



# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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## The Need to Grow Up

Wasn't there a crisis in the Church not so long ago? The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse forced statements, even from bishops, that significant change in the Church is required in establishing a renewed culture with structural change. Ostensibly, the Plenary Council was set up to deal with this, drawing in over 17,000 submissions and eliciting countless hours of discernment by the faithful. But where are we now? After the 285 members of the Council have concluded its first assembly, we have no indication as yet of any direction or priorities. Working groups did not vote on any proposals that they made and no plenary sessions were held in order to arrive at any level of consensus.

The First Assembly report outlining proposals by small groups and individuals was released on 9<sup>th</sup> December (<https://bit.ly/FirstAssembly>). Just how and how much these proposals will be taken forward into the Second Assembly is unknown. What is prepared will only be distributed to Council members and any further input will not be considered after 25<sup>th</sup> March. A situation tightly under control? No process for the next steps. No hint of any aspect of a crisis.

Certainly, we know that large numbers of Catholics are crying out for a meaningful way to influence what happens in their Church and you cannot do that without salient information along with timely opportunity to contribute. The recognition that the percentage of Catholics attending Mass with any regularity is so low would be a start in acknowledging this crisis and some of the likely associated causes. Father Bryan Massingale (see page 6) speaks of a developing deeper disenchantment with the Church represented by very significant numbers of clerics who appear to be incapable of 'respectful hearing'. His point is amplified by Gideon Goosen (see page 4) as Gideon outlines the support of a culture that deafens the ability to hear and respond in an engaged way.

And what do many Catholics so often hear when they do attend Mass? From its inception in the year 2000, Australian Reforming Catholics as an organisation has

placed great emphasis on the institutional Church needing to grow up and for its leaders to respond to the faithful as intelligent people. John Crothers (see page 2) outlines some of the desperation that many people must feel when they have literal interpretations of scriptures presented as fact in homilies. When we have grown up surely there is a tendency to leave behind trappings associated with our immaturity. The Mass 'experience' should not be part of that.

At the last Annual General Meeting of ARC in August, those members present endorsed ARC's emphasis on striving for meaningful interpretations of scripture and dogma in homiletics and catechetics. The ARC Secretariat will continue to try finding ways to do that. From the evidence I have alluded to above, I very much doubt if the Plenary Council will undertake anything of significance in this regard.

*John Buggy*

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# Catholics aren't disappointed—they're exasperated

(Fr) Bryan Massingale

Deep disappointment with the church used to reveal deep love.  
Father Bryan Massingale says something has changed.

**M**y ministry focuses on speaking and writing about race and sexuality. Lately, in discussions after online lectures or webinars, I hear the following questions and comments with increasing frequency: 'How can I remain a member of the church?' 'I don't know how long I can stay.' 'Why should I stay in the church?' 'My kids/friends/relatives have left, and I don't know what to tell them.' 'Why would a gay or lesbian person stay Catholic?' 'If the church doesn't value or care about Black Catholics, why stay?'

Before going further, I know that a column like this will generate responses from Catholic apologists along the lines of: 'You stay because we're the one true church;' 'Because we have Jesus and the sacraments;' 'We have the Truth;' 'If people can't accept the truth of the church's teaching, then they're better off elsewhere.' So, let me say that what follows is not for such folks. I only ask them to consider if such attitudes might contribute to why many are leaving, and seriously consider leaving, Catholicism.

Such questions are not new. I addressed them in the early 2000s after the tragic revelations of clergy sexual abuse of minors. I wrote a column for my hometown newspaper titled 'Deep Disappointment Reveals Deep Love'. I reflected on Martin Luther King Jr.'s profound disillusionment with Christian churches and their silent, even vocal, complicity in racial injustice. In his now classic 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' King wrote, 'There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love.' He offered a severe critique of the church. Yet he noted that his strong feelings could only come from one who deeply cared for and about the church.

I then noted that the profound disappointment, outrage, pain, and sadness felt by so many in 2002 demonstrated the depth of love and concern these same people have for the church. Apathy or indifference, I argued, would be far worse signs for the church's future. Paradoxically, the outrage that so many felt was a silver lining that showed how so many cared very much about the welfare of the Catholic Church, its faith, and its members.

Something has changed since then. There is a different tone in the questions. Now, the deep disappointment expresses not deep love but exasperation. A kind of anger that is not a prelude to deeper engagement and resolve but rather the step before resignation. As I listen to my audiences, there is a growing sense that church leaders, especially the bishops (and too many priests), are not only unwilling to hear their concerns but incapable of giving them a respectful hearing. Again and again, I hear of repeated attempts to engage in dialogue and to raise honest questions about complex issues concerning human sexuality, systemic racism, or political discernment—and of repeated dismissals, lack of response, or a questioning of their faith and loyalty to the church.

This last point is the most painful: the attitude that any criticism of the church is treason. Indeed, the difference between 2002 and now is a conviction that if you don't accept a certain politically tinged interpretation of Catholic belief and practice, then you aren't really Catholic, but 'Catholic in name only'. This is the deepest cause of the current well of disappointment. It's a disillusionment that spurs not concern for the church but the feeling that one would be better off without it.

The silver lining is much harder to detect this time. I believe it is this: In my questioners, I see a hunger for Jesus. I hear a desire to return to the gospel. There is a hunger for meaning and purpose, a yearning for a deeper connection with what really matters. And they believe that Jesus—with his passionate challenge to abundant mercy—holds the key to their longings.

