



# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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## Is Pope Francis Now in a Hurry?

According to one report in Rome, cameras are often directed away from Pope Francis in some of his public appearances as a way to mask the Pope's decreasing mobility. Francis appears to have great difficulty moving in and out of his popemobile or even a chair and is now using a walking stick. At 85 years of age, he has been experiencing severe pain in recent weeks. He is appearing in a wheelchair in order to keep up his commitment to meet with groups and individuals. Could it be that, despite his determination, he may be worrying about his capacity to deal with what he yet wants to be done within the timeline of his pontificate?

Are we seeing, as a result of all this, that the style of his communication is changing? Resistance to his intended reforms remains very strong in significant parts of the Vatican and no doubt he is concerned that key things that he wants to achieve are taking much longer than he expected. Some people have expressed frustration that Pope Francis has not been more directive in stipulating what he wants. His communication strategy has been to outline his approach and hope that others will follow. We see his demeanour of encouragement and leading by example constantly in evidence, especially when he gives seemingly 'off the cuff' interviews or statements when he is travelling.

Perhaps a clue to a possible change in strategy lies in the article in this edition on page 5. Pope Francis had been working for quite some time towards reforming the Roman Curia and this culminated in March of this year with the release of his apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (Preach the Gospel). We can only speculate on how this was received in the Vatican. However, Pope Francis 'ordered' the senior members of the Curia to attend a motivational seminar in May, making it clear that these officials were expected to be there. I have not previously read about Pope Francis saying anything as forceful as this.

A further indication that Pope Francis may be in a hurry lies in his appointment, also in May, of Cardinal Matteo Zuppi as President of the Italian Episcopal Conference. There were other strong contenders supported by the bishops but Cardinal Zuppi is a strong supporter of the Pope.

The Italian Catholic Church is coming under increasing pressure to deal with clerical sexual abuse (see article page 10). The resistance that the Italian bishops have shown towards constructive ways of dealing with the problem has implications for the pope's legacy. The time it now takes from here on for this long-standing issue to be properly addressed may enable us to judge whether his approach is changing.

*John Buggy*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial .. 1

Letters to the Editor ... 2

Michael Sibbert: *A Lament from the Coalface of Catholic Education* ... 2-3

Arnaud Join-Lambert: *Synodality must become permanent part of Church's way of being* ... 4-5

Loup Besmond de Senneville: *A motivational seminar for the Vatican's top brass* ... 5

Joan Chittister: *For real change, we must get at four roots deeper than church structures* ... 6-7

Duncan MacLaren: *Liberation theology—50 years on* .. 8-10

Isabelle de Gaulmyn: *Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church: the Italian exception* ... 10

Alan Clague: *'Of Blessed Memory'* ... 11-12

Michael Sibbert: *In praise of quiet time* (a poem) ... 12

Margaret Knowlden: *Kindness* ... 13.14

Editor: *ARCVoice—20 years on* ... 15

Subscription Form, Secretariat, Have your say, ARC website ... 16

Recently I read a small booklet by Denis Nickle *et al.* entitled, *A New Habit of Mind*. The title is sourced from a statement of Pope Paul VI on the need for the laws of the Church to accommodate the ‘new habit of mind proper to the Second Vatican Council’.

To quote from the text: ‘The necessity of a tension between past and present challenges an attitude which looks back to “The Catholic faith that I grew up with” to “a yearning for things to be the way they once were”.’ This new knowledge ... ‘requires the Church to ensure that its teaching is adapted to the realities which science has revealed.’

The author has referred to many Church documents, quoting Pope Pius XI, the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. The sources show that the Catholic Church with regard to the development of doctrine... ‘is readily accommodating recent scientific concepts’.

There are certainly examples of science being incorporated into the school syllabus and also into homilies. But for many of us at the Parish level, we hear very little of these developments in Church thinking. Our homilies are so often based on the Scripture readings of the day. What can we, as lay people, do about this? I don’t know, but I do recommend reading this booklet as a starting point.

*Noelene Uren*  
*ARC Secretariat*

What excitement for all lay Catholics! Pope Francis has appointed Sr. Nathalie Becquart as Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (*ARCVoice* March 2022). At last a chance for us to write directly to the Vatican about the need for synodality in the church today. And there’s more—we know our thoughts will be heard.

There will not be another chance to do this in our lifetime, so I urge all ARC members to gather a group together and email Sr. Nathalie. If we don’t respond to this initiative of Pope Francis we really don’t have the right to complain about anything ever again.

*Jan Prior*  
*Cronulla NSW*

Thank you for your challenging articles.  
*Most Rev. Barry J. Hickey*  
*Archbishop Emeritus of Perth*

Two copies of *ARCVoice* are being sent to you this time in the hope that you will pass one on to someone you think might be interested. It is often a good way of attracting new ARC Members.

## A Lament from the Coalface of Catholic Education

Michael Sibert

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matt 13: 45-46)*

I am a teacher at a systemic Catholic senior college with an approximate enrolment of one thousand students aged 16 to 18 years. Nearing the end of this vocation, I lament the many years of lost opportunities for myself and other passionate teachers within this system. In particular, not being

able to ‘get on the front foot’ and present the best of what the Catholic tradition has to offer these young hearts and minds: in short, the unequivocal teaching that God loves you.

Imagine yourself walking into a classroom, wanting to reveal the nature of a life-giving God who cares for all creatures equally. But then, in the midst of your endeavours, having to rationalise why women cannot share in the leadership and authority structures of this church, why LGBTIQ+ people have to comply with restrictions placed on their membership, and why so many priests perpetrated sexual abuse whilst being protected by people in authority positions within this same church. Young idealistic students have a very sharp eye for hypocrisy. Moving beyond this situation requires the removal of misplaced doctrinal certainties and exclusivist

practices that unnecessarily cloud and confuse the ‘pearl of great value’ and leave teachers in a significantly handicapped position.

Matthew Fox and others, call for an education that values ‘wisdom’ over ‘knowledge’<sup>1</sup>; an education that puts before young minds and hearts the awe and wonder of the cosmos and invites them into a relationship of encounter and discovery, enlisting their creative imagination to give expression to their experiences of such encounters, rather than an education that presents pre-packaged, non-negotiable answers. Such guarded knowledge turns most students away before they have been given a chance to explore the depth of their own questions, let alone the ‘pearls of wisdom’ laying within traditional and potential modes of religious expression.

Interestingly, removing the barriers which currently prevent Catholic education from achieving its deepest longings and highest goals, may indeed be able to, at the same time address the causes of much of the youth depression, cynicism, boredom and addiction we witness today.

Students at our senior college have a choice when it comes to studying Religion. They can enrol in the NES (ATAR) Studies of Religion course, or they can choose the non-ATAR diocesan-developed course, Studies in Catholic Thought. Most students choose the former which entails the study of several religious traditions and the common characteristics that exist across these traditions. In this academic context they also learn about the provisional nature of ‘belief’ statements and to appreciate the nature of ‘beliefs’, including the doctrines and dogmas of Catholicism, as just another characteristic of religion, along with rituals, symbols, sacred spaces, sacred stories and ethics, all of which serve the primary aim of communicating and passing on insight and wisdom into the nature and mystery of God.

Beyond the classroom today many adults have a problem in developing spiritual maturity, in that the nature of religious belief statements are commonly misunderstood as literally true statements about absolute reality, which considering the subject is the

ultimate mystery of God, can never be so. Religious belief statements, being composed in words, are more akin to poetry and are on a par with religious symbols, when it comes to conveying the nature of the divine. Yes, they do contain truth, religious truth not literal truth. Learning to hold these religious truths a little more humbly, more lightly, is a wisdom that comes down through the ages but has been obscured over the past few centuries partly because of the insights gained through the application of the scientific method and the subsequent ‘success’ this has brought to western cultures. The application of science has suggested in the eyes of many that all truth is objective and provable. Many religious and non-religious alike have fallen for the misconception that the scientific method is the touch-stone for all truth, which for me is certainly an overreach and one that leads to the predicament of people applying the scientific paradigm when approaching religious ‘truth’ and thus miscomprehending the nature of religious truth. Teachers are in an ideal position to address this wider cultural issue and assist both our students and our wider culture to appreciate and distinguish the nature of religious truth and thereby come to greater spiritual maturity.

However, until we (the church) loosen the grip of clerical hierarchical control and stop pretending that doctrines and dogmas are absolute, teachers will continue to be confronted with an impossible evangelising task. It is not until that which is passed its use-by-date, is thrown off, that the new can be born. This will necessitate a more nuanced, more lightly held grip on the doctrinal teachings, a wisdom that sees the priority of some teachings and practices over others, a wisdom that is truly catholic. To be catholic means to be inclusive and focussed on what really matters, which is spiritual enlightenment over allegiance to a rigid set of doctrines. This approach would help teachers do what would really make a difference in the lives of young catholic students, that is, to pass on the best of the Catholic tradition – its focus on Jesus and our relationship with God (the mystery of our lives).

MICHAEL SIBERT has been a teacher in Senior Catholic Schools for 24 years. He has taken up the recent invitation to join the ARC

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.matthewfox.org/about-matthew-fox/pedagogy-of-matthew-fox>

The Budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled and assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest Rome will become bankrupt. People must again learn to work instead of living on public assistance.

**Cicero 55 BC**

# Synodality must become a permanent part of Church's way of being

Arnaud Join-Lambert

Catholic priests need to embrace synodality and help promote shared responsibility for the Church among all the baptised.

**L***earning by doing.* This expression sums up a major challenge that has emerged from the first four months of preparations for the Synod of Bishops' upcoming assembly on synodality, which will take place in October 2023 in Rome.

The Preparatory Document rephrases that expression in this way: 'Journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience' (PD 1). The Roman Synod is challenging all Catholics to shift the centre of focus on three levels. First, to shift the centre away from one's self in order to 'learn from one another' (PD 32 quoting the pope from 2018). Then, to shift the centre from parishes. 'The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from other points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries' (*Vademecum*). And, finally, to shift the centre away from an overly clerical Church towards becoming a 'synodal Church', in which 'everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other' (PD 15 quoting the pope from 2015). It is easy to understand that this locally initiated process should not be stopped in three months, but should become a permanent way of functioning, even a way of being.

We are transformed by what we do: listeners, deliberators (with others and with the Lord), communicators (trained in the culture of dialogue). Synodality is not only cemented in know-how, but in a know-how-to-be.

## By all the baptised

Current echoes received from all over the world show that this transformation through experience is not an empty word, even if it is far from being the case everywhere. Steps are beginning or are being made on this way of being Church by all the

baptised, in a manner commensurate with their baptismal vocation, their charisms and their missions. What we can also observe is the decisive role of the clergy. The local phase of consultation is very largely—and sometimes totally—dependent on the priests, and even the bishops. There is a discrete form of 'passive' clericalism here, not bad in itself, but ambivalent. To put it another way, this shows that the synodal approach does not exclude leadership. It is obvious that processes of change, whether they are institutional or more profound, currently require forms of top-down leadership since they aim at a pastoral and missionary conversion. The issue is crucial. Those who lead must encourage the dimension of spiritual discernment, and therefore let go of certain ways of exercising power that they embody in their hierarchical and ministerial position. What is neither easy nor obvious for some is, nevertheless, a necessary and potentially fruitful step.

## Reluctant priests

This unprecedented moment in the life of the Catholic Church highlights priests who are active in the implementation of the synod and others who are more reluctant and are 'forgetting' the synodal process. Their enthusiasm or their inertia shows how essential synodality is for Catholic ecclesial renewal today. Entrusting responsibility to all the baptised in the life and mission of the Church is still too dependent—for the moment—on the commitment of a few, the priests.

This is a kind of paradox. Let us add that priests involved in the process of synodality could be the first beneficiaries when it comes to their own pastoral ministry. How can the dynamic be established throughout the Church since those who have no experience of it will not be convinced? The Roman synod is an opportunity because of its strong institutional appeal. Perhaps some will then enter into the rich exercise of shared discernment. It seems that the members of movements and associations of the

faithful are more at ease in the process. Perhaps this can be explained by the experience of a different type of governance, and by the active participation of priests as spiritual advisors and not as presidents. This would tend to prove that shared responsibilities favour the commitment and initiative of a greater number. It would thus be truly through experience that the way of discerning and deciding in the Church could be reformed for the good of all. The fact that synodality is both the method and the subject of the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops shows its relevance here.

However, it must be recognised that the clarity of the approach is not always obvious and requires a significant investment at all levels to communicate the meaning and know-how of this way of being and acting in the Church. The hundred or so days spent so far are obviously not enough. The Catholic Church is committed, as always, to the long term.

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## A motivational seminar for the Vatican's top brass

Loup Besmond de Senneville

(Vatican City)

**A**t the request of Pope Francis, a colloquium is held for Vatican officials to study the new apostolic constitution for the reformed Roman Curia.

The vast amphitheatre of the Pontifical Lateran University was nearly full with senior Vatican officials.

They gathered on May 17<sup>th</sup> in the Aula Magna of the 'pope's university', located just behind Rome's cathedral-basilica of St. John Lateran. And among them were Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State; Jesuit Father Juan Antonio Guerrero, prefect of the secretariat for the economy; Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints; Mr. Paolo Ruffini, head of Vatican communications; and Ms. Gabriella Gambino, undersecretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

They came to take part in a 'study day' on *Praedicate Evangelium*, the apostolic constitution the pope issued on March 19<sup>th</sup> for the reformed Roman Curia. The Vatican's top brass was not there by chance. According to our information, Pope Francis ordered the colloquium be organised and made it clear that these officials were expected to attend.

With less than a month before Pentecost Sunday, when the new constitution goes into effect, the pope clearly believes that members of the Curia have not sufficiently grasped what the reform is all about. In this perspective, the day at the Lateran had the air of a motivational seminar for Vatican officials, based on canon law.

In the near future, everything remains to be done to implement the reform, from moving the offices of merged dicasteries to appointing new prefects and secretaries. Will Francis appoint all of the Curia's leaders in a single wave by June 5<sup>th</sup>? Or will the appointments be spread out over several weeks? There is a difference of opinions inside the Vatican. No one really knows what the pope's intentions are.

'He hates being pressured,' said one source who has been in Rome for decades. 'Appointments are among the most personal decisions the pope makes,' said another aide. 'Only he knows what he will do'.

Read more at:

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/vatican-diary/a-motivational-seminar-for-the-vaticans-top-brass/16119>



## For real change, we must get at four roots deeper than church structures

Joan Chittister

**I**n the midst of the angst that has accompanied the revelation of unparalleled amounts of sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church, the cry for reform gets louder by the day.

For some, it's a call for the elimination of celibacy as an unnatural and, therefore, impossible way of life. For others, it's about barring homosexuals from the priesthood, as if homosexuality was in essence a model of immorality rather than simply another state of nature—just like heterosexuality with its own immoral aberrations. For many, it's about a lack of psychosocial development in seminaries; for others, it's about the liberalisation of the church since the Second Vatican Council, no matter that the bulk of assaults happened, apparently, before the end of the council.

Indeed, there are as many explanations for this crisis in morals, spirituality, church and trust as there are people, dioceses, parents, priests, lawyers, whomever. But there is one element on which everyone seems to agree: There must be repentance. There must be accountability. There must be reform.

Good. And that looks like what?

Most of the cries for reform also call for reform of structures. The great consensus seems to cluster around issues of how and to whom victims may register complaints. The questions are endless: Who will create the sex abuse committees? Who will appoint the commissions? Who will be on these boards, in these official offices, as official officers? Lay people as well as clerical? And how much of the work of these committees will be shared with the

public? Most of all, who will hold the final authority to judge these cases: the chairperson of the group, the bishop of the diocese, a Curia in Rome, a papal tribunal, the pope—as Pope Benedict XVI declared that he himself would do—or a jury of peers?

Well, whatever the answer to those legal technicalities, I agree that some reform of structure is essential. The damage done by the pontifical secret and its notion that ecclesiastical scandals should be kept hidden rather than exposed is now embarrassingly clear. A change of structures is obviously imperative.

At the same time, I do not agree that a change of structures alone will really change anything much at all. Not in a church whose theology of exclusive papal authority comes from Pope Gelasius in the fifth century. On the contrary. We are going to need a great deal more than structures. As Pope Francis himself said to the Chilean bishops, 'It would be a serious omission on our part, not to delve into the roots ... the dynamics that made it possible for such attitudes and evils to occur.'

The fact is that structures validate process. But process guarantees nothing but adherence to the values, the ideals and—in a church—whatever theology underpins them. It's the theology that counts.

Structures have been used to validate evil forever. As in the present. Nothing that canonical courts dealt with would deal adequately with the evil of child abuse while it was bishops themselves, in concert with Rome, who provided the secrecy that would maintain the problem. In the name of holy secrecy, bishops and their lawyers could intimidate the complainers with confidentiality agreements, label the children themselves liars and so embed the guilt in the wrong place, and keep the church free from scandal for, of course, 'the good of the faithful'.

Indeed, we must 'delve into the roots' of it. Of which, I think, there are at least four.

Francis is painfully clear about one such root of it—the scourge of clericalism that creates a caste system in Catholic Christianity.

Clerics make up less than one percent of the church. But clericalism makes its clerics superior to the rest of the church in power, the presumption of holiness, absolute parochial authority and as the keepers of accountability. It moves clerics light years away from the Jesus who 'did not see being equal to God a thing to be clung to'. It moves the rest of us to talk about being 'the people of God'—as if we

knew we were—but then fail to call the clerical church to public discussion of great theological ‘truths.’

What Francis’ statement fails to unmask, however, is the second issue that must be addressed: The fact is that clericalism touched more than the clergy. It was Catholic police, lawyers, staff, even parents who shielded pedophiles by refusing to make complaints, listen to children, or rip away the secrecy that shielded them. It says that the theology of the church itself must be re-taught. It says that the rest of the church itself must grow up to be equal to the Christianisation of the church itself.

A third dimension of the problem is certainly the theology of obedience that derives, of course, from our definition of church and the role of the clergy, but affects the personal lives of Catholics in a particularly insidious way. It turns obedience in the

church—a commitment to ‘listening to the Spirit’—into blind obedience, a kind of military code attached to a series of clerical commanding officers.

As a result, 100 percent of the decisions, the discernment and the moral perspectives of the laity are simply ignored. National conferences of bishops, dioceses and parish priests—the clerical one percent of the church—all stumble along laying down laws developed by few but heralded by the clergy alone.

Pope Paul VI toyed with the notion of clergy/lay consultation on the birth control question—certainly a question for the sacrament of marriage if ever I saw one. But, as the song says, *‘When will they ever learn?’*

JOAN CHITTISTER is a Benedictine sister of Erie, Pennsylvania.  
This article was published on 20 September 2018

## A meeting with Joan

**S**ister Joan Chittister is currently in Australia and spoke to a large gathering in Sydney on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May.

A few days before this, I had the privilege of having a conversation with her regarding her above article. Her concluding statement that ‘real reform depends on the teachings of the church. Not simply on a change of structures’ struck a chord with me and reflects the emphasis that ARC has had since its inception.

I asked her how we could expect the next well-educated generations to respond to the Church when so much of what we are expected to believe has no relevance for them. We reflected on how Jesus did not claim to be God, did not set up any church, and proposed no doctrines of belief. He simply outlined how we should live by word and action. ‘We are at one in this understanding’ she said.

I said that ARC attempts to help its members to develop a mature spirituality and advocates changes in church teaching that will enable that. Sr Joan strongly endorsed the perspective that we have taken since we began 22 years ago.

*John Buggy*

## The wisdom of Joan

- ◇ Darkness deserves gratitude. It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand that all growth does not take place in the sunlight.
- ◇ Spirituality without a prayer life is no spirituality at all, and it will not last beyond the first defeats. Prayer is an opening of the self so that the Word of God can break in and make us new. Prayer unmasks. Prayer converts. Prayer impels. Prayer sustains us on the way. Pray for the grace it will take to continue what you would like to quit.
- ◇ Prayer is an opening of the self so that the Word of God can break in and make us new. Prayer unmasks. Prayer converts. Prayer impels. Prayer sustains us on the way. Pray for the grace it will take to continue what you would like to quit.
- ◇ Beware the religion that turns you against another one. It’s unlikely that it’s really religion at all.
- ◇ Our role in life is to bring the light of our own souls to the dim places around us.
- ◇ The time is now. The time is for reflection on what we’ve lost in life, yes, but for what we have left in life too. It’s time to begin to live life fuller rather than faster.
- ◇ What happens to the spiritual life of a young girl who is made to understand, consciously or subconsciously, that she has no place in the spiritual domain except as a consumer of someone else’s God?

# Liberation Theology

## Fifty years on Duncan MacLaren

**O**pen House will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of liberation theology with a conference in February to mark the publication of *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez in 1971, published in English in 1972. In fact, another leading liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, wrote that Gustavo's book was 'a kind of baptism, but the baby had already grown old'.<sup>1</sup> The real beginning had occurred at least ten years earlier (and therefore before the Second Vatican Council) in theological faculties in Latin American universities where lecturers and students, through their accompaniment of the poor, began to unmask the ideologies used by both governments and churches to make excuses for the dehumanising poverty of most of their populations.

Liberation theology is in brief a theology of the irruption (or 'breaking-in') of the poor into the church and into their own reality of a poverty based on structural causes emitting from those who oppress them. To analyse this, there emerged a new way of reading the Bible, especially those parts that dealt with liberation such as the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament or the Acts of the Apostles in the New. The poor read and discussed these stories from the perspective of their own poverty to discern how they could transform their reality into a fairer, more equitable and dignity-filled existence.

The new basic ecclesial communities became, in Leonardo Boff's phrase, an *ecclesio genesis*, a new way of being and understanding Church. Boff states that the members of the base communities 'seek to live the essence of the Christian message: the universal parenthood of God, communion with all human beings, the following of Jesus Christ who died and rose again, the celebration of the resurrection and the Eucharist, and the up-building of the Kingdom of God, already underway in history as the liberation of the whole human being and all human beings'.<sup>2</sup> The people discovered that there was a phenomenon of social sin which became part of the structure of a society and from which they had to be liberated.

From Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationalist, the people learned about critical consciousness or conscientisation which is 'a process in which people are encouraged to analyse their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation'.<sup>3</sup> Freire encourages them to become participatory subjects – 'transformers of the world' – rather than objects of pity or

oppression.<sup>4</sup> This is his brief dip into the genesis of liberation theology.

I leave the last word to the Boff brothers who were both Brazilian liberationist priests, Leonardo, a Franciscan (though now a married layman) and Clodovis, a Servite. They talk about how liberation theology builds up 'new syntheses of faith' and gives practical answers to the 'great challenges of the times', ending paragraphs on 'The Creative Task of Theology' with these words:

By creatively bringing out or deducing the liberating content of faith, liberation theology seeks to produce a new codification of the Christian mystery, thereby helping the church to carry out its mission of liberative evangelisation in history.<sup>5</sup>

### Critics of liberation theology

**O**ne image that always remains with me of Pope John Paul II is his arrival in Nicaragua in 1983 and castigating, in the full glare of global publicity, the saintly priest-politician Ernesto Cardenal who had gone down on one knee to kiss the pontiff's ring. Instead of allowing this, the Pope lifted his finger like an old dominie and wagged it at the gentle priest, saying he should 'regularise' his situation, that is he should leave the Sandinista Government which at that time was genuinely trying to lift the poor out of poverty. Later that year, the Pope suspended his priesthood and this remained in place until Pope Francis lifted the ban in 2019. Ernesto died at the age of 95 in 2020.

That was how bitter Pope John Paul's opposition was to liberation theology which he understood to be too influenced by the Marxism he had grown up with in Communist Poland and too close to treating the Church as a secular political institution which had replaced redemption from sin with the achievement of social justice.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who, as Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, had been Prefect of the formerly termed Holy Office and author of the 'Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation', is famed for stating that all theology is liberating. His idea of a liberating theology was that, firstly, the supernatural realm was the most real level of existence; second, that individual transformation comes before social transformation; and thirdly, the Church should not dictate political solutions but increase a desire to know and love God among the poor.

Both popes undermined liberation theology and sanctioned even 'liberationist' priests in good standing with the Church such as Jon Sobrino SJ and Gustavo Gutiérrez OP, who left the diocesan priesthood to become a Dominican. They have all been reinstated, and all barriers have been removed to make one of the greatest martyrs of the option for the poor, Archbishop Oscar Romero, a saint, thanks to the pontificate of Pope Francis.

Sadly, many novices in religious orders for both men and women and seminarians throughout the world have also turned their backs on liberation theology and justice and peace as a central tenet of the faith. They prefer a more domesticated faith where piety is cherished and the poor are treated in an ‘assistentialist’ way which Freire refers to as ‘a term used in Latin America to describe policies of financial or social ‘assistance’ which attack symptoms, but not causes, of social ills. It has overtones of paternalism, dependency and a ‘hand-out’ approach. It contrasts with *promocionalismo* which, on the contrary, ‘promotes people to a state of vigorous self-capacity to solve their own problems’.<sup>5</sup>

I can understand a reaction to those liberationist priests who took up arms against oppressive forces but cannot fathom why Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who both wrote passionately about the rights of the poor, could not get over their prejudices and see liberation theology and its progeny such as black theology, political theology and Minjung theology from the experience of the Korean marginalised as a new revelation of the faith. Fr David Tracy, an eminent, ‘orthodox’ American theologian wrote that Christian theology is ‘a discipline that attempts to correlate the meaning and truth of the Christian faith...with the meaning and truth of our contemporary experience’. Following Christ, one of the most important parts of that contemporary experience is the continued existence of a poverty which disfigures the lives of millions of poor people globally and which diminishes those who cause it.<sup>6</sup>

### **Liberation theology in action**

One of the first programs with a liberation theological flavour that I remember when I was with SCIAF was an offshoot of the ‘Training for Transformation’ program designed by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. The Africa-based authors admitted it was influenced by Latin American liberation theologians that ‘kept alive the hope and conviction that transformation is possible, that the way things are is not the only way that they can be’.<sup>7</sup>

SCIAF had a partnership with the diocese of Masaka in Kenya and the Bishop had asked us to design a programme which could change the lives of a group of women who had resorted to selling their bodies to survive. Having no skills, the women took to a lifestyle which they all abhorred.

Based on training for transformation methodologies, the women were given rice for the days of the program so that they could feed their children. They were trained by the local facilitators how to come to their own solutions to escape from their dilemma. SCIAF then supplied the seed money to establish a cooperative to buy a piece of land so that they could

grow vegetables and sell them in the market. Profits were shared and confidence in their own abilities increased.

The late Bishop John Mone and I went to a ceremony in the village to celebrate the success of the program. One woman came up to me and told me, ‘It is wonderful that I can afford to feed my children and send them to school. But the greatest thing for me is that I can hold my head high in church’. Her self-esteem had been restored and she had been transformed.

I remember also my SCIAF colleague, John Dorman, and myself going to Haiti to talk to the people working in a radio station established by Caritas Haiti and supported by SCIAF. It didn’t just give the news but truthful news about what the government was doing in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. In a place where many were illiterate, the radio station broadcast programs to help people read and write but also raised their awareness of the injustices foisted on them by a corrupt government. Unsurprisingly, they were violently shut down by the Government for speaking truth to power.

I remember well the programs to empower Catholic women in Eastern Africa and in Oceania by urging them to discuss the stories of strong women in the Bible such as Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Ruth, Esther, Judith and Susannah and to reflect on how Jesus as a man and rabbi related to women in a very different way from the patriarchy and toxic masculinity which they had experienced in their own lives.

In Cambodia, for Caritas Australia, I researched similar programs to empower women, and soon they were being elected as convenors of the self-help groups established to transform their villages economically and socially. In this Buddhist society, both men and women had become more human towards one another and had become transformed.

### **Integral Human Development: the new name for liberation theology?**

Pope Francis changed the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in 2016. He added dicasteries on refugees and migrants, health care, charitable works and the care of creation. His aim in the *Motu Proprio* setting up the new entity was to ‘promote the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel. This development takes place by attending to the inestimable goods of justice, peace and the care of creation’.

The teaching of Pope Francis on Integral Human Development contains the seeds of liberation theology. There is a focus on the poorest people in our world, those who are discarded like pieces of rubbish; an

integrated approach to human development, dealing with the material and the sacred in all humans; a stress on the participation of the poor in society and that they should be dignified agents of their own destiny; a challenge to neoliberal capitalism which he calls an economy which kills in *Evangelii Gaudium*; a stress on the 'option for the poor' without the word 'preferential' inserted by Pope John Paul II to remove any perceived Marxist element. For Francis, integral development is focused on the human, on other creatures and on our 'bonnie broukit bairn', as Hugh MacDiarmid called the earth. This integrated teaching is, says Pope Francis, 'the path of good that the human family is called to travel'. And that path is paved with a theology which is liberative and which had its glittering birth in Latin America.<sup>8</sup>

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2019 for his thesis on *A Hermeneutic of Integral Human Development: Bridging the Gap between Magisterial Theory and Catholic Agency Praxis*. He is one of the speakers at the Open House conference on liberation theology which will be held in February.

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## Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church: the Italian exception

Isabelle de Gaulmyn

Bishops in Italy examine the issue of clergy sexual abuse

An independent body to look into sexual abuse; listening to victims; compensation; and a historical and sociological study. These are among the demands that victims of clergy sex abuse are making to the Catholic Church in Italy. They are supported by a shocking book, co-authored by the historian Lucetta Scaraffia (*Agnus Dei. Gli abusi sessuali del clero in Italia*).

The demands are reminiscent of the courageous methods that bishops in France adopted when they established the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE) under the direction of Jean-Marc Sauvé. Except that, so far, the Italian Church has been resistant to dealing with matters of sexual abuse. After initially claiming that it was not an issue in their country, the bishops are now saying that they can deal with it on their own and without external intervention, especially from the justice system.

The Italian Church still has the means to oppose the growing pressure to put an end to this culture of abuse that is in its midst. The influence of religion is still important in the country—despite the fact that Sunday Mass attendance is plummeting. Above all, the Italian Church is one of the richest in the world, thanks to a particularly advantageous tax-financed system that allows it to defend itself and buy the silence of victims in a country where pedocriminality remains taboo. For the Italian prelates, the Sauvé method is a red rag. Still influential in the Roman Curia, they did everything possible to ensure that the members of the French commission were kept from meeting Pope Francis.

But Italian public opinion is changing. And the Church will not be able to ignore it for long, at the risk of losing all credibility. The pope has a role here. As Bishop of Rome, he appoints the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI). His willingness to deal seriously with sex abuse in the Church will also be judged by the way he handles the Italian situation.

Read more at:

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/editorials/sexual-abuse-in-the-catholic-church-the-italian-exception/16132>

ISABELLE de GAULMYN is a senior editor at *La Croix* and a former Vatican correspondent

# ‘Of Blessed Memory’

## Detrimental influence of Tradition in the Catholic Church

Alan Clague

The Catholic Church takes pride in its traditions, and traces its origin to Christ himself and the apostles. It traces the source of papal infallibility to the gospel report of Jesus conferring authority on Peter, and the handing on of that authority to the Bishop of Rome. However, the road from Peter to Francis has not been smooth. New ‘traditions’ have been developed in response to perceived needs at the time, and some old ones have been discarded when considered to be inappropriate for the time. Papal encyclicals are a relatively recent innovation, having been formally commenced by Pope Benedict XIV in 1740. One common feature of recent encyclicals is the frequent reference to statements made by previous Popes, describing the pope as being ‘of blessed memory’. These statements typically reinforce a point being made in the current encyclical, and at the same time reinforce the impression of timeless continuity of thought within Church governance. Popes do not contradict other Popes in encyclicals.

There are glaring anomalies in contemporary traditions. Some are old but do not originate with the apostles and Paul. Obligatory celibacy for priests is only about one thousand years old, and was introduced in an attempt to prevent priests stealing Church property for their families—arguably necessary for those times. Today, the Church in most places is dangerously short of priests, yet Church authorities are unwilling to return to the earlier tradition of an optionally married priesthood. An exclusively male priesthood is also very old, but Paul’s Church undoubtedly had female leaders, some of whom Paul identifies by name. However, within 40 years of Paul’s death, patriarchal Church leaders (writing in the pastoral epistles to which they attached the dead Paul’s name) were clearly trying to suppress this situation. This became the tradition of the Catholic Church. Today’s leaders are refusing to consider overturning a long history of male priesthood by returning to the original Pauline state.

Another problem with tradition is its role in the Church’s official teaching on birth control. The use of abortion as a birth control method has been

unambiguously condemned by the Church throughout the ages. Prevention of conception, although condemned by such people as St Augustine, was not a major problem until relatively recently. It was not mentioned in *Arcanum*, Leo XIII’s 1880 encyclical on marriage, but the forbidding of contraception comprised a major section of Pius XI’s 1930 encyclical, *Casti Connubi*. He stated ‘The conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children. Those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.’ This was written at a time when Europe was concerned with under-population as a result of World War I and the 1919 influenza epidemic. The text was actually drafted by a Belgian Jesuit, Father Vermeersch, and Belgium was severely affected by under-population. It was also written at a time of controversy regarding the role of eugenics in society. Vigorous eugenic programs, sterilising people considered socially undesirable, such as the mentally retarded, had been instituted in a number of Christian countries, and was even supported by some Christian groups. The Catholic Church was vehemently opposed to eugenic sterilisation. The comments would have been considered by many appropriate for the times in order to conserve traditional Christian values. Other sections of the encyclical also may have not caused concern at the time, but now would seem grossly inappropriate. He claimed that original sin is passed on to posterity through ‘the natural process of generating life’. He stated ‘the man is ruler of the family’, ‘divorce is a result of giving in to unbridled passions’. The woman owes the man ‘honourable and trusting obedience’. It is wrong for a married woman to achieve ‘social, economic and physiological emancipation’. It would be unlikely to see such explicit pronouncements in an encyclical today.

We do not know how much influence *Casti Connubi* had on Pope Paul VI’s decision to forbid the use of oral contraceptives in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* released in 1968. The majority report of Pope John XXIII’s pontifical Commission on Population, Family and Birth which was leaked to the press in 1967 stated that birth regulation by artificial means might in certain circumstances be acceptable. The ultra-conservative Cardinal Ottaviani then stated that to issue an encyclical based on the majority report, which contradicted *Casti Connubi*, would undermine the doctrinal authority of the magisterium and seriously endanger the confidence of the faithful.

Considerable conservative lobbying occurred in the ensuing months, culminating in an encyclical, drafted by Ottaviani's group, which rejected the Commission's findings and forbade artificial contraception.

The role of papal encyclicals and tradition followed a different path in defining the role of conscience. The right to follow an informed conscience was accepted throughout Church history. However, in 1832 Pope Gregory XVI released the encyclical *Mirari Vos* in which he condemned 'religious indifferentism'—the belief that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everybody. This was reiterated in 1864 by Pope Pius IX in the encyclical *Quanta Cura* in which he denied that liberty of conscience and worship is each man's personal right. Vatican II reasserted the right to freedom of conscience. This nineteenth century aberration can perhaps be attributed to the turbulent times in Italy, with the loss of a great deal of the Church's temporal power. These episodes do, however, illustrate that acceptance of the pronouncements of an encyclical is not obligatory.

There are sound reasons for the Church to relax its insistence on an exclusively male celibate priesthood and allow the use of artificial contraceptives. The conservative influence of tradition, and the reluctance of conservative Church leaders to abandon traditions that are significantly damaging the Church today in Australia and elsewhere must be targets of reform to prevent further damage to our Church.

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of the ARC Secretariat  
and a long-time contributor to *ARCVoice*

New book:

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### *Hard Questions Born of Love:*

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**D**uring the 2021 lockdowns I wrote this little poem as a reflection on the downsides and the upsides of the experience. For me one of the upsides was the opportunity for more quiet time, less stimulation, fewer distractions.

*Michael Sibert*

## In praise of quiet time

In the stillness that hears no sound  
My soul rests  
Quietly awaiting deepest voice  
I sit

Easy breath  
bird song punctuation  
whisper in the breeze  
I move aside

Inner warmth  
Light spawns within darkness  
Acceptance placates agitation  
I sit, hand in hand, reposed

Divine light  
grace filled intuition  
blessed synchronicity  
I await

Busy agenda  
shelved for now  
in tandem I seek to walk  
come, it's time we go.

### **Prayer ...**

May this day be blessed  
by moments of quietness,  
by light in moments of darkness,  
by peace in the thought ... of a  
higher order connection  
that grace, joy and gladness, bind  
and bless our collective endeavours.  
Amen.

# Kindness

Margaret Knowlden

**H**as the Catholic Church always been kind? We can think of the brutality of the Crusades and Inquisitions, the terror of the confessional, as well as harangues from the pulpit about hell fire and damnation, lectures on the evils of contraception or berating late-comers to Mass. Catholicism, despite the advances proposed by Vatican II, has often been less than kind. Why else has ‘Catholic Guilt’ flourished as a familiar state of mind? Even today, its moralistic attitude towards the gay community or those who are divorced and remarried is unkind and unsympathetic. While the Church’s handling of the sexual abuse scandals has shown more reaction to protect its reputation and resources than compassion towards the victims.

But it didn’t have to be like this. The Late Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, in his recently posthumously-published book *Towards the End of My Day*, relates how, as a student, he had the privilege of attending the Second Vatican Council. He wrote:

There was a powerful change in the *style* of the council. Until then all councils were legislative bodies, they made laws. Their canons consisted largely of words of threat and of intimidation, of surveillance and punishment, words of a superior speaking to an inferior. They consisted of power words, the most powerful and constant being ‘let him be anathema’. The Second Vatican Council preferred a pastoral tone. It used equality words such as people of God, collegiality, co-operation, partnership, dialogue, conversation. It used humility words such as pilgrim and servant. It used words expressing change, such as progress, development and evolution. It used interiority words such as charism, conscience and the call to holiness. In this language is to be found much of ‘the spirit of the Council’, that overriding vision that transcends the particulars of the documents.

In this there was a profound paradigm shift. A church of decrees is resistant to the changes and chances of history, and the risk of relativism is considered necessary in order to counter the far greater risk of irrelevance.

Fortunately, even those of us who grew up Catholic

before the sixties, most have been able to shake off the accretions of the past and can appreciate the generally less-judgmental attitude which prevails today. When did we last hear the times for Confession? Acts of kindness become more important than compulsory attendance at Sunday Mass and ‘mortal sin’ is rarely mentioned. Social justice has, it would seem, become more important than Church dogmas.

Hugh Mackay, in his recent book, *The Kindness Revolution* (sub-titled: *How we can restore hope, rebuild trust and inspire optimism*) provides an excellent blueprint for living (without any religion).

What should we do with the knowledge that we grow through pain; that having to adapt to change is good for the brain; that ‘grey matter works better under grey skies’; or that complications, disruptions and uncertainties can enrich our own experience of life and draw us closer to others?

**Accept that you can’t control life’s seasons**, or most of the other things going on around you, and many of the things that happen to you. But there are some things you can control, and they are mainly within you. In his very mid-Victorian poem ‘Invictus’, W.E. Henley wrote: ‘I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.’ He was only half right. He was not the master of his fate, and nor are you of yours, but you are the captain of your soul. In other words, we can control our response to what happens to us; how we deal with it; what we learn from it.

**Stop wishing for things to stay the same.** They never do. Life’s an evolution: embrace the process. The impermanence of life’s loveliest moments is one of the reasons they bring us such pleasure.

**Stop wishing for things to be different.** Give the cycle time to turn.

**Above all, remember that your own struggles are part of the human struggle**, shared by everyone you meet. Everyone is in need of kindness, because everyone walks with shadows – the bereaved with their grief, the arrogant with their deep-down insecurities, the believers with their doubts, the lonely with their ache for connection, the uncherished with their fear of insignificance, the ambitious with their vulnerability to failure, the siblings with their rivalry, the bullies with their repressed self-loathing, the errant with their guilt, the anxious and depressed with their dark yearnings . . . and all those living with the pain of disappointment, frustration, humiliation, rejection

or loss. Kindness is the universal balm for troubled souls, the gift that says, 'I understand the need for kindness, because I share it'.

Given how little control we have over life's vicissitudes, it's a wonderful thing to realise that, in the words of Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century English lexicographer, biographer and poet: 'Kindness is in our power, even when fondness is not.' **In other words, we don't have to like someone to show kindness towards them.**

To be kind – always and to everyone – is to be fully, gloriously human, and who wants their humanity diminished by mean-spiritedness? A smile, a wave, an offer of help, a word of encouragement or reassurance ... every act of kindness is therapeutic and potentially transformative, and one more step towards a better society.

And if sometimes, in exceptional circumstances, we can't muster the emotional strength or the courage to be kind ... well, that failing is human enough, but it's still a failing, a falling short. Our *capacity* for kindness never leaves us.

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson devoted a whole chapter in his book to the topic of 'The Seeking of Goodness'. He identifies innocently inherited habits of thinking and acting that we later came to realise were morally wrong. Unjust attitudes that we may have innocently inherited:

- \* men towards women
- \* 'white' people towards people of a different 'colour'
- \* Christian towards Jews and Muslims
- \* People born in a country towards immigrant peoples
- \* People of richer countries towards those of poorer countries
- \* People of today towards people of the past (through a sense of pride and superiority)
- \* People of today towards people of the future (through destruction of the environment)

*Conscience is the individual's most secret core and sanctuary. There each person is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his or her depths.'*

## But What About Prayer?

Not as in the old days I pray,  
 God. My life is not what it was . . .  
 Once I would have asked for healing  
 I go now to be doctored,  
 I would have knelt long, wrestling with you  
 Wearing you down. Hear my prayer;  
 Lord hear my prayer.  
 As though you were deaf,  
 myriads of mortals have kept up their shrill  
 cry, explaining your stillness by  
 their unfitness.

It begins to appear this is not what prayer is  
 about.

It is the annihilation of differences,  
 the conscious of myself in you,  
 of you in me; the emerging  
 from the adolescence of nature  
 into the adult geometry  
 of the mind . . . .  
 Circular as our way is,  
 it leads not back to that snake-haunted  
 garden. But onward to the tall city  
 of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit.

R.S. Thomas  
*Twentieth-century Welsh poet*  
 (quoted in Spong *A new Christianity for a New World*)

## ARCVoice—Twenty years on ...



In March 2002, I edited the third Edition of *ARCVoice* ... and 75 issues and twenty years later I am still here. It is a role which gives me enormous 'job satisfaction' as well as occupation during my 'retirement'. I like to think that 'someone' is guiding my selection of appropriate articles.

The question is: How much Reform has been achieved since the early dreams of the three pioneers – Barbara Campbell, Jim Taverne and Ted Lambert – who founded Australian Reforming Catholics? The welcoming words from the Interim Committee in the first edition in October 2001 are worth revisiting. See: [www.e-arc.org](http://www.e-arc.org)

It is sobering to reflect on whether the Committee's early ambitions for ARC have been realised. Apart from the regular quarterly production of *ARCVoice*, several ARC meetings and conferences were organised over the years with impressive speakers. These proved excellent opportunities for members to network with like-minded people. However, they also brought ARC to the notice of the authorities when Cardinal George Pell interfered, twice, in the choice of venues and with threats of contract termination to two proposed speakers, both priests.

The suggestions in that first issue of *ARCVoice* for Roving Ambassadors, Regional Groups and a Panel of Experts seemed good ideas at the time. But more resources, including paid staff, would have been needed to bring them to fruition. Although she eventually became reasonably computer-literate, Barbara's initial 'equipment' consisted of a telephone and manual typewriter!

Perhaps Members could let us know how ARC has influenced their thinking about Catholicism over the past twenty years.

*Margaret Knowlden*  
*Editor*

## Out of the mouths of babes ...

Children at a Catholic elementary school have given some unorthodox answers to Bible questions. Among them were:

- ◆ St Paul preached holy acrimony which is another name for marriage.
- ◆ Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the apostles.
- ◆ The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- ◆ The seventh commandment is you shall not admit adultery.
- ◆ The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
- ◆ Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- ◆ The epistles were wives of the apostles.
- ◆ Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

*The Tablet* 16.2.2002

### Have your say!

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

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of ARC

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