



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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Editorial

Australia's 5th Plenary Council ended on 9th July 2022 with a final gathering in Sydney. This was the culmination of four years of work, beginning at the Parish level when parishioners were asked to give their opinions on what are the main issues facing our Church today. Submissions for change were made by 200,000 people. Perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the Council was that it demonstrated that bishops, priests, religious and lay people can meet and hear what each other has to say.

There was a two-thirds consensus reached on a variety of motions. Amongst those agreed on were several acknowledging the place and contribution of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people in the life and liturgy of the Church and their place in the life of the nation. Discussions on liturgy resulted in a motion calling for a new English translation of the Roman Missal to replace the controversial version overseen by Cardinal Pell in 2011. Another was a request that Pope Francis allow greater use of the Third Rite of Confession.

Amongst the decrees agreed on by the Assembly were: apologising for the harm done by the Church to victims and survivors of abuse and to marginalised groups such as indigenous people and LGBTIQ Catholics; a call for a greater role for lay people in governance; and recognising a sacred duty to protect the environment. All of these were passed with the two-thirds consensus needed. It was only when the motions referring to the disconnect between roles held by women in civic and community life and those held in the Church that deeply entrenched differences surfaced. The majority of bishops voted down all motions dealing with equality and dignity for women.

When so much that was positive had emerged from the Council, it was an extremely damaging decision. The aim of the drafters of the motions was to reflect the concerns of Church members who, over the last four years, had expressed views on the need to enhance the roles of women in the Church. It was an issue that had been at the forefront of discussions. After dozens of members, including some bishops, refused to resume their seats for the next session, the motion was re-drafted and passed, but the damage was done.

Predictably, the reaction of some commentators in the media was that of scorn for those who look for change, describing it as 'Woke politics' and stating that the bishops who passed the revised motion did so because they were 'traumatised' by their 'public pillorying'. Perhaps, instead, these writers might consider that the help of the Holy Spirit was often invoked during the Council. Two of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom and Understanding and just, maybe, the Holy Spirit was responding to this call for counsel. The question now is how the implementation will occur since the decrees, if approved, do not appear to require legislation to be put into practice.

Noelene Uren

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial .. 1

Letters ... 2

Maureen Ryan (contributor): *Radical Inclusivity* ... 2

Submission to the Vatican ... 3

John Buggy: *'Upon this Rock'*... 4

Joan Chittister: *The cosmic God is a surety* ... 5

Noelene Uren: *Letter to my Grandson* ... 5

Peter Vardy: *Philosophy, Faith and Truth* ... 6-7

Alan Clague: *Tidying up 'Pauline' Epistles* ... 8

ARC Secretariat: *Appraisal of the Plenary Council* ... 9

Margaret Knowlden ... *The Opus Dei Connection?* .. 10

National Catholic Reporter Editorial Staff: *Criteria for choosing bishops can go one step further* ... 10-11

International.la-Croix: *Pope 'fervently' wants 'accompaniment' for remarried divorcees* ... 11

Claire Maguire: *Lighting the Way* ... 12-13

Wendy Rowe: REVIEW: *Birth of a Dancing Star: A Memoir by Sr. Iliia Delio* ... 14

John Crothers: (song) *Rows of Men* ... 14

Denis Nickle et al, *A New Habit of Mind* ... 15

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

Letter to the Editor

A special Thank-You for your twenty years of Editorship. I am, and have been for some time, in awe at your quality work and editorial resilience. My experience over the years has moved from nervousness about the 'out-there' ideas into full confidence that the message is from the Holy Spirit. For this I thank you.

Gerald Stack
Shenton Park WA

Dear John Buggy,

I'm slightly confused by the conversation you had with Sr. Joan which you wrote about in the last *ARCVoice*. You said that both she and you agree that 'Jesus did not set up any church'. Didn't he say to Peter 'thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church'. That's one of the few bits of the Bible which sticks in my memory.

(Writer prefers to remain anonymous—See reply P.4)

Catholic women want to be at the decision table

(Letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* – 11.7.22)

The bishops of the Australian Catholic Church have declined the chance to make women deacons. However, deaconships are not what women want.

We want a place where decisions are made. We want women cardinals. In the history of the Catholic Church, cardinals have been appointed who were not ordained priests. This could happen again if the old men who are presently the decision-makers acknowledged the fact that half the numbers in the church are women who refuse any longer to be cooks, cleaners and flower-arrangers.

If this generation of women continues to leave, there will be no generation of members of the Catholic Church. Wake up, bishops.

Barbara Fahey
Grafton

Radical Inclusivity

Contributed by **Maureen Ryan**

On 30th July 2022, Parramatta Diocese launched the Statement of the Parramatta Diocesan Pastoral Council '**Radical Inclusivity**'. This ground-breaking document endorses the Catholic Community's responsibility to welcome our sisters and brothers who have previously been excluded or alienated.

'Radical Inclusivity' is published with the same spirit of welcome already extended by Pope Francis. In Chapter 8 of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis says, '**Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church...**' (Chapter 8, 299).

Following both Pope Francis' entreaty and the instructions contained in 'Radical Inclusivity', we are now challenged to find ways to be the welcoming community to our alienated sisters and brothers. These sisters and brothers who are estranged through sexuality, contraception, divorce and remarriage and other issues need our welcome and inclusion.

We ask, '**How can we, the local Catholic Church, be the welcoming community?**'

- ◆ We could provide **education on the teaching about Primacy of Conscience**. In the Vatican II decree 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' (*Gaudium et Spes*) pre-eminence of a human's God-given, personal conscience holds sway over any other law or religious norm (Part 1, Chapter 1, Paragraph 16-17). This education could be included in the adult education component of Sacramental preparation, especially Baptism preparation.
- ◆ We could publicise this inclusivity through our bulletins, school newsletters and homilies.

Radical Inclusivity is a challenge and encouragement for us all. It is the encouragement of the welcoming love of God that Jesus modelled for us all in the Gospels. You can read the statement by going to www.e-arc.org and clicking on 'Notice Board'. It is at the top of the page.

Submission to the Vatican

This is the submission to the Synod of Synodality of one group of ARC members who have sent it directly to Sr. Nathalie Becquart at the Vatican in response to the invitation of Pope Francis.

CLERICALISM – the basis of many problems. An educated laity needs no oversight by a priest. He does not “own” the parish, nor have the right or competence to judge individual conscience (example – contraception).

GOVERNANCE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP. Elected Pastoral Councils should not be at the whim of the priest. Councils need a role in decision-making in matters that concern the parish and the diocese. Need for Parish AGM providing **TRANSPARENCY.**

INVOLVEMENT OF THE LAITY. A world-wide shortage of priests and still the role of the laity is ignored. Surely, lay people can perform Baptisms, facilitate marriages and conduct funeral services as well as performing leadership roles in all aspects of parish life.

MARRIED CLERGY. Essential to connect priests to *real life*. Links to the issue of **Sexual Abuse.** History tells us that a common reaction of some clergy has been to ‘*protect*’ their friendship group.

ROLE OF WOMEN – Women’s skills and knowledge are ignored. Women are *allowed* to take part in some part of church life (example – lector), but are not allowed an opinion – so many wasted opportunities, so much wasted talent.

EQUALITY FOR ALL – Divorced, LGBTQI should be **INCLUDED** in **ALL** aspects of church life.

DECLINING ATTENDANCE. The English translation of the Mass is awkward and clumsy. Older people remain out of lifetime habit. Younger people find no real relevance to their lives. **YOUTH** find attendance ‘boring’ – dreary irrelevant sermons and dreary music (if any) – no connection to their lives. Sense of community of the past has disappeared.

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND DOGMA. Early theologians philosophised about the meaning of the Sacred Texts and interpreted them in the context of their **times** and their **experience**. It is absurd that these ideas of **men** from early times be turned into **Dogma** governing life at this time in this place. Make our theology relevant to the educated, science-oriented people of the 21st century.

Briefly – We need/we want INCLUSION, TRANSPARENCY, EQUALITY, RELEVANCE.

Ineke Nieuwland, Robyn Stewart, Carolyn Marr, Nance Cale, Janice Prior,
Robyn Wienholt, Annette Smith

‘Upon This Rock’

John Buggy

A letter to the editor in this issue asks a question about the conversation that I had recently with Sister Joan Chittister that I reported in the previous issue of Arcvoice. The writer expressed surprise that both Sister Joan and I agreed that Jesus did not establish a church when it is recorded in Matthew 16:18 “you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church”.

Traditionally, the Catholic Church has interpreted the ‘rock’ in relation to Saint Peter as the first Pope and the beginning of the apostolic succession. It is often used to argue that the Catholic Church is destined to endure as the one true church. Over the centuries this has fitted in nicely with the attitude of triumphalism that has often been expressed to overcome attempts to deviate from Church doctrine.

Let us look at the meaning behind the words and the context in which they are expressed. The Gospel of Matthew, originally written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, was translated into Greek and we now read it in English. The Greek word that has been translated as ‘church’ is ‘ekklesia’ which means ‘an assembly called together’. An ‘ekklesia’ is a simple community, not an institution that we tend to equate with the huge hierarchical structure that is the Catholic Church today. The word ‘ekklesia’ is only used here at Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 and does not appear in any of the other gospels. According to the renowned Catholic scripture scholar Raymond E.

Brown, it is highly doubtful that Jesus himself used the word. Many protestant scholars agree with him and some do not even consider that the statements around Matthew 16:18 were spoken by Jesus.

So, who is the foundation of this community? To answer this, one has to read the other parts of Matthew’s gospel as well and not just concentrate on this one. While Jesus names Peter with a word meaning ‘rock’, that is, ‘Cephas’ in Aramaic and ‘Petros’ in Greek, the imagery of a rock on which his believing community is built is expressed differently. At 7:24, Matthew reports Jesus as saying: “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock”. Jesus’ magnificent teaching (the Beatitudes) has just been outlined earlier in the gospel beginning from 5:3. And throughout the New Testament it is Jesus who is referred to as the foundation stone. Jesus is the rock and he is the foundation on which the community is built. The significance of the words around Matthew 16:18 is that Jesus is commending Peter for his understanding of Jesus when Peter proclaims: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Jesus singles out Peter owing to his confession that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus, as confessed by Peter, is the foundation of the faith through his teaching and the primitive community believed that Jesus intended to form an enduring community. This is strongly emphasised several times in the Pauline epistles. It is the faith in Jesus that enables that community to endure. It is not about a structured institution that we often tend to think about when we use the word ‘church’.

John Buggy

During his press conference on the plane returning to Rome from Canada, Pope Francis made a remark about so-called traditionalists that rankled some conservative Catholics and confused others.

‘A church that does not develop its thinking in an ecclesial way is a church that goes backward’, the pope said. “That is the problem of many today who claim to be traditionalists. They are not traditionalists, they are “backwardists”. Tradition is the root of inspiration in order to go forward in the church.’

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/pope-francis-right-catholic-church-cant-go-backwards>

The cosmic God is a surety

Joan Chittister

I have no doubt now that God is with us all and comes often to many in a burst of awareness. The difference is that the Presence becomes a guide, a warmth, not a vengeful human being writ large. Instead the cosmic God is a surety, a promise of support, a reminder of what the Jewish community has always called ‘The Covenant’ and the Quakers call ‘The Inner Light’. God is the internal voice calling me to give myself to the fullness of life. It is the trek of the soul to wholeness and understanding. It is an awareness within me of my identity with all creation and the strength I need to wrestle my own uncertainty, indifference, spiritual deafness to the ground.

Let me explain: Science has become my spiritual director.

It is science that brought me face-to-face with the awareness of the overwhelming, immeasurable presence that is God. It took me to the edge of life, beyond the fairytale God. It helped me to understand that the Light was the energy from which all things come. It brought me to realise that the Cosmic

Presence, the beginning and end of everything, has been consumed, dwarfed, shrunk, and reduced to magic, warring, vending, judging, and manipulating the laws of life. God, to be God, is the substance, the embrace, the whole of life. It’s out of five basic elements – oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon – that all the elements of life come. These five elements are at the base of all life processes, in all of us, in all living things everywhere. ‘We are made of the same makings as the stars,’ Dr Ashley King, a planetary scientist and stardust expert teaches. ‘Nearly all the elements in the human body were made in a star...’, and so, I believe, will return to stardust at the end.

The poets tell us that we are nothing but stardust. But stardust is the same stuff of a Cosmic God as we are its cosmic dust. Think of it: God is within us and we are within God, the Light – God, the energy of all life, God the Creator of the universe.

God within us is Light, the essence of revelation and insight. God within us is energy, the pointer toward the tomorrow that comes out of today. God within us pours out on us the reckless generation of the gifts of life.

from *An Evolving God, An Evolving Purpose, An Evolving World*
by Joan Chittister (Fortress Press)

A Letter to my Grandson

Noelene Uren

You ask if religion helps you to be present. Looking back, I think that religion and a belief in a theistic God was more a sense of security. God was there, looking after you and prayer was a way of cajoling a suspiciously human deity into doing what we wanted. I don’t think I was ever present in the moment, if that is what you mean and it is sad because looking back you think, ‘That was a time that was special and I never stopped and thought: “This is now, and it will never happen again.”’

As to your other questions, ‘Am I still a Catholic?’ Culturally I guess I always will be because it’s hard to turn your back on the habit of a lifetime. But I can no longer support a Church that clings to outdated concepts and tenaciously defends dogmas formed in times before our major advances in human thought. Nor can I agree with a Church that ignores women and is ruled, as a friend once said, ‘By men in frocks and funny hats’.

‘Do I believe in God?’ No, not as a supernatural being dwelling somewhere external to the world and intervening when it suits Him. I don’t know what I believe, but I like best the description of God by the 17th century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. He saw God ‘not as a being but as a force of nature’.

‘And what of Christ?’ The Son of God? Or was he an amazing man, a man before his time, a teacher whose teachings should still resonate today. I will always call myself a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ and I will always try to live by his teachings, especially ‘Love one another as I have loved you’.

This, I think, has been the basic tenet of my life. The unconditional, all encompassing, complete love I give to you is not what I am talking about. The love Christ talked about is acceptance, tolerance, kindness, forgiveness. Some people are easy to treat this way, some more difficult, some almost impossible, but while we continue to try we are living as Christ taught and we can call ourselves Christians. It’s hard, but as G.K. Chesterton said: ‘Christianity has not been tried and found wanting: It has been found difficult and not tried.’

Noelene Uren is a Member of the ARC Secretariat

Philosophy, Faith and Truth

Peter Vardy

Michael Sibert's article 'A letter from the Catholic Coalface' (*ARCVoice* 85) was perceptive in setting out the frustration that teachers of Religious Education face in Catholic schools. But the problem runs deeper than he outlines.

We live in an age dominated by relativism, postmodernism and nihilism – this was the conclusion of the brilliant encyclical under Pope John Paul II's name (although it may well have been written by the then Cardinal Ratzinger). The encyclical is a masterly exposition of the history of philosophy culminating in the malaise of our present age where any idea of absolute truth is derided and everything is seen as relative to culture and perspective.

'As a philosophy of nothingness, (Nihilism) has a certain attraction for people of our time. Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth. In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.'

The encyclical emphasises the importance of a search for ultimate truth and meaning and recognises, well in advance of President Trump and his 'alternative facts', that the real challenge is to hold onto a commitment to absolutes in a world where these are derided.

'...it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason.'

The encyclical laid down a clear challenge for the Church and called for a new evangelisation – by this was meant a new engagement with the richness of philosophy and the search for ultimate truth. The encyclical is very clear:

I have judged it appropriate and necessary to

emphasise the value of philosophy for the understanding of the faith, as well as the limits which philosophy faces when it neglects or rejects the truths of Revelation. The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason mutually support each other.

The Pope, however, goes further:

This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal – not, I trust, untimely – that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy.

The encyclical specifically states, surprisingly, that the Church has no philosophy of its own but seeks a commitment to absolute truth. The emphasis of the encyclical, it seems to me, is one that every Catholic who is interested in the future of the Church should strongly support:

'I have unstintingly recalled the pressing need for a new evangelisation; and I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access.'

However, instead of responding to this challenge, the Church and Bishops have reinterpreted the challenge and turned it into yet more catechetical education which young people find alienating, irrelevant and all too often boring. Catholic education today is all too often most successful at inoculating people against faith rather than engaging them with it.

The Catholic Church has immense intellectual riches. No other religious tradition has such a brilliant and relevant tradition of the finest philosophy combined with theology. Yet instead of exposing young people to the immense riches of this tradition, a catechetical approach harks back to a bygone age when young people might have placidly accepted laid-down truths. *Fides et Ratio* has very clearly shown that these days are over.

Over the last thirty years I have spoken to well over a quarter of a million secondary students primarily in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Many of them care about religious and moral issues. They are interested in the question of whether or not God exists; what relevance this has; how an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God can allow evil; the nature of miracles and religious experience and whether these are good pointers to the existence of God; whether St. Thomas Aquinas' arguments for God or other

arguments succeed; the relationship between religion and science; the challenge of celebrity atheists as well as the basis (if any) for ethics and how to deal with moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, medical ethics, genetic engineering, new reproductive technology, just war, crime and punishment, environmental and animal ethics, liberation and feminist theology and similar issues. They are interested in the thoughts of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas as well as contemporary thinkers. However, they will only engage with these issues if they are permitted to think for themselves, to engage with the issues in an open-minded way and be allowed to arrive at their own conclusions. This is exactly what is frequently not encouraged in most Catholic education. The assumption is that the Church's answers are correct and this is the conclusion to be expected from arguments – this is not philosophy, it is indoctrination and it simply will not and cannot succeed in the modern world (as *Fides et Ratio* recognised).

Pope Francis has said that the Church is called to form consciences not to replace them. This was profound – it means the Church has to bring both young and old to have a developed conscience based on reflection and reason. St. Thomas Aquinas defined conscience as 'reason making right decisions'. But in order for this to succeed, consciences need to be developed. The trouble is (and this is one of many reasons why many conservative Catholics do not like Pope Francis) that people may, in conscience, come to ethical decisions that depart from Church teaching. This must be expected. Some more conservative Catholics hold that conscience must be 'informed by the teaching of the Church' – by this they mean that the faithful must be obedient to what they are told by the Church. This, however, is not forming individual consciences. It is, of course, right that the faithful Catholic will attend to Church teaching and take this seriously when deliberating on difficult issues. But, in the final analysis, she or he must make decisions and live by their own conscience.

Once young people are educated and can understand the intellectual basis for Church teaching, they may well have the resources to question and to challenge the assumptions on which such teaching rests – this is why, I suspect, the hierarchy does not want and resists a commitment to excellence in philosophy teaching. As an example, both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas did not think that human life began at conception. The tradition of the

Church throughout much of its history was that God implanted a soul at 40 days after conception of a male and 90 days after conception of a female and before this it was not a person. Yet the Church's teaching on abortion changed to say that human life begins when sperm enters the egg. This was a major change.

An acorn is not the same as an oak tree and many young people will not regard an embryo as the same as a full-term baby. A fertilised egg is certainly human and alive. But it can be questioned whether it is a person and this, of course, has profound implications for IVF, IVM and the 'morning-after pill'. This is not to argue that these are right or wrong but merely to point out that, when teenagers are able to understand the intellectual basis of some Church teaching, they will also have the basis to question it. This is not necessarily a bad thing as, for most teenagers today, Catholic teachings on such issues as sex, contraception, abortion and euthanasia are simply dismissed.

Priests, in their training, have to undertake courses both in theology and in philosophy – and rightly so. *Fides et Ratio* again emphasised the importance of both disciplines, but the Church does not want this to apply to the laity. It can be worth asking yourself how often a homily has really dealt in any depth with philosophic issues. This may be because many priests lack the intellectual resources to do this (obviously there are many honourable exceptions, particularly among priests belonging to the great religious Orders). Yet, all too often, homilies are pious, but lacking in intellectual, philosophic rigour.

The Church will inevitably contract and, in fifty years or less, in the developing world it may be a mere shadow of what it is in its even now diminished state. It will, however, survive but it will only flourish when the laity are properly educated to recognise the profound depth and rigour of the tradition – even if this process may be uncomfortable for some in positions of authority.

(Dr.) PETER VARDY was Vice-Principal of Heythrop College, the then Jesuit-run Philosophy & Theology College of the University of London. His most recent book was *Beyond the Cave – a defence of absolute truth in an age of relativism*. His next book, *The Philosophers' Daughters*, to be published early in 2023, is a record of questions asked by his young daughters and replies from leading theologians, philosopher, academics and scientists around the world.

Tidying up ‘Pauline’ Epistles

Alan Clague

Paul wrote epistles to different communities over a period of at least twenty years. Over those years he addressed various problems experienced by the different communities, and developed a theology centred on Christ, not on Jewish Law. His emphasis changed during this time. In particular, in his later epistles he gave less emphasis to the imminent return of Christ, which had featured prominently in his earlier epistles.

There has been a problem in establishing whether all ‘Pauline’ epistles were actually written by Paul. Seven epistles are universally accepted as authentic Pauline epistles. It is now generally accepted that the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) were written at the end of the first century by Church leaders, long after Paul’s death. They are not the only ones of questioned authenticity. Ephesians and Colossians differ in style and content from earlier authentic epistles and are more in tune with late first century writings. The status of 2 Thessalonians is not clear, but it appears to be early.

Another difficulty lies with aggregations and later insertions into the original text. 2 Corinthians, which has sudden changes of style and content, is now usually accepted as being a compilation of at least two epistles, but the actual texts are considered to be authentic. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, the text, which forbids women to speak in church, is considered to be a later insertion to harmonise this epistle with the later, non-Pauline Pastoral Epistles, which also command women to be silent. It would improve interpretation to italicise this section or insert brackets around it in order to alert the reader that this is not a part of the original epistle, but represents a later development of the community. (This has been done in the New Revised Standard Version.)

To address the problem of more readily discerning Paul’s change of emphasis over the course of his evangelising, and to identify the further changes that occurred in the latter part of the first century after Paul’s death, a simple improvement would be to present the epistles in the Bible in their likely time sequence of writing. At present, the sequence is largely based on their length. It commences with the long Romans and 1 Corinthians and finishes with the brief Titus and Philemon. There is no sense of development of theology, and no separation of authentic Pauline letters from non-authentic ones. This is not conducive to an optimal study of the epistles.

If the epistles were entered into the Bible with the earliest first, followed by the likely time sequence, the epistles would start with 1 Thessalonians and finish with Romans (the most developed of Paul’s theology). They would be followed by Ephesians, Colossians and the pastoral epistles, giving a picture of the post-Pauline Church in Greece. This would allow an easier understanding of the gradual development of theology and Church organisation in the first century.

ALAN CLAGUE is a Member of the ARC Secretariat
and a regular contributor to *ARCVoice*.

Just a thought: Now that Alan has outlined the above, why don’t we go back and read the epistles in their chronological order? It could help us to better understand the little snippets we only get in the readings
at Mass. – *John Buggy*

Australian Reforming Catholics (ARC)

Appraisal of the Plenary Council

It is worth remembering that the Plenary Council was, in part, promoted by the bishops as a significant action in their response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This decision became interpreted as their “get out of jail card”. One could have expected that, in addition to formulating a statement of apology to all the victims of clerical sexual abuse, the Council would have included legislation aimed at the sources of abuse in the future. This would require examining the culture and lifestyle of the priesthood in Australia, the education and training of candidates for the priesthood, the elements of clericalism, and the necessity of celibacy. Apart from an apology there is nothing in the decrees that really address the above issues. The “crisis” that brought the statement that the Church could not just get back to “business as usual” became managed by a series of writing filters, ending in a collection of intentions with no immediate commitment. Back to business as usual.

Many of the non-clerical members of the Plenary Council have measured its success on the open dialogue and candour between the participants who, one might expect, would have quite divergent viewpoints. They see that many of the important issues that did not get addressed would be progressively considered in the near future because of the willingness to listen that the PC atmosphere produced. This is certainly a positive, but the spirit in that atmosphere would have to be maintained. If those non-clerical members, especially those employed in the many Church institutions and services, could continue to strengthen the bond they achieved, then together they could be a powerful influence on the Church hierarchy. If, together, they could keep up front in their own diocese just some of the many issues identified in the thousands of submissions to the PC, then the real “fruits” of the PC may emerge. The courage shown by the group of PC members who held a brief silent protest on the third day of the Council’s second session was significant. They were instrumental in ensuring that recognition of the equality of men and women is stated clearly in the decrees, even though some attitudes might not be changed.

It is those who are working in the Catholic school system, in Catholic hospitals, and in the many charitable agencies who are able to hear how Catholics relate to the institution of the Church today. Together they may be able to hold up a mirror to the bishops and respond to any small invitation to help in dealing with the ever-declining participation of Catholics in the life of the Church (currently around 11%), particularly that of the coming generations – the “elephant in the room” that seemingly was ignored in the proceedings of the Plenary Council.

ARC Secretariat
15th August, 2022

The Opus Dei connection?

Margaret Knowlden

The agenda for the Second Assembly of Australia's Plenary Council was disrupted on July 6 2022 after more than 60 of the 277 members staged a protest over issues regarding women in the church, including the defeat of a motion to formalise support for the ordination of women as deacons.

Why should we be surprised? The appointments of mainly conservative Bishops were tightly controlled under the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It is well known, for instance, that George Pell was not the preferred candidate to replace Archbishop Little when he retired. However, the Vatican had made their decision and the rest is history. It is also known that John Paul II had strong leanings towards Opus Dei (hence his efforts to back-track on all Vatican II's exciting innovations). One of his first acts was to beatify Josemaria Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. Then in 2002, in one of the shortest waiting periods in papal history (27 years), he also canonised him. In 2008, when Pope Benedict came to Sydney for World Youth Day, it was no secret that he stayed with the Opus Dei community at Toongabbie, NSW. Arriving in Sydney, George Pell lost no time in appointing an Opus Dei priest to be in charge of Adult Education.

We do not know the ages of the conservative bishops or whether they are members of Opus Dei. But it is possible most of them were aware of the fate of Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba who, in daring to even suggest that women priests might help solve the problem of the shortage of clergy in his huge diocese, brought the wrath of Pope Benedict on himself and dismissal. Another possibility is that Cardinal George Pell, who attended the Plenary Council, exerted pressure on certain bishops to ensure they did not veer from traditional teachings. Admitting women to the Diaconate would be going too far.

Furthermore, the news that some Australian Catholics have petitioned the Vatican to remove Bishop Vincent Leong from the Diocese of Parramatta over his support for alienated Catholics, including those Catholics within the LGBTQI community. This is further evidence of a disconnect between Progressive Catholics and conservatives who say that their Bishop's actions contradict church teaching.

Enter Pope Francis on whom all hopes were founded for a more progressive style of leadership. However, as the following article reveals, this has not proved to be necessarily so.

Editor

Criteria for choosing bishops can go one step further

National Catholic Reporter

Editorial Staff

July 3, 2013

Meek and merciful: Does that sound like your bishop or the kind of bishop you hope might be appointed to your diocese? How'd you like a local ordinary you could describe as 'gentle, patient ... animated by inner poverty ... and also by outward simplicity and austerity of life'? What would you think of a bishop who was not ambitious and wasn't looking for a bigger, more prestigious See? How about a bishop without 'the psychology of princes'?

This is not a wish list from progressive Catholics. These are qualities that episcopal candidates should

have, Pope Francis told a gathering of papal ambassadors on June 21. The papal nuncios and apostolic delegates had come from the far corners of globe for a two-day meeting. In the field, these men are the legendary papal diplomatic corps. They hold places of privilege within a nation's political establishment but are also well-connected to grassroots movements because of their ties to the local church. One of their duties, a 'delicate task,' Francis told them, 'is talent-spotting and vetting episcopal candidates'.

'Be careful that the candidates are pastors close to the people,' he said. As is his style, Francis used rather traditional language. He said bishops should be 'married to a church', meaning that they should have strong ties to the local church and should not be 'in constant search of another'.

His admonishment that bishops should 'watch over the flock that will be entrusted to them' and be 'vigilant of the dangers that threaten it' is not an invitation to build walls against a hostile outside

world. Rather, he said, bishops should ‘keep watch [and] imbue hope, that they have sun and light in their hearts, to lovingly and patiently support the plans which God brings about in his people.’

Some have noted that missing from Francis’ list of episcopal attributes are loyalty and orthodoxy, the two criteria that dominated the nomination process under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Francis told his diplomats to remember this ‘fundamental criterion in choosing who should govern: *Si sanctus est oret pro nobis, si doctus est doceat nos, si prudens est regat nos* [If holy let him pray for us, if learned teach us, if prudent govern us].

It would seem that Francis is looking for pastors who have a sense of joy about them and who can share that joy with others. He is looking for listeners who can attune themselves to the ‘plans which God brings about in his people’.

Our hope is that the papal ambassadors heard and received Francis’ message, and that they will keep this criteria in mind as they seek out episcopal candidates.

We would add just one thing. We would suggest that besides this set of criteria, the ambassadors also check with the people the new bishop will be serving. Last December, Benedictine Abbot Peter von Sury of Mariastein Abbey in Switzerland addressed the need for greater local consultation when selecting new bishops.

Von Sury said that during the first millennium, three authorities were decisive in nominating a new bishop to a diocese, namely: the local faithful, the local clergy and the neighbouring bishops, which today would be the equivalent of the local bishops’ conference.

‘That is a procedure that makes sense,’ he said. We agree.

Pope ‘fervently’ wants ‘accompaniment’ for remarried divorcees

Francis writes the preface for a new Vatican document on preparing couples for marriage, applying one of the most commented upon points of his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, published in 2016 after the two assemblies of the Synod of Bishops held on issues pertaining to marriage and the family. In that earlier document, Francis said divorced Catholics who are in new partnerships need to be ‘more fully integrated into Christian communities’.

He said this would require ‘pastoral accompaniment’, ‘the Church’s help’ and – he specified in a footnote no. 351 – ‘in certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments’. This last clarification gave rise to numerous comments, and certain circles criticised the pope for going back on the Catholic doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. Francis never responded directly to the criticisms. But he said the interpretation of *Amoris laetitia* that he offered to Argentina’s bishops had the authority of ‘authentic magisterium’.

In a letter to his fellow countrymen, he insisted on the importance of discernment and ‘discreet’ access to the sacraments in certain cases for divorced couples who have remarried. ‘The Church wants to be close to these couples’. In his new text published on Wednesday, Francis does not make it clear whether this thorny issue will be addressed in the document for which he is calling. In any case, he notes that it will be a matter of ensuring that these couples ‘do not feel abandoned and can find accessible and fraternal places of welcome, help in discernment and participation in communities’. ‘The Church, in fact, wants to be close to these couples and walk the *via caritas* with them,’ he insists.

The pope says it is necessary to bridge the gap between the ‘many years’ that the Church dedicates to preparing candidates for the priesthood and the ‘few weeks’ of marriage prep it offers to couples who are committing themselves to a ‘mission as great as that of the family’.

Lighting the Way

Clare Maguire

A short introductory guide to a once-recommended evangelical group in Sydney's Archdiocese. All examples have been documented and reported to the Archdiocese.

Once upon a time, ... some 'presbyters' were found trying to get in a window of a Redfern church.

Not so very much earlier, into what was a thriving parish of black and white parishioners, Dr. George Pell had unilaterally appointed 'priests' of the Neocatechumenal Way [NCW] to St. Vincent's parish in Redfern St. Dr Pell was earlier a Victorian Bishop, and then Archbishop of Melbourne. By July 2003 he was the appointed Archbishop of Sydney! The unique congregation consisted of Aboriginal and settler-Australian parishioners in the poor suburb of Redfern.

Fr. Ted Kennedy¹ had been the sole remaining priest of a small team appointed there in December 1971, not long after the Second Vatican Council. A motley flock was also drawn to come there regularly from the 'broad spectrum' of local inner-city inhabitants, and from all-over Sydney and beyond, and be part of that like-minded Catholic community who found the challenge of the gospel to be the 'lodestar' of how to live.²

It was literally thrilling to attend each week, to see and hear the thrust of the Council's Documents – as opposed to one's childhood experience of either staid, dry homilies on regulations or dogma *per se*, or the same theological underpinning of the same homily on the same day as 'last year'.

The shockingly different 'ways' of the incoming NCW emanated from their sect-like³ nature and conduct. Having originated in conservative Catholic Spain in 1964, they appealed to a Catholic Archbishop with a conservative approach, particularly because they readily offered to fill the positions of his diocesan priests, disappearing in dwindling numbers.

In 2003, no introduction of this group of NCW Presbyters¹ was provided to St Vincent's congregation. What later came to light is that they have secretive, devious sectarian ways 'as functionaries under the central control of NCW Catechists'.⁴ They did not identify themselves as a group when they came to St Vincent's; it took a whole

year for the first NCW-appointed Parish priest to even admit he was a member.

Parishioners were left to wonder whether Dr Pell may have deliberately 'organised' a new, different 'theological' ethos for St Vincent's. If he saw parishioners as rather too creatively engaged in strict church liturgy, or too enthusiastic about new Vatican Documents, he may have hinted that firm measures be exercised. Daily newspapers showed how he described his view of parishioners by more unusual terms/phrases such as 'agitators' or 'the rump of Redfern'. However, there would be no need of this type of 'advice'; the NCW showed that it was already master of 'control' by their often rude manner of delivery and use of severely shouted commands, which were expected to be blindly obeyed. Their abuse showed bullying in place of conversation, force in imposing unwanted NCW liturgical (often-Spanish-based) customs onto the existing dynamic of pastorally-oriented parishioners, and then attempts by presbyters to suppress lawful spiritual practices – all of which resulted in division in the parish and negative effects on the community.⁵

While this was noted in Reports to the Archdiocesan Office, Dr Pell began stone-walling. His method can be recognised as passive-aggressive and was copied by his counterparts, Archbishops Hickey/then Costelloe in Perth, from where Sydney's presbyters were loaned.

Across the 15-year-period of NCW-oppression in Redfern, it applied many types of abuse in repertoires physical, emotional and psychological.⁶ Perhaps one could say, it 'pinnacled' in an NCW presbyter's proven Defamation of a parishioner during Mass in St Vincent's, Redfern.⁷

NCW appears in research of other parishes worldwide. Beginning in Kelmscott and Mirabooka, Perth WA, parishioners express concerns about their ongoing struggle; Denver, Colorado, U.S, gives a short account of heavy-handed facts; Bristol in England reports the NCW as 'a form of spiritual enslavement'; Japan's Bishops closed their NCW Seminary, especially due to cultural difficulties; and Bishops of the island of Guam sent four of their seminarians to the US for priestly training rather than use the NCW seminary and spoke of extreme difficulties with the NCW.⁸ Moreover, difficulties can arise if/when the 'cells' of NCW groups attend ongoing catechesis, and, by means of its 'soul-baring scrutinies', hope to 'pass' a personal examination and 'rise' to every next level; (ii) if an NCW 'follower' attempts to leave the group, there is a variety of pressures applied. Or, finally, family and friends are

ordered to abandon that person altogether.

Over time, parishioners at Redfern put into action a number of counter-balancing, non-violent measures to maintain their parish-community. They:

- ◆ established a significant website to inform others what was happening at St Vincent's: churchmouse@lanuera.com which expresses both *gravitas* and good humour
- ◆ introduced the Sunday Liturgy with Commentaries based on the weekly Sunday-Gospel-text;
- ◆ initiated *Sharing the Meal* with those around the neighbourhood;
- ◆ painted a church mural inside the Sanctuary;
- ◆ began a monthly hard-copy bulletin of *Thoughts of the Month*;
- ◆ created dramatic features such as 'Tolling the Names' of deceased Aborigines on Good Friday;
- ◆ supported three Aboriginal parishioners to travel to Rome for Mary McKillop's canonisation 2010;
- ◆ documented very valued/valuable church liturgical artefacts;
- ◆ extended the once-weekly Sunday-Gospel Discussion to include a now-18-years-long Christian Meditation group.

When finally the NCW was moved from Redfern to Maroubra and Pagewood parishes later in 2017, the following points remain for ordinary parishioners to consider, and each may need to be addressed:

- ◆ whether the title of 'The Neocatechumenal Way' was devised to avoid possibilities of legal demand(s) for recompense for harm visited on people by the 'psychologically-dangerous' Way;⁹
- ◆ the not only lamentable but unjust fact that the NCW has been given access to Catholic people/parishes, poaching the vulnerable from existing-parishes as well as getting members there without constructing its own buildings;
- ◆ the grievously-deficient aspects of NCW priestly-training, including the lack of pastoral-care;
- ◆ giving parishes an informed choice of whether or not to accept this group, and to have transparent knowledge before an NCW enters a parish;
- ◆ reasons the NCW is permitted to preach their humanly-crushing Jansenistic doctrine of atonement, with excessive attention to sin and death, the devil and the lack of human worth, and the individual's inability to do good.

In summary: The NCW is trained to remain outside a questioning community; in any difficulty arising, they do not wish nor attempt to dialogue, listen or discuss the problem because their training indoctrinates them as 'always right' in what and how they believe. Its

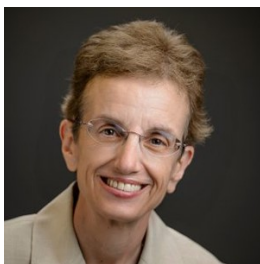
seminary-preparation needs immediate overhaul and there is a need to develop adult critical thinking with their presbyters. Acting inappropriately, they lack priestly pastoral care and replace it by angry brusqueness or disregard. The NCW readily alienates parish-people by their behavioural characteristics, and have been clearly incompatible with parish-life. With now more than 70 Seminaries around the world, they present a current serious crisis within the Catholic Church because of their differences in accepting certain traditional, essential doctrines. They have been experienced as secretive, elitist, authoritarian, inflexible, intolerant, riddled with fundamentalism, and attached to power and power-games, scandalously even with Holy Communion. Due to actions like the Archbishop's stonewalling, it is obvious that they are 'sweeping things under the carpet' as formerly occurred in Cases of Sexual Abuse. So, in the future, one may be well advised to fact-find and consider thoroughly BEFORE accepting a Sydney-Archdiocesan recommendation.

CLARE MAGUIRE is a retired University tutor, who has worked with modern European languages. Quite recently, the State Library of NSW and the Veech Library accepted a Major Work she put together entitled "*The Neocatechumenal Way: Redfern at the CrossRoads, 2003-2017*".

End-Notes

1. 'Presbyter' is the term the NCW uses for their 'ordained' men.
2. A series of strokes caused Ted Kennedy's retirement in 2002.
3. Described in the best short study found – Rev. Dr. Gerald Arbuckle sm., 'Is the Neocatechumenