through which the Church is renewed for the sake of its mission for the poor. The Church is helped to decentralise and impelled towards the peripheries. The Church, the People of God, should walk together, sharing the burdens of humanity, listening to the cry of the poor, reforming itself and its own action, first by listening to the voice of the humble, the *anawim* of the Hebrew Scriptures, who were at the heart of Jesus’ public ministry.

Conclusion

The COVID crisis, the Pope says, has exposed our vulnerability. It has revealed the fallacy of individualism as the organising principle of our Western society. It has given the lie to a ‘myth of self-sufficiency’ that sanctions rampant inequalities and frays the ties that bind societies together. If we want a different world, we must become a different people.

I wonder if the crisis in the Church today could be framed in analogous terms. In fact, we are at a point in history where all the indications point to a perfect storm: sexual abuse crisis, near-total collapse of active participation, loss of credibility, shrinking pool of clerical leadership et cetera. Some have likened the state of the Church to Shakespeare’s state of Denmark. It is hardly an exaggeration!

This monumental crisis above all has exposed the weakness and indeed the unsustainability of the clericalist model. Hence, if we are to emerge out of this, we will need to boldly embrace a new ecclesiology from below that has regained momentum thanks to the prophetic leadership of Pope Francis. We must take up the call issued to St Francis, ‘Go and rebuild my Church that is falling into ruins’. It is not only possible; it is the most exciting time for us to construct a new future.

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. Christendom and for the most part of history, we have tried to be great, powerful and dominant.

It was no coincidence that Dom Helder Camara and many of his Latin American colleagues chose to make the so-called ‘Pact of the Catacombs’ as a way to return to the roots and foundations of the Church. They weren’t just letting the fresh air of the Second Vatican Council blow away the cobwebs and the manacles. They were determined to recapture the original and radical spirit of the earliest Christian movement.

It may be a long and winding road to a vision of the poor, humble but empowering and leavening force in the world. But as Teilhard de Chardin wrote: ‘The only task worthy of our efforts is to construct the future’. I pray that this historic, once in a generation, Plenary Council may be an expression of such effort. May we have the courage, boldness and parrhesia 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.

Most Rev. Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM
is Bishop of Parramatta
This Dom Helder Camara Lecture was given at
Parkville, Victoria, on 30 June 2021

The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia

(Presentation made to Bishops' Committee—mid-90's)

Rosemary Breen

I welcome this opportunity of adding my voice to the many voices of women throughout Australia who have made presentations for this research project. On the whole, I am speaking for myself but am including views of women who could not speak because of distance, the restricted times of the hearings or because they worked in some way for the institutional church and feared getting a bad name for themselves and risking their jobs.

During most of the 60s, I was studying at the Dominican University in Fribourg, Switzerland, where the theological winds from Germany, France and the Low Countries were blowing hard. We devoured everything that came off the press from the Council deliberations and were gradually filled with tremendous hope at this new vision of Church. (Pope John XXIII is the only pope I have seen in audience and, despite the pomp, the *'sedia gestatoria'* and all the trimmings, he came over as a true man of vision). It was John XXIII who indicated that we should be sensitive to the signs of the times, for that is where the working of the Spirit is to be found. (Perhaps this listening to women by the bishops is part of this 'sensitivity'). It was John XXIII who declared 'If you have a right, you have the responsibility to claim this right' and women are beginning to do just that.

Recently I have come to the conclusion that I belong to the 'dangerous' generation, as far as the church is concerned, for in this generation are women who are educated in theology and scriptural exegesis, women who are articulate and competent in their professional lives and, above all, women who were brought up in the pre-conciliar church, when most of the practices and doctrines seemed to be set in concrete, never to be changed. We remember being taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church, that we must never share in the prayers and services of a false religion (the poor old Anglicans were included in this). We remember being told why the Latin could never be changed, we remember the ban on women without hats in church (which led to such nonsenses as walking with a hand or a hanky on one's head!) We remember spitting out meat inadvertently taken into the mouth on a Friday. We remember when women were cautiously permitted to make responses at Mass but only when a suitable man was not present and then only from a distance. We remember the churching of women (which

originally was a purification after the contamination of childbirth)—we remember the rules about wearing gloves to touch the 'sacred vessels'—laws and regulations which had built up over the centuries and under which the Gospel message was being submerged. We remember agonising over the correct titles for the male dignitaries of the Church (which paralleled the offices and titles of the imperial court): 'Your Grace', 'Your Eminence' 'My Lord'. (I told the story of the young sister who was instructed to take the Bishop a cup of tea in the parlour and who agonised over getting the title right. When she'd poured the tea, she nervously enquired 'How many lords, my Lump?' The Church had become a bureaucracy with clerics as officials. Even to this century, women were not allowed in church choirs (*castrati* were still used in the Sistine chapel at the beginning of the 20th century. Ouch!) Pius X (now a saint!) reiterated this ban. It seemed that the Church spoke on every aspect of life and women always came as poor seconds.¹

Canon Law, written by men for men and often unrelated to the experience of women, in 1917 spoke of 'women, children and idiots'. I have a cartoon on my fridge showing a Moses-like figure reading from a tablet of stone to the crowd below: 'And men shall be in charge and have the best jobs and women shall dust and obey'. And a tiny group of women on the fringes are saying 'He's making it up'. Many of the rules governing church practices are simply 'made up' and therefore can be changed. (Sr Juana Ines de la Cruz 1651-1695: 'You foolish men, accusing women of lacking reason when you yourselves are the reason for the lack.'

Perhaps *Humanae Vitae*, for all the damage that it did to the image of the Church, prepared lay Catholics, particularly women, to start thinking for themselves and acting according to their consciences. In the 60s and 70s, theologians like Yves Cougar and Karl Rahner were talking of the need for ecclesial restructuring, as the limitations of the hierarchical, patriarchal system were becoming obvious. Times were changing, needs were changing—where was the Church in all this?

New images of Church began emerging in the 70s: 'the people of God', 'pilgrim people', 'community of faith' etc. and also the importance of collegiality and the call to mission of the baptised. In Scripture, there are so many stories of Jesus' relationship with women and the value he put on their ministry: the Samaritan woman who was sent to spread the Good News to her local village; Mary, who was sent to tell the Apostles of the Resurrection; the disciples on the way to Emmaus who told Jesus that 'the women had affrighted them' by announcing the Resurrection—men often seemed to be 'affrighted' in the Gospel by the women and perhaps this has continued among churchmen ever since!

Above all, I think of the woman bent over double (Lk.14) whose hand Jesus took so she could straighten

herself up. Bent over, what would she have seen? Her own feet and little more! She could not have seen the faces of other people with the lines of anxiety or laughter, fear of joy. She could not have seen the beauties of creation—she needed that hand to stand up straight. And it seems that is what He is saying today to women throughout the world: Stand up straight, take on the responsibilities which came with claiming your rights in the Church'. No longer are women simply 'misbegotten males' whose only use is 'motherhood and animal sex', as some of the Fathers of the Church in earlier times so kindly put it.

No longer should women be treated as lesser beings, whose presence and voice has to be monitored and restricted. There are many examples of discrimination in the Church, often as a result of the whim of the bishop or parish priest.

- ◇ I was invited to address a diocesan group of priests in the mid-80s to speak on the role of women in the Church, and then was dis-invited because some of the men objected to a women addressing them;
- ◇ Having preached at an ecumenical gathering in a Catholic Church, the priest rose and contradicted what I had said. (luckily for me, he was wrong so he actually did his own credibility more damage than mine);
- ◇ A parish sister told me she has had to leave the parish where she was working on two different occasions, because of a change of parish priest and the new arrival did not want a sister working with him;
- ◇ A friend who is a religious sister and assistant chaplain at (Oxford) University was recently appointed President of the Association of Chaplains in Tertiary Institutes. She is invited to preach in all the colleges and churches except the Catholic ones—women in that diocese are not allowed to preach.

These are some practical examples of barriers to women's ministry in the Church. There are also men (and some women) who do not want women in ministry. I work in the ecumenical field with a local Uniting Church minister, a woman, who has broken down many barriers about ordained women in a very conservative part of the country by her sensitive yet powerful ministry. One of the local ministers is set against the ordination of women and he confided, perhaps unwisely, to her husband, the reason for his views: not some deep, theological reason, or an argument based on Scripture, but 'Women should not be ordained because they are too passionate'.

Whose view was expressed in the words:

'Because you are neither hot nor cold

I will spit you out of my mouth.'.....?

Perhaps there is room for a little more passion in the Church!

When women's voices are heard in churches, communication need not necessarily be better on all occasions (we'll still have our Maggie Thatchers and Pauline Hansons around!) but the whole Church may be enriched with wider viewpoints. So today's church

must make sure that women's voices and views are heard, not just as a once-off gesture but at all levels of church deliberations. I endorse strongly the suggestion of a Commission of Women which would have official recognition and a voice at national and state levels.

Let us work together towards a church where justice is more evident. There is no equality where the 'male' remains the norm and where a hierarchical model of relationships persists where women are just passive recipients of laws given from on high. To achieve this equality:

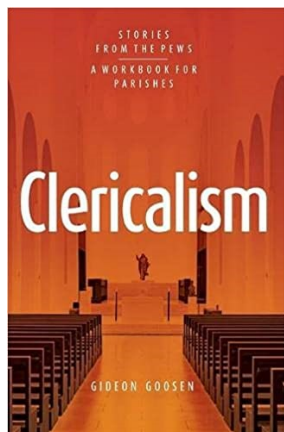
- ◇ models of church established from a male point of view only should be reviewed and corrected;
- ◇ inclusive language should be introduced forthwith (the deliberate rewriting of the catechism in non-inclusive language seemed farcical to many, especially as the exclusive rendering was clumsier and more stilted! Inclusive language can deepen one's spirituality, eg HOMO FACTUS EST—the true significance is that the 'Word' became a human being—the importance is not so much 'male/female' but that the 'Word' became one of us);
- ◇ women should be accepted and listened to and welcomed as part of the resource personnel in seminaries in the training of priests, and in parishes;
- ◇ situations of injustice or simply not using the talents and skills of a person based on gender should be corrected;
- ◇ women should share responsibility in the Church and this means that men alone no longer direct the Church, especially in areas that directly affect women. To this end, church structures which do not allow women to share in decision-making processes should be challenged. (This may seem insurmountable but let us remember the comparatively easy collapse of the Berlin Wall!)

Commitment to such principles of justice, equality and shared responsibility (and then action on same!) will lead to the formation of a Christian community more easily seen to be based on Gospel values. These are times when women can be enabled to stand up straight and tall in the Church and perhaps this research project is one of the means for this to happen.

To women, I say 'Courage and Confidence'—as Gabriel Daley, the Irish theologian, said in an interview on ABC radio recently, 'You can't put toothpaste back in the tube'.

ROSEMARY BREEN is a activist, working at the centre of Coordinated Refugee Resettlement Group in Inverell and a Reconciliation group. She started **Living Water Myanmar** which has built over 350 large water tanks in the Dry Zone. A Thursday Group (women who dream of the Church of tomorrow!) meets weekly at her home. She is a member of WATAC and ARC.

This article, written in the 1990's, shows how little has changed for women in the Church in the interim.



Review

Clericalism: A Workbook for Parishes

By Dr Gideon Goosen

Gideon Goosen's workbook *Clericalism* is a very thoughtful follow-up to his previous book *Saving Catholics*. Once again Dr Goosen taps into the thoughts and experiences of ordinary parishioners. Through careful scholarship and real life stories he unpacks what clericalism means in our contemporary Catholic Church.

The structure of the book is organised around scholarly discussion of the origins, history and current implications of clericalism, interspersed with practical illustrations from the lived experiences of Catholics 'in the pews'. The witty and insightful cartoons add to the accessibility of the book to a broad audience, and the thoughtful questions posed throughout the book also provide a springboard for meaningful discussion.

This is not an 'anti-clergy' book but strongly makes the point that we, the laity, are no less guilty than ordained clergy of promoting the patterns of behaviour which can be described as 'clericalism'. This book challenges us people 'in the pews' to examine our own attitudes and behaviours which may, unthinkingly, be promoting clericalism in our parishes.

Finally, the book invites ordained and unordained Catholics alike, to take concrete steps towards reform which will lead to a more inclusive and collaborative future for our Catholic Church.

**Elizabeth Rowe
Glenbrook NSW**



New Woman Moderator for the Uniting Church

Rev. Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau has been elected as the next Moderator of the NSW and ACT Synod.

The ongoing 2021 Synod meeting heard from the new Moderator Elect for the first time.

Rev. Havea Hiliau told the Synod meeting she was, 'deeply humbled by the nomination and ever so grateful that I have been called by God...to be your Moderator Elect. I thank you for your bold, courageous, risky and prayerful decision.' She paid tribute to her late parents, who she said worked to give her a better life in Australia.

Rev. Havea Hiliau is currently minister at Northern Beaches Uniting Church. She is the first person of Tongan descent to hold the role.

She told the Synod meeting that she was a preacher and a storyteller, and that she 'will continue to tell the story of Jesus Christ as Lord.'

Rev. Havea Hiliau will serve as Moderator from 2023. Current Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford's tenure was extended at the 2019 Synod meeting.

Rev. Havea Hiliau pointed to reconciliation with Australia's First Peoples and resourcing churches throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as two of her priorities. This, she said, was a matter of ensuring that we loved our neighbours and ascertained that they had what they needed. 'I will listen to the church and explore where the Wild God leads us.'

As well as moderating the Synod meeting every 18 months, the Moderator speaks on behalf of the Uniting Church and exercises pastoral leadership.

In lieu of applause Synod members offered Rev. Havea Hiliau their congratulations in the discussion forum.

Johathan Foye
Editor
Insights

You've been loyal - go straight to jail

Graham English

Extract from Graham English *Climbing out of Yesterday*, pp.56-58
Morning Star Publishing

Loyalty: I just looked it up. 'Loyalty' has the same Latin root as 'legal'. It comes into English via old French from the Latin *lex*, *legis*, the law. My dictionary spells it out 'loyal: faithful; true as a lover; firm in allegiance; personally devoted to a sovereign or would-be sovereign'.

When loyalty means 'faithful' or 'true as a lover' it is an admirable quality.

But loyalty which is to do with keeping or enforcing the law, or being 'personally devoted to a sovereign or would-be sovereign', 'I will do whatever you ask, my Lord,' is not always admirable. It makes good foot soldiers. Mafia hit men, the Gestapo, some CIA operatives are loyal in this sense. It is this kind of loyalty that led to the Nuremburg trials. I looked up the meaning of loyal because when I was reading about codependent people the other day I came upon this sign of codependence, 'I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.' Some of the Church officials, some at a high level, have been too loyal. I would not be at all surprised if these men are strongly codependent.

Wikipedia defines codependency or codependence as 'a psychological condition or a relationship in which a person is controlled or manipulated by another who is affected with a pathological condition (as in an addiction to alcohol or heroin); and in broader terms, it refers to the dependence on the needs of or control of another'. Codependent people depend on their security being connected to the needs of another, especially to strong leaders and to people with psychological illnesses like addiction or narcissism. Codependent people might look as if they are coping, they may even be 'the strong man in the office', they may look in charge but they are not independent.

This is important for Church people to think about. There are a lot of codependent people who entered monasteries, convents and seminaries and

often they were promoted. Some of them rose very high. Narcissists and other pathological leaders demand echoes. Echoes carry out commands because they are personally devoted to a leader. 'We will put him in charge of the chancery because he will do as I say.'

- ◆ How do these signs of codependence go with the Mosignor I wonder? I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others' anger.
- ◆ I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and I feel the same.
- ◆ I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- ◆ I value others' opinions and feelings more than my own and am afraid to express differing opinions and feelings of my own.
- ◆ I put aside my own interests and hobbies in order to do what others want.
- ◆ I am afraid to express my beliefs, opinions and feelings when they differ from those of others.
- ◆ I make decisions without regard to the consequences.
- ◆ I give up my truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.

Institutions of their nature demand loyalty. When I was much younger I read of an American cardinal reported as having said, 'My country right or wrong'. He was a military chaplain and this was during the Vietnam War. This is an evil remark. Maybe he was codependent and his security was so tied up in his country that he couldn't help himself. I wonder how such a man came to be a cardinal, though I am not surprised. It is a pattern in all institutions unless they are made up of enlightened people. And sadly there are not a lot of enlightened people about even in the Church.

Unenlightened people and codependent people who are unaware of their condition are dangerous especially if they are loyal. I have come to be suspicious of the loyalty demanded of institutions whether the institution is a country, a family or a Church; especially of loyalty there means 'personally devoted to a leader, abusive parent or sibling, or a pope'. Dysfunctional families, countries, institutions and churches get away with murder if they can achieve personal devotion to a leader. I do not want to be an accomplice to murder.

As I said when loyalty means 'faithful' or 'true as a lover' it is an admirable quality. An infallible sign (I

use the word very carefully) that loyalty is good is that it begins with you being faithful to yourself.

Codependent people find this very hard to do. They (we!) are so, so tempted to try to please others, and so, so unsure of what they want and need to be faithful to themselves. There are codependent because they cannot be faithful to themselves.

In *The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers* (I think) there is an admonition: when you face God at the end of your life he will not ask you, ‘Why were you not Abraham?’ or ‘Why were you not Moses?’ The only question you will be asked is, ‘Were you a good you?’

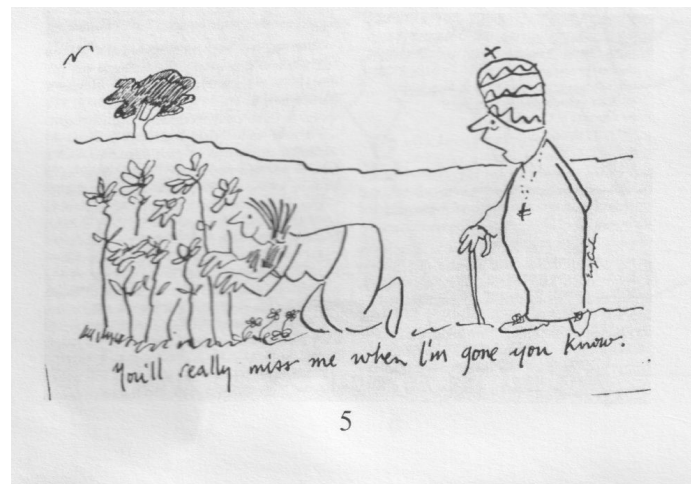
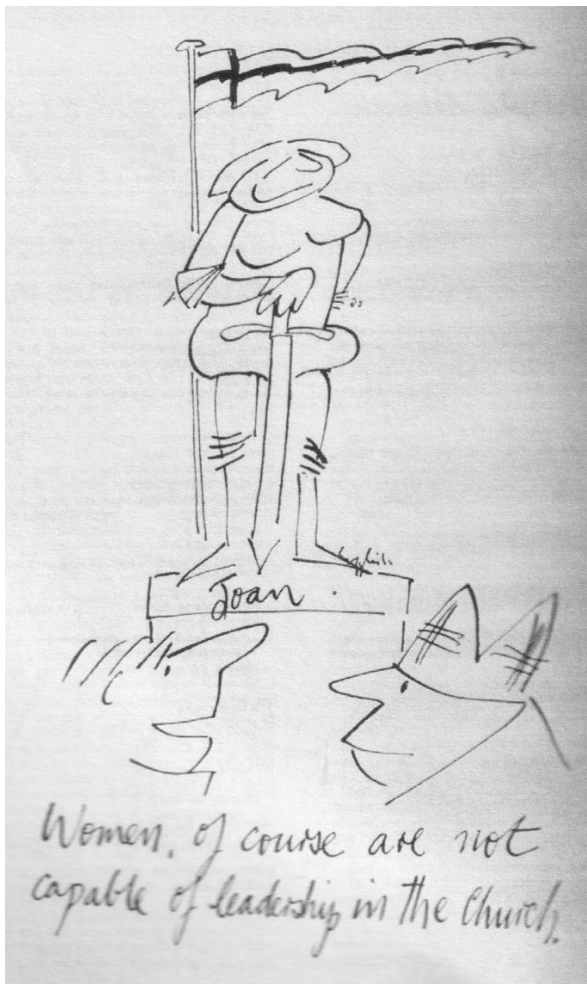
I find this both frightening and consoling. I am a bit frightened because I am not sure how good a *me* I am, but consoling to know this is all I have to be. All I have to do is find out who I am and who I am called to be and then do that. And no one else knows the answer to that but God and me.

So I am trying to be is loyal to myself. I am trying to find out what I believe, what I know, who God calls me to be. At present the last person I would ask for help in this enterprise is anyone who purports to be a leader. I don’t want to be your echo, my dear Narcissus. I guess I am just too disloyal.

GRAHAM ENGLISH grew up in a religious working class family in country NSW. He entered the Christian Brothers aged fifteen and remained in the Order for seventeen years. He was in the first cohort at the National Pastoral Institute in Melbourne in 1973 and studied at the Australian National University, and the universities of Lancaster and Sydney. Until retirement, he was a senior lecturer in the School of Religious Education at the Strathfield campus of ACU National.

Sadly Graham died on 15 June 2021. He will be fondly remembered by his past students, for readers of his contributions to *Catholica* and, especially, for his very incisive, quick-witted cartoons in *Women Church Journal* which should have sent powerful messages to the Vatican.

He is survived by his wife, Erin White, and their son, Max.



An acquaintance once explained her devotion to Alan Jones (the controversial radio host) with these words: ‘He tells me what to think’. That is co-dependency.

When the Same Sex Marriage act was being debated, Archbishop Fisher admonished Catholics to vote NO. However, Catholics in general chose to disobey his orders and mostly voted YES. That is dependency.

Editor

Doctrinal and structural Catholic Church transformation

J.A. Dick

Transformation most often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. It is change but not restoration. Transformation is a new configuration. For the church it means a doctrinal as well as a structural transformation.

The ministerial deformity of clericalism is one of several issues that must be addressed. It is a clerical power structure that is accountable only to itself. And, as we have seen, it often ends up abusing the powerless.

The Vatican, with its proconsul-like hierarchy, is a governance structure that owes more to the Roman Empire than to the Way of Jesus. In fact, Jesus gave no blueprints for church structure. His focus was clear: ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. Structure he left up to his followers. The early Christian communities were charismatic and creative. Today we need a liberation from imperial structures. We can also be creative. There is nothing healthy about an authoritarian church structure of self-protection and privilege, with a climate of secrecy and limited accountability.

The church is the People of God. Transformation starts there on the horizontal collaborative people level not the vertical pyramid authority level. Jesus was a horizontal people-person. ‘For where two or three are gathered in my name,’ Jesus said, ‘there am I in the midst of them.’ (Matthew 18:20)

A healthy church transformation calls indeed, as I said in opening remarks, for doctrinal and structural change.

DOCTRINE: Official Roman Catholic teaching, in the books and in papal pronouncements, needs to be updated and transformed in the light of today’s biblical and historical research and understanding. We can and must learn and grow. Continuing education should be a requirement for all church leaders, starting of course with the top leader in Rome. Just like medical doctors, bishops need to be kept up to date. Perhaps they should be examined and re-certified every five years?

Examining the meaning of ordination is a good

example of what I mean by updated theological and historical understanding. The historical Jesus did not ordain anyone. We know today that ordination did not even exist in his lifetime. It was created by early Christians and was gradually introduced almost a hundred years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The apostles, therefore, were NOT ordained as the first bishops. One of my archbishop friends still says he often thinks about Jesus putting mitres on the heads of the apostles, rings on their fingers, and croziers in their hands. He has a talent for episcopal fantasy.

In the early Christian communities, men and women, as heads of households, presided at Eucharist—without being ordained. When Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, (‘Priestly Ordination’) May 22, 1994, declared that ‘the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church’s faithful’ he was showing his own theological and historical ignorance. Pope Francis, unfortunately, repeated the error. During a discussion with reporters on November 1, 2016 as he flew back to Rome from Protestant Reformation commemorations in Sweden, Pope Francis said: ‘On the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, the last word is clear.’ The definitive decision, he said, ‘was given by St. John Paul II, and this remains.’

Ordination began not as a way of passing on some kind of sacred power but as a form of quality control: ensuring that early Christian community leaders were well trained, knowledgeable, competent, and trustworthy. It was only at the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, that the church officially began to teach that only a properly ordained priest could consecrate bread and wine for the Eucharist.

STRUCTURE: The needed Roman Catholic transformation is also a structural transformation. Some things could be done rather quickly. Three structures could change immediately: (1) Church leadership could acknowledge and welcome all the ordained Catholic women who are already priests and bishops. (2) Church leadership could drop the celibacy requirement for Roman Catholic priests. Let them get married — gay and straight. (3) In a spirit of equality and fairness, church leadership could also allow the already ordained to marry if they wish.

Unlike some of my friends, I don’t want to get rid of the pope. Papal ministry, however, has to be primarily one of service not administrative power. For restructuring the papal office, much can be

learned from the structure of the World Council of Churches, which has an administrative center in Geneva and a General Secretary. It has regional ‘Presidents’ (supervisors) for Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, for North America, the Pacific, the Eastern Orthodox, and the Oriental Orthodox. In a Roman Catholic institutional transformation, the pope could easily become the General Secretary within the Roman Catholic Communion, ideally with a set term of office. There would also be regional supervisors — male and women bishops — around the globe. (I would love to see a woman bishop as president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

In the restructuring process, Roman Catholics can also learn a lot from the example and ministry of the Archbishop of Canterbury, within the world wide Anglican Communion.

When it comes to structural transformation and the role of bishops, one could write a long article. Very briefly, bishops should be well educated and pastorally-minded Christian community leaders. Not colorfully dressed company men with barrel vision. I do try to encourage bishops who are competent and credible contemporary leaders. I know some who are my former students and I am proud of them.

A bishop whom I greatly respected and admired was Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga (1928—2020), Bishop of São Félix, Brazil, from 1971 to 2005. He was a well-known supporter of liberation theology and a strong advocate for the poor and for indigenous peoples. In 1988 he was called to Rome to be examined by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger about his theological writings and pastoral activity. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation of Bishops found him problematic. They produced a statement for him to sign, as an acknowledgment of his dangerous errors. Bishop Casaldáliga refused to sign it. He simply replied: ‘My attitude is a reflection of the view of the church in many regions of the world... I have criticized the Curia over the way bishops are chosen, over the minimal space given to women, over its distrust of liberation theology and bishops’ conferences, over its excessive centralism. This does not mean a break with Rome. Within the family of the church and through dialogue, we need to open up more space.’ In 1971 when Pope Paul VI had named him bishop, he refused to wear the mitre, preferring instead the sombrero of a peasant. He refused to wear a bishop’s ring; and he refused to carry a crozier, preferring instead to carry an oar he used to steer his boat along the Amazonian rivers to

the churches of his diocese. He later replaced the oar with a Tapirapé Indian ceremonial stick. I A wonderfully courageous and prophetic bishop.

Roman Catholics in some parts of the world like in Australia and Germany are already experimenting with what is now called ‘synodality.’ The term comes from the Greek word for ‘assembly’ or ‘meeting.’ It is a process of consultations between ordained and non-ordained that leads to a consensus. There have already been some positive and some awkward moments in the process. The big question is how authoritative synodality is or can be.

There are indeed a great many issues for doctrinal transformation and structural transformation. Today I have touched on just a few. Human sexuality remains a big issue. Is same-sex marriage sacramental? Does the church have a sexual hang up? Ecumenical relations? Is Catholic belief closer to the truth than Protestant belief? Who has the truth? Is consolidating parishes and having circuit-rider priests driving from place to place on week ends a healthy way to maintain parish communities? How does a church establish itself as a credible moral authority? Is abortion really the major moral evil in today’s world? What about racism, poverty, starvation, and genocide? How does the church deal with climate change? Are democracy, justice, and equality church virtues as well?

Transformation is a big process. It is an absolutely necessary process, and the Catholic clock is ticking. I hope it will happen.

John Gehring, who is Catholic program director at Faith in Public Life, understands very well the current Roman Catholic predicament. I conclude this week’s reflection with one of his observations, in ‘Confessions of an exhausted Catholic,’ published on July 23rd in *The National Catholic Reporter*.

‘I still believe the best of Catholicism can enrich our culture, politics and search for meaning. The artists, activists and ordinary Catholics who live our faith in the shadow of scandal and hypocrisy are not blind to the flaws of our church. We persist because we search and struggle together, connected in spirit and memory to all those who did the same before us, and to future generations who will take up this difficult, worthy pilgrimage after we are gone.’

JOHN A. DICK is an American Catholic academic who has taught historical theology for many years at the University of Leuven, Belgium. This article was published on *Pearls and Irritations* on 10.8.21.

Catholic women are still relegated to second class

Robert Mickens

Holy Mother Church, ever deepening her contemplation and understanding of the mysteries of human salvation over the long course of history, has always taught in various, though sometimes veiled ways, that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Holy Mother of God, was the first human being, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make her Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, really and truly present to those who would become His disciples, during His earthly life and throughout all ages until the end of time.

One day, in maybe 50 or 100 years from now, those words, or others similar to them, but probably even lengthier, will be the preamble to the papal encyclical or conciliar document that will finally open the ordained priesthood to women.

Then there will be paragraphs about Mary of Magdala, who was the first to proclaim the real presence of the Risen Christ to the ‘other’ apostles...

Seriously. Women’s ordination is going to happen eventually, because the Church has not been able to come up with a single convincing argument to justify its continued perpetuation of institutional and institutionalized misogyny, except to say: ‘we’ve always done it this way’.

But when the Church finally rids itself of a sufficient number of clerics and clericalists who are defending the Church’s relegation of women to second-class citizenship, there will be a pope or ecumenical council -- probably with number of married bishops -- who will have the courage and holy will to finally approve a female priesthood.

Church teaching never changes

But they will never, ever admit that they are changing the Church’s perennial teaching. And they will never confess that the former teaching was wrong.

No. Like Pope Francis writes in his recent *‘motu proprio’* to juridically recognize what at least two or three generations of Catholics have witnessed for decades—namely, that women are readers at Mass (lectors) and girls are altar servers (acolytes), the document allowing for women priests will talk about ‘the needs of the times’ and ‘doctrinal development’ and ‘a consolidated practice’...

Some will object and say this is impossible, even preposterous.

They will point out, correctly, that John Paul II ‘closed the door’ on women’s ordination, as Francis has acknowledged on numerous occasions. But the clever Jesuit pope knows full well that closed doors can always be opened.

Taking the door off the hinges

And with the new *motu proprio* and the accompanying letter that he sent to Cardinal Luis Ladaria, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the pope has not just opened a door (in this case to formally institute women lectors and acolytes). He’s begun taking it off the hinges so it can never be closed again.

‘Offering lay persons of both sexes the possibility of accessing the ministries of the Acolyte and the Lector (*sic.*), by virtue of their participation in the baptismal priesthood, will increase the recognition, also through a liturgical act (institution), of the valuable contribution that a great number of lay persons, including women, have offered to the life and mission of the Church for a very long time,’ the pope notes in his [letter to the CDF prefect](#).

These lines come shortly after Francis trots out the classic two-tier system of Church ministry and uses some clever wordsmithing to justify why the top tier still excludes women:

A clearer distinction between the attributions of what are today called ‘non-ordained (or lay) ministries’ and ‘ordained ministries’ makes it possible to dissolve the reservation of the former to men alone.

If, with regard to ordained ministries, the Church ‘does not consider herself authorised to admit women to priestly ordination’ (cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994), for non-ordained ministries it is possible, and today it seems opportune, to overcome this reservation.

This reservation made sense in a particular context, but it can be reconsidered in new contexts, always having as its criterion fidelity to Christ’s mandate and the desire to live and proclaim the Gospel transmitted by the Apostles and entrusted to the Church so that it may be listened to in a religious manner, kept in a holy manner and faithfully proclaimed.

The problem here is that Baptism is the prime sacrament and the only one necessary for one to be instituted in a particular ministry—whether that be conferred ‘through a liturgical act (institution)’ or ordination.

'There is neither male nor female'

There is no theological rationale or divine command to allow women access to some ministries, but then deny them access to others. These are man-made dispositions, especially because Jesus never conferred a 'priesthood' as we know it today on anyone.

The only 'criterion' that allowed the Church to lift the 'reservation' to men alone in these other ministries, the pope says, was 'fidelity to Christ's mandate and the desire to live and proclaim the Gospel... so that it may be listened to in a religious manner, kept in a holy manner and faithfully proclaimed'.

Either men and women are equal through Baptism or they are not. St. Paul says, 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal 3, 28). Through this prime sacrament all are called to holiness.

The Church has developed the sacrament of Holy Orders, often in an exaggerated manner, which has led, in effect, to the construction of a two-class system of how one attains holiness, provides ministry or exercises ecclesial authority (oversight).

Universal call to holiness vs. higher states of life

For many centuries, and even in our own day, the priesthood and religious consecration were considered 'higher states of life' compared to the 'merely baptized'.

But the Second Vatican Council formally confirmed the 'doctrinal development' of what is called the 'universal call to holiness' based solely on being baptized in Christ.

Yet, the two classes distinction of Church ministry remains. And women remain the only baptized members who are excluded from the First-Class status of the ordained.

It seems kind of silly to make a big deal about the legal change that Pope Francis has decreed regarding formal recognition of women performing ministries that they have been doing for decades.

Subtle and slippery theologians will still be able to bend the theological pretzel in whichever way they like to support or refute what the pope has just done. It doesn't matter.

The Catholic Church will eventually ordain women—to the diaconate and to the priesthood—because it is the right and holy thing to do. And also, because a Church that excludes from one-half or more of its members from fully responding to God's call to ministry, is a crippled Church.

And in the 'new contexts' of our evolving and developing world, it is suicidal to even think it is possible to keep women in the second-class section of the People of God. The Church that does so in this day and age is doomed to become a sect.

But don't despair. There is the Holy Spirit. And she won't let that happen.

ROBERT MICKENS is the Rome correspondent for La Croix International. Robert Mickens.
This article was published on 13.8.21



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