What frustrates them is that the Jesus of the gospels is absent from the pronouncements and actions of church leaders. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is cited more than the one to whom the church is to lead us. My questioners express a conviction recently articulated by theologian, William Cavanaugh, who declared, 'The church is only attractive when people can see the poor Christ in it.'

Just as in 2002, people's deep disappointment with the church reveals a deep love. Except not for the church. For Jesus Christ. Unless the church begins to understand that its purpose is not to defend its institutional prerogatives and boundaries but to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then people's hunger for Jesus will lead them to look elsewhere to satisfy their longings.

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# Is it time to re-think seminaries?

Gideon Goosen

The Catholic Church in Australia has reached a critical point in its journey where a total re-generation of the church is required. The findings of the sexual abuse of children in the Church has been the main catalyst, documented in the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Final Report identified *clericalism* as a significant contributor to abuse across religious institutions Australia-wide. Clericalism is rooted in a theological belief that the clergy are different to the laity, having undergone an ‘ontological change’ at ordination (a change to the very nature of their being on receiving Holy Orders) and feeds the notion that the clergy may not be challenged. And according to the report, the culture of clericalism is on the rise in seminaries in Australia.

According to the report, ‘Clericalism is the idealisation of the priesthood and, by extension, the idealisation of the Catholic Church. Clericalism is linked to a sense of entitlement, superiority and exclusion, and abuse of power.’ A person suffering from clericalism sees himself as special, superior to others and worthy of greater respect. This could lead to arrogance and the belittling of others. Lay people can also be guilty of clericalism if they support this attitude.

The initial training of pastors (I prefer to use the term ‘pastor’ over ‘priest’ to emphasise the pastoral nature of this role) occurs in segregated ‘clericalist’ environments which, according to the report, are likely to have a detrimental effect on psychosexual maturity of candidates and in turn ‘increased the risk of child sexual abuse.’

It’s no wonder then that amongst key recommendations from the Royal Commission, specifically mentioned was the issue of training of diocesan priests in seminaries as needing reform.

According to the final report, ‘all Catholic religious institutes in Australia should review and revise their particular norms and guideline documents relating to the formation of priests’.

‘We need seminaries to be places that train new generations of clergy to be servant leaders who can pastor—not rule over—the faithful.’

It’s critical that the Plenary Council address issues of clericalism during pastoral formation. Thankfully, church leadership is, to an extent, in agreement on the need for reform. Speaking of the cultural and structural changes the Plenary Council might spark in the church, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, said ‘This is no time for the Church to be putting up signs that say “business as usual”’.

Reforming ‘clericalist environments’ requires viewing all aspects of formation with a critical eye. It seems logical that, when a group of people is taken to an exclusive place and given special attention in small classes with others to look after board and lodging, feelings of separateness might eventuate. The same applies to these young men who are allowed to wear cassocks and collars before ordination. The estimation of themselves as ‘other’ is perfectly understandable.

The logical question that follows is this: If we are trying to eliminate clericalism from our church and from the training programs for future pastors, why do we persist in having seminaries that adhere to a model that has produced problematic results? The church must explore other ways to prepare individuals for the task of being the parish pastor. After all, Jesus never sent his disciples to a seminary. Jesus introduced them to kingdom values not in a building, but ‘on the road’.

In the first two centuries, it’s unclear how people were chosen to preside over the Eucharist. Once the religious orders were founded, starting with St Benedict, monasteries had their own criteria. Those not living in a monastery, that is, diocesan candidates, followed various pathways to ordination depending on the local bishop.

It’s worth noting that in the history of the church seminaries are a relatively recent development. It was the Council of Trent (1545-63) that decided on a

strict process of years of study in a single, isolated location, to ensure pastors were properly trained. Students were separated from their families and communities and placed in a hothouse of spirituality and theological study.

Why was this model of training appealing? It provided literacy and a solid education for candidates and a place where, regardless of background, young men could study with access to facilities. It provided board and lodgings so training could be guided, continuous and supervised.

The system of seminaries has produced some excellent individuals like St John Vianney, whose good example led to the radical transformation of the community he served. And yet the clericalism that was allowed to grow inside the Church over the centuries has arguably offset many positive aspects of the training and practice of the ordained ministry.

And this does not apply exclusively to those training to become diocesan priests. The Final Report of the Royal Commission criticises both ‘priests and religious’ regarding their training. However, members of religious and monastic orders like the Benedictines and Cistercians are distinct in that they are members of a familial community which supports and guides them; some are ordained but not all. Diocesan candidates generally do not have the same familial support. Where members of religious orders are less focused on ordination, it lessens the threat of both careerism or the desire to climb ranks within the Church, and clericalism which can loom large in diocesan seminaries.

‘He should not be given the impression that he is somebody special and *above* the community, but rather one *of* the community.’

In enabling clericalism, this current system of formation in seminaries contributed, however indirectly, to the shocking sexual abuse of minors exposed by investigations throughout the world. If we are serious about ridding the church of clericalism, we cannot continue with the seminary model as it has always been.

Some commentators who have taught in seminaries in the United States, including former seminary professors Colt Anderson and Christopher Bellitto, recognise the weaknesses of the traditional

model, saying despite being staffed and attended by good people, ‘seminaries have played a significant role in the church’s current crisis,’ by enculturating students into clericalism. ‘Seminarians are fed a consistent message: their role is to rule over the laity and the religious as a result of their ontological change at ordination, not as a result of their virtue, knowledge or model behaviour. They are being trained to be autocratic bosses, not servant leaders.’

We need seminaries to be places that train new generations of clergy to be servant leaders who can pastor—not rule over—the faithful.

The most important prohibitor of clericalism is to avoid physically isolating individuals who wish to join the clergy. Seminarians should be spending more time living in their parishes during formation. Theoretically, seminarians could continue to live at home, which would allow the candidate to maintain ties with contemporaries, while being involved in the practical life of the parish.

In the lead up to Plenary, we need to consider alternate styles of preparation for ordination where seminarians have greater interaction and integration with their parishes and non-seminarian colleagues. The final document for the 2018 Synod on Young People, for example, proposes that there be joint formation courses for ‘young lay people, young religious and seminarians’. This goes hand in hand with Pope Francis’ church considering a more integrated set of roles and responsibilities for both laypeople and clerics.

Receptive ecumenism also has a part to play. What styles of preparation do other denominations practise, and what can we learn from them?

To counter clericalism, it’s important that an individual’s preparation takes place while being one the parish, one of a community with multiple ministries; he should not be given the impression that he is somebody special and *above* the community while being a member of the parish.

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# It Ain't Necessarily So

John Crothers

In the 1960s the Australian singer Normie Rowe released a song entitled 'It Ain't Necessarily So'. Personally, I don't think it was one of his better songs, but it certainly contained a good message. There is probably better theology in this song than you would find in many homilies being given by priests and bishops today.

The verses of the song refer to biblical events such as Jonah being swallowed by a whale and the boy David slaying the giant Goliath. Then the chorus follows with the words, 'The things that you're liable to read in the bible ain't necessarily so.'

It's perhaps not surprising that such a song would surface in the 1960s. It was a time for breaking the shackles and looking forward to new horizons, both for the Church, and for society generally. Scripture and theology were part of the new movement.

I remember when I began my seminary studies at St Columba's College Springwood in 1974, it was the first time I had been exposed to serious questions about the historicity of the Gospels. I found it enthralling. To that point I had never understood what the Incarnation meant. I had always believed that Jesus was divine, but I don't think I had ever believed that he was truly human.

And I had certainly never realised how many of the bible stories were exactly that, stories, wonderful stories of people searching for God, but in many cases, stories containing little, if any, historical content. It didn't shake my faith—in fact, quite the opposite. It was the catalyst for my love of the Scriptures. The bible was no longer a book of extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. It was now my world—ordinary people trying to live out their faith despite all the obstacles, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing.

From the seminary at Springwood I progressed to St Patrick's at Manly, and there I found the studies even more engaging. Yes, we learnt traditional theology, but as the politicians say, 'everything was

on the table'. I remember in a course on eschatology we were allowed to choose our topic for the major assignment. I chose the question of 'The non-existence of hell'. It was accepted as an appropriate topic. As young theologians, we were allowed to fly.

In one of my Scripture courses at Manly the reading list included a book by the renowned scripture scholar Raymond E Brown, entitled *Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*. The book studied the questions of whether Jesus may have been born like any other person rather than miraculously, and whether his resurrection may have been spiritual rather than physical. I could be wrong, but I'd be surprised if such questions were being addressed in seminaries today.

Sadly, like so many other aspects of Church life, with the coming of Pope John Paul II in 1978, the brakes were put on, the initiatives of the Vatican Council were reined in and, among other things, there was a return to a more literal interpretation of Scripture and dogma. And a whole generation of priests has grown up in that culture.

Congregations are still listening to homilies about angels and devils, as if they really existed, rather than being creative expressions of good and evil. Miracle stories from the bible are still being presented as if they are literally true, rather than stories that have been embellished, and sometimes invented, to get a message across in a dramatic and memorable way.

Admittedly, when one is preaching, it is not always easy to consistently get the message across that much of the Gospel was never meant to be taken literally, and much of it is based on outdated scientific knowledge. You can't begin every homily with a word on biblical hermeneutics, and often the message of the story is closely tied up with the story itself, as it is told. But, as preachers, we must do our best. For example, when preaching on the story of Jesus healing the boy with epilepsy by driving out a devil, it is not hard to make the point that today we know a lot more about the causes of epilepsy than they did in Jesus' day, and we certainly know it has nothing to do with devils.

I do understand that the bishops are concerned about the 'slippery slope' effect. If people stop believing in the accuracy of the biblical details, will they stop believing in the bible itself? Will they stop

believing in Jesus? Will they stop believing in God? I don't think so. A literal interpretation of Scripture holds us prisoners to an outdated and stifling world view. Modern biblical scholarship is liberating. And the Catholic community knows it. There is a real hunger amongst many Catholics for a more sophisticated understanding of the bible.

To be perfectly honest, a Jesus who works miracles has little appeal for me. He's not living in my world. He doesn't have to deal with the reality of sickness and disease, and all the other things that go wrong in life, at least in the same way that we do. The miracle-worker Jesus is not truly incarnated. He is wearing his humanity like an overcoat. And I don't believe he did that. Rather, the miracle stories in the Gospels are simply the evangelists' way, their only way, of saying that this man is special in his relationship with God.

Even a casual look at the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, with angels appearing regularly bringing messages, stars moving atypically across the sky, women becoming pregnant in miraculous circumstances, would suggest that this is a prelude. It's setting the scene for something marvellous that is soon to come. It was never meant to be taken literally.

The way we interpret Scripture has a big influence on how we see God, how we pray, how we view the Church, and indeed on our whole spirituality. It is fundamental to who we are as believers. And it's especially relevant for our bishops because the way they see God, the way they see the Church, determines to a large extent the sort of Church we have. I am sure the bishops' position on women in the Church, for example, and their exclusion from ordained ministry, has more to do with their literal interpretation of Scripture (Jesus was male, the apostles were male, so all priests have to be male) than it has to do with any theological arguments.

The Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, makes the point that the Church's Scripture and Tradition are dynamic realities, not static. In reference to 'The Tradition which comes from the Apostles,' the document states that 'There is growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down.' That 'growth in understanding' is exactly what

our biblical scholars are engaged in doing, and the hierarchy need to be open to their findings, even if those findings may at times challenge a more traditional Catholic understanding of the bible.

As a Church it is imperative that we develop a more mature understanding of our Scriptures and our Tradition. **To put it bluntly, we must grow up.** There is certainly nothing to fear in embracing modern biblical scholarship, or looking at Church doctrine in new and more sophisticated ways. It can only bring us closer to the truth, and that truth can only bring us closer to God.

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## The Prayer of Australian Reforming Catholics

**Jesus**, our friend, through whom we see something of the mystery of God, help us in our efforts to reform structures, teachings and practices in the Church that developed over time from your simple command that we love one another.

**Help** us to discern and express what is in keeping with your Spirit and to inspire others to join us in the task of making the Church a visible sign of what your love means.

**Enable** us to make known biased teachings and practices that hurt and confuse those who seek you with willing hearts.

**Give** us the courage to speak and act in seeking necessary reform in the Church.

**Empower** us to work with the same love, compassion and truthfulness that showed in everything that you said and did.

**May** we be instruments in bringing about change so that more people feel happy to say 'Our Church' when they speak of the community or path that leads them to you.

# Censorship

Noelene Uren

Beginning in May 1933, Nazi-dominated student groups carried out a public burning of books. In Berlin and across Germany in thirty-four University towns upwards of 25,000 volumes were consigned to flames—books that were judged to be un-German. Ending up in the bonfires were works not only of prominent Jewish liberal and leftist writers but also authors such as Ernest Hemingway and Helen Keller who were judged to be corrupting foreign influences.

Now, if you walk through the streets of Berlin you may come across a tiny window in a footpath. Look down and you will see a library of empty bookshelves, a poignant reminder of what can happen when a dictator decides to censor what people can read.

The burning of the books was an appalling act, but despots have always used censorship as a tool. However, historically, our Church also stands guilty of, if not book burning, then certainly book banning. The Index *Librorum Prohibitorum* was a list of publications deemed ‘heretical or contrary to morality’ by the Sacred Congregation of the Index. Catholics were forbidden to read them without permission.\*

Proclaimed by Pope Paul IV in 1559, the Pauline Index banned thousands of book titles and publications, including works of Europe’s intellectual elites. What was the aim? The Church decided that the Sacred Congregation knew best what we should be allowed to read. Anything that might contaminate our faith or corrupt our morals was deemed forbidden. They graded books on the degree of toxicity and included anything from philosophy to romance. Across the centuries banned books ranged through writers such as Baruch Spinoza, Francis Bacon, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Edward Gibbon and all love stories by George Sand, Honore de Balzac and Alexandre Dumas. The final edition was published in 1948 and in 1966 was abolished by Pope Paul VI.

Remembering back, I think it was ‘more honoured in the breach than in the observance’ as the majority of people, although they knew about the Index, rarely, if ever, checked it. The only example of censorship I remember was by my older cousin. He

allowed me free access to his bookcase, mostly classics, but removed Henry Bellamann’s *King’s Rom*. Of course I made sure I read it when I was old enough to get a copy for myself, which only demonstrated how ineffective banning books could be.

One might have hoped that, with the end of the Index, freedom of thought and expression would logically follow. But, extreme as the Index was, today’s censorship is more dangerous because it is insidious. Writing in *The Age* in May, Farrah Tomazin reported on how Sister Joan Chittister, writer, feminist and theologian, was dis-endorsed last year from speaking at the Catholic Education Conference. At the time it was explained as merely, ‘a misunderstanding’. But it was obviously censorship. Sister Joan declared, ‘Nobody has the right to tell anyone else what to think.’

Another example of censorship is given in the Autumn edition of *The Swag*. Under the heading, ‘Is there room for dialogue when an Archbishop can be censored?’ Dr Rodney Page reported that the reformist views of Archbishop Carroll, featured originally in *The Catholic Voice*, were expunged. As Dr Page wrote, ‘A censor has excised the substance of an otherwise challenging article’.

This controlling of the printed word filters down to the Parish level, certainly in my Parish and I’m sure we are not alone. Our monthly publication, produced by an editorial group under former Passionate priests, was always filled with lively and often controversial articles. But the arrival of priests trained in a different culture has reduced it to a few pages of parish events. Articles deemed not appropriate’ are removed.\*\* As Sister Chittister stated, ‘The Church needs to grow up if it wants to thrive’. Towards this growth the Church needs to continue where Pope Paul VI began in 1966 and not use censorship to stifle freedom of thought and expression. The people are the Church. They have a voice that needs to be heard and not left on the outside of (to quote Dr Page again) ‘An exclusive, clerically controlled clubhouse’.

Noelene Uren is a member of the ARC Secretariat

\*I am the proud owner of a book banned by the Vatican: (As if they can tell me what I can or cannot read.) Lavinia Byrne’s *Women at the Altar*. Its ‘crime’ is the mention of the possibility of women’s ordination. (Ed.).

\*\* An article in the parish newsletter critiquing Indulgences was censored by the PP because, according to him, ‘Indulgences are still part of the Church’s teachings’. (Ed.)

# The Challenges of the Times

Michael Kelly SJ

Catholics cannot afford to get bogged down in their own frequent failures to meet the challenges of the times

**T**hroughout the Catholic Church, something is stirring about the way we are governed.

For many of us in the Church and across society, we don't much care about that subject. We long ago made peace with being parts of communities, organisations, nations and even families where we just get on with our lives and leave running the show to those who like to be in charge of things.

But now in the Church, each of us is being presented with the challenge and opportunity to take a larger part in setting the course and managing the conduct of the very thing we are already part of—the Church.

Even in those parts of the Catholic Church where Eastern Church precedents make for different patterns of liturgy and Church structure—the Syrian tradition in India, for example—the pattern of governance is under pressure.

Our response is based on a vast slew of experience of participation in communities and their governance.

Some of it is relevant and some of it is completely irrelevant to today's challenges and opportunities to set the course and manage the conduct of our life in the Church. For example, today we can assume greater managerial responsibilities commensurate with our qualifications and experience in particular areas of missionary or apostolic activity, whether or not we also hold or have ecclesiastical status as, for example, a cleric may enjoy.

And then there are those tasks and responsibilities that require the *munus*\* or office authorised by the clerical state. And that is exactly where the trouble starts for the exercise of governance in the Catholic Church.

Despite all manner of exhortations to share in and participate in governance of the Church, it is simply and practically impossible without the *munus* that comes with orders.

Some of us live in democratic, participatory societies. Many more among us live in societies that are authoritarian and centrally controlled political entities. Very often through-out history that experience has mistakenly been adopted as normative for church governance.



No listening; no inclusion of those on whom the changes had impact in the decision-making process; top-down command and control management was common in medieval societies and was adopted in the Church, with ecclesiastical rationalisations providing for an operating structure that actually had no theological mandate.

An alternative collegial structure was common enough in the Middle Ages too and led to the creation of the kinds of collaborative governance better known as capitular, collegial or even conciliarist structures that still persist in religious orders and congregations that elect their leadership on a regular basis and also legislate for the conduct of their lives together in the chapter.

These are all forms of collegial, collaborative, participatory leadership. Now, under the present pope's leadership but drawing on the encouragement and structure suggested by Vatican II, we are building a life of leadership by a synodal form of governance.

But what exactly does that mean?

It has been suggested that synods can be constructed and operated as the Church's response to democracy. But that's not really the case.

The two main forms of democracy at work or available in the world are representative democracy and participatory democracy.

Representative democracy is more common and has elected representatives voted into assemblies to legislate what those they represent consider most desirable. Then, when their job is done, they can be replaced by other representatives.

Participatory democracy can only work with smaller populations where all those with a stake in the legislative outcome get to cast a vote on what that outcome is to be.

Synods are very different because only people of a certain status in the Church get to participate and not all those participating get to have an effective say in

what is decided. Sometimes, the best that many in a synod without a deliberative or decisive voice or vote can hope for is consultative status.

So, synods are not democratic. The Australian Plenary Council is like that. It is something like the British House of Lords whose members are not elected by anyone but constituted by birth rights or because of a status granted by the Crown—a peerage.

Synod ‘fathers’ are all males and are in their places by virtue of their ordained status in the Church. Most, it seems (as in Australia), are nominated by bishops and appointed, not elected. The reach and significance of this status are plainly restricted and circumscribed and one would be hard pressed to find the ordinary operations of a synod in the Catholic Church to be anything more than a very small step along the way to fixing the challenges to governance.

Anglican Church governance is more developed in its use of synods and we have a lot to learn from them. They aren’t the last word because they reflect the church and society in which they were formed. But they would be a good place for Roman Catholics to start to learn how other voices than bishops might be heard, which is what the formalities of the Catholic process mean—bishops appoint the members of the synod and will ultimately vote on any recommendations.

The Anglicans have three houses—bishops, clergy and laypeople—established for their decision-making. In that they have borrowed from the Orthodox and Lutheran churches. It will now fall to Roman Catholics to learn from these other churches how to go about structuring and harmonizing these various voices for more effective governance.

Clearly, Catholics have a long way to go if they aim to catch up with Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant structures and processes that have been developing as Catholics have put ever more trust in doing it all from Rome over the centuries.

But Catholics can’t stay where they are. They will just get bogged down in their own frequent failures to meet the challenges of the times.

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\* *Munus*: Singular form of Latin *munera*, in ancient Rome, a duty or provision owed to a person or persons, living or dead. In particular, a gladiator game.



## ‘The Beatitudes of the Bishops’

It was originally thought that Francis had written the text himself, but it later transpired that the text had been written by the archbishop of Naples, Domenico Battaglia, who first used it at the ordination of three new bishops for that diocese in a homily on Oct. 31. The pope learned about the text and made it his own by having it printed on a card and giving it to each of the Italian bishops.

1. Blessed is the bishop who makes poverty and sharing his lifestyle because with his witness he is building the kingdom of heaven.
2. Blessed is the bishop who does not fear to water his face with tears, so that in them can be mirrored the sorrows of the people, the labours [fatigue] of the priests, [and] who finds in the embrace of the one who suffers the consolation of God. Blessed is the bishop who makes poverty and sharing his lifestyle because with his witness he is building the kingdom of heaven.
3. Blessed is the bishop who considers his ministry a service and not a power, making meekness his strength, giving to all the right of citizenship in his own heart, so as to inhabit the land promised to the meek.
4. Blessed is the bishop who does not close himself in the palaces of government, who does not become a bureaucrat more attentive to statistics than to faces, to procedures than to [people’s] stories, who seeks to fight at the side of people for the dream of the justice of God because the Lord, encountered in the silence of daily prayer, will be his nourishment.
5. Blessed is the bishop who has a heart for the misery of the world, who does not fear dirtying his hands with the mud of the human soul in order to find there the gold of God, who is not scandalized by the sin and fragility of the other because he is conscious of his own misery, because the look of the Risen Crucified One will be for him the seal of infinite pardon. Blessed is the bishop who for the Gospel does not fear to go against the tide.
6. Blessed is the bishop who wards off duplicity of heart, who avoids every ambiguous dynamic, who dreams good even in the midst of evil, because he will be able to enjoy the face of God, tracking it down in every puddle of the city of people.
7. Blessed is the bishop that works for peace, who accompanies the paths of reconciliation, who sows in the heart of the presbyterate the seed of communion, who accompanies a divided society on the pathway of reconciliation, who takes by hand every man and every woman of good will in order to build fraternity: God will recognize him as his son.
8. Blessed is the bishop who for the Gospel does not fear to go against the tide, making his face ‘hard’ like that of Christ heading to Jerusalem, without letting himself be held back by misunderstandings and by obstacles because he knows that the Kingdom of God advances in contradiction to the world.

*(The Pope should specifically send this text to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to help them to be in the right frame of mind when making decisions in the Plenary Council – John Buggy)*

# Climbing Mountains

Don Humphrey

In her recent visit to Australia, Sister Joan Chittister spoke about mountains. Ancient religious myths all told that mountains were where earth touched heaven; where the human could touch the divine; where individuals must go to contact God. She identified eight mountains and it's these mountains which yet today I believe are challenging us too. A few of them we already climb, with daily devotion. But the others, I believe, we have yet to scale.

In Mount Olivet, we see what St James calls 'Good Works'. Faith we must have but we need our good works as well. When we care for the poor and the oppressed we are dealing with Jesus himself. 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

One has only to look at the various religious magazines to see how so many of our confreres are caring for the poor and oppressed. Thankfully, many Christian people are living their lives as part of the Body of Christ. This doesn't mean that we can sit back and think that this is under control, we don't have to worry, the poor and oppressed are being looked after so we can get back to our own lives. What we sometimes do not realise is that the poor and oppressed are on our doorstep. Where is our compassion for our neighbours?

What are we doing to alleviate the oppression of our neighbours for being of a different race or a different religion or even just being women? It is not good enough to say that women have come a long way. The Church, or at least 'Our Church' still hasn't got it. Women are still classed as second class. But we are not the only ones. Society, in general, hasn't got it, so what are we doing to rectify this?

I have a grandson who is one of the most caring people I have ever been associated with. I know he

loves me. All my grandchildren say they love me and I love them all but this young fellow goes out of his way to look after me. Whenever we meet, which is not as often as I would like, he helps me. I have difficulties climbing steps where there is no handrail. He is there. Do I want a glass of water? Do I want to watch TV? Can I get you another more comfortable chair? This grandchild is not even out of Primary School. He is more a Christian than many Catholics I know.

I know that he is not looking to emulate Jesus but he does have that compassion that Jesus had. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

So, what can we do? We need to look beyond ourselves. We need to look at government, local, state and federal and make noise and lobby for policies that fulfil Jesus' wish. This goes beyond people. It goes to care for our environment. We have a powerful tool, our vote. We can write our letters to our representatives, to the press and we can talk to our neighbours. If we are bringing up children, we need to teach them compassion. We need to act compassionately in all we do. This mountain will take a lot of effort but it will be worth it.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why not women deacons?
2. Why not lay boards that are really boards, not just clerical cheerleaders?
3. Why not synods with lay delegates chosen by laypeople?
4. Why not married priests, women priests – oh, what the heck, women?

DON HUMPHREY is a long-standing member of ARC and is now on the Secretariat. He is a member of St John Bosco Parish Engadine. He spent 56 years teaching High School students in Public and Catholic schools. He has a BA and an MEd.

# Bishops' opposition to equal opportunity laws exposes their own teaching

Michael Leahy

*By opposing Victoria's Equal Opportunity Bill, Catholic bishops demonstrate the tension in their church's teaching on discrimination.*

Societies like Victoria's have long histories of discrimination against groups held to be offending against community moral standards. Divorce required the ordeal of proving fault, and invariably attracted a lasting stigma. Women could be denied access to jobs or housing because they were divorced. Homosexuals could even be prosecuted as criminals for indulging in their 'perversions'. The possibility of sexualities other than those conferred by biology were inconceivable.

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, attitudes to sexuality, divorce and re-marriage changed, and laws were enacted to ease the discriminatory burdens imposed on relevant victims.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only were most state laws prohibiting homosexual conduct repealed, but gay marriage was also permitted under the Commonwealth *Marriage Act* (1961, amended 2017).

In short, the community at large rejected the traditional view of homosexuality as a perversion from which society needed protection, and demanded removal of all forms of discrimination against homosexuals. Indeed, the community at large accepted the view that human sexuality was much more diverse and complex than the simple biological binary supposed from ancient times.

Acceptance of change in assessments of such fundamental aspects of human life is, of course, not instant or easy. Attitudinal change can sometimes stem from fads or misguided ideologies. But underpinning these changes was something deeper than fads or ideologies.

The patriarchal family structure was in its death throes, and the dignity of the individual human person was being recognised as demanding respect. Freedom to define one's own sexuality, and to express it in relationships formed and terminated by one's own choice, was one such demand. This elevation of personal dignity above prevailing convention as a criterion for measuring the morality of sexuality, and of its expression, is thus better understood as an evolution of moral consciousness on the part of a community emerging from the tyranny of patriarchy.



Those whose dignity was most seriously impugned by prevailing convention were members of the Rainbow community: homosexual behaviour was not only condemned as perverse but also made criminal. It was no fad or ideology that led to the repeal of laws against such behaviour but developments in the science of psychiatry. In Australia on October 15, 1973, the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Federal Council declared that homosexuality was not an illness.

In its 2013 edition, the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) no longer defined homosexuality as a mental disorder. Recent works in biology such as Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (Stonewall Inn Editions, St. Martin's Press, Chicago, 2020) report sexual diversity in the animal as well as the human world.

Society revised its moral assessment of homosexual behaviour not because it caved in to a fad or an ideology, but because it accepted an evolution in the scientific understanding of such behaviour. The prevailing empirical assumptions that human sexuality was binary, and homosexual behaviour a deviation from the norm, became untenable.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021 seeks to remove the remnants of past discrimination against members of the above-mentioned groups. The Victorian Catholic bishops' protest that the Bill violates Catholics' religious freedom to employ persons who will support their teachings, values and ethos. In so protesting, however, the bishops expose themselves as victims of a tension in the church's own teaching.

The core values underpinning any Catholic ethos are the gospel values of love, justice, mercy, truth. The Second Vatican Council, the highest level of church authority, asserted these values when it condemned all forms of discrimination: ‘With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent’ (*Constitution on the Church Today*, 29).

The same document mandated an update of all church teaching in light of the fact that ‘the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one’ (5).

The church itself has failed to fulfil this mandate in relation to homosexuality in particular. Its official teaching, expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2357), still affirms that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered’.

By doing so, the global church demonstrates its persistence in the ‘static’ vision of human sexuality.

Persistence in this static vision prevents the church from sharing in the evolution in moral consciousness that has enabled societies such as Victoria’s to outlaw discrimination in employment practices on grounds of sexuality or marital status.

The consequences of this persistence are serious. The least of them is that local bishops are forced, under pain of dismissal, to uphold the official teaching of the Catholic Catechism despite its inconsistency with the mandate of Vatican II. The most serious is that the cries for care and compassion from some of the most vulnerable members of the community are met with words of lip service, but with employment practices that give the lie to those words.

Passage of this Bill will give these vulnerable people a measure of the protection they should properly be receiving from the church.

**MICHAEL LEAHY** is a former Melbourne priest and a retired philosopher of education and politics. He maintains a keen interest in the renewal and reform of the Catholic Church. This article was published in *Pearls & Irritations* on 26.11.21.

## An Experience

Peter Meury

**R**ecently I attended a so-called ‘Solemn Requiem Mass’ (more like a memorial celebration after burial), celebrated especially for some members of the (small) family of our deceased friend who had passed away from cancer, aged 53 years. The Mass was requested and organised by our grandson who is a member of a traditional Latin Mass Parish in the Sydney Archdiocese. It reminded me of my youth – everything in Latin, including the sequence *Dies irae dies illa*, all recited by the Priest only (including readings and gospel), robed in traditional vestments, etc. The Eucharistic Prayer was read silently by the Priest. Communion was announced only for those in the ‘State of Grace’ and only kneeling, on the tongue.

The official funeral had been held the previous week in the Catholic Church of Maitland, with a Mass of Christian Burial as we are used to, only attended by vaccinated mourners. It was digitally transmitted and very beautiful. The Priest gave a short homily (he did not personally know the deceased). He also explained how to receive communion in the hand – no other explanations or restrictions. Unfortunately my wife and I were unable to attend physically, although fully vaccinated.

I understand from a priest-friend that such Latin traditional (Tridentine) parishes attract many young people who are fascinated by the mystery of the Latin celebration, etc. Unity in diversity?

Needless to say I shook my head in disbelief!

PETER MEURY is a member of the ARC Secretariat.

# Catholic Church synod must bring women's stories to the fore

Soline Humbert

**H**ow do you respond to a call to 'journey together' with people who, in Christ's name, proclaim your non-existence? This is what I asked myself when I heard the Irish Catholic bishops calling for participation in a five-year synodal pathway.

Pope Francis has also launched a two-year worldwide synodal process, so we are now doubly exhorted to be a listening church where everyone can speak freely. I have heard that before.

My first experience of formal consultation in the church was three decades ago, as a member of the Women in the Church subcommittee, in the Dublin archdiocese.

The Dublin Council of Priests wanted to listen to women's pain and set up a sub-committee of four priests and four women. Our subcommittee met for more than a year. Soon there was pressure to censor ourselves and not to mention women's ordination for fear of episcopal anger.

On February 23rd, 1994, we gathered in a large room in Clonliffe College, with the archbishop, the auxiliary bishops and all the priests on the council. It took me all the courage I could muster to be vulnerable and share the very deep spiritual pain I felt about the sense of calling to the presbyterate/priesthood I had experienced since my teens.

The response was mostly silence and no further contact.

Months later, I was contacted by a journalist from *The Tablet* in London. Margaret Hebblethwaite was puzzled at seeing my name among the women's names attached to a report ruling out women's ordination.

The report of the Dublin Council of Priests on women in the church had been written up, approved by the archbishop and press releases sent far and wide. I had never seen it.

As Hebblethwaite read out the content of the report to me over the phone, I felt physically sick. It stated: 'The fact that the priesthood was given only to men did not prevent women from taking their full part in the life of the church.'

I wrote to the chairman of the council who replied that this was a report of the council, of which I was not a member. I was only on the sub-committee, I had no grounds for complaint. The women's names were attached to it because we had been consulted. I felt betrayed, my trust violated.

A month later, the pope shut the door to women's ordination. Gagging all discussion, it was designed to crush any hope in women like me. Buried alive with a vocation that would not die.

We are now invited 'to trust that this synodal pathway is a sincere effort to bring about real transformation and renewal in the church guided by the Spirit', and at the same time we are warned by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference that 'Pope Francis has been clear that synods are not instruments to change church teachings but rather help to apply church teaching more pastorally.'

I do not believe this much-needed renewal can happen while insisting all church teachings (of various degrees of authority) remain in place. Many render the gospel message inaudible.

Dr Nicola Brady, the chairwoman of the steering committee of the Irish Synodal Pathway, has said that 'we are seeking to acknowledge the hurts that exist within our church community and work to heal those relationships'. The stark reality is that male dominance in the church has been sacralised for centuries and distorts relationships. Women must be under the control of men, who alone can represent Christ.

The structures and theology, including papal teachings, which underpin the church version of gender-apartheid perpetuate the violence of inequality and exclusion.

They are truly a scandalous counter-witness to the foundational baptismal affirmation that, 'In Christ there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28) and Christ's prayer 'that all may be one' (John 17).

In his recent **blog post**, entitled 'The Taliban Within,' Gerry O'Hanlon SJ starts with a letter published in *The Tablet* on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from

Dr Anne Inman: ‘What does the Catholic Church have to say about the Taliban announcement that women can work for the government, since almost half of the workers are women, but ‘in the top posts...there may not be a woman?’

O’Hanlon doesn’t answer directly but concludes: ‘... when women in the Catholic Church are now so conscious of not being taken seriously for so long, their feelings and thoughts not given equal value, then there is a real crisis, a time of discernment.’

Can Pope Francis open himself to an encounter with women with a calling like mine and listen to our stories, something his predecessors have never done? What if the vocations we bear are of the Spirit?

The first century Church could dispense with male circumcision; can we dispense with a male-only priesthood? With the help of that same Spirit.

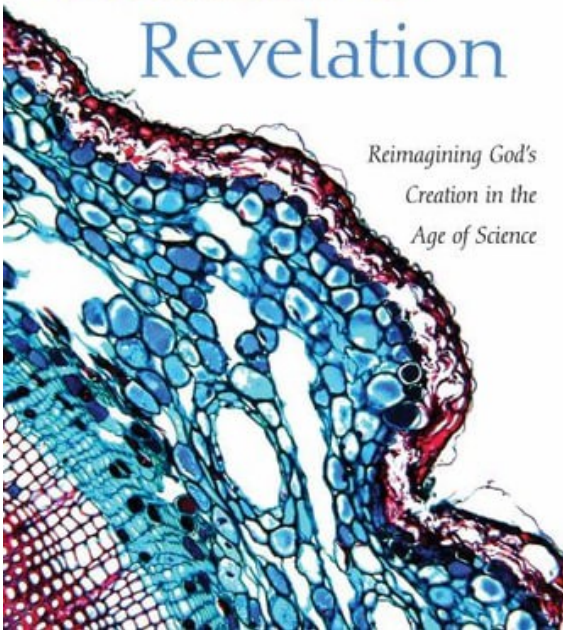
Soline Humbert is a spiritual guide and an advocate for women’s ordination.

Published in *The Irish Times* on Oct 26, 2021

PETER R. STORK

## Cosmos & Revelation

Reimagining God’s  
Creation in the  
Age of Science



*‘Over the last 25 years, I cannot recall one single instance when the Christian doctrine of creation featured as a teaching or preaching topic. As I cannot imagine that church leaders, ordained and lay alike, are unaware of how deeply the discoveries in cosmology, physics, biology, genetics, and paleontology have shattered all traditional conceptions of space and time as well as of animal and human history, there is only one explanation: they don’t know how to deal with it without causing intracongregational conflict. The fact that clergy education also ignores the new-universe story does not help. Hence my contention that faith in God as creator of the natural world lacks credibility without due acknowledgment of its contemporary scientific description.’ (p.9)*

Science and technology have profoundly altered the cosmic and societal perceptions of the world. Regrettably, the Christian imagination has not kept pace. Most believers still adhere to pre-scientific views. *Cosmos and Revelation* urges the Christian community to reimagine God’s creation by engaging the data of science. For if God has indeed brought forth an intelligible world for us to explore through scientific research, those who profess this faith ought to, as a minimum, allow scientific findings to expand their theological horizon. Drawing on his scientific qualification and academic background in theology, Peter R. Stork opens several windows on God’s creation, from galactic star nurseries to the wonderland of living cells. After re-reading Genesis 1 and 2, the author interlaces examples and reflections to present a coherent yet provocative sketch of the new landscape that spreads out before us, leaving it to his readers to intuit for themselves the immensities Christians are challenged to embrace in the age of science.

### Industry Review:

Stork’s search for coherence in reimagining God’s creation guides him into cosmology and astrophysics, chemistry and biochemistry, and evolutionary anthropology and neurology, along with religious studies, biblical interpretation, and theology. Brooding over Stephen Hawking’s question—‘What breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?’—electrifies the author’s greatly expanded vision of the Creator and of creation as a cosmic event, in whose finely tuned beginnings and complex history human existence is astonishingly deeply rooted.

Raymond Canning  
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ARC*Voice* is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church. Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of ARC

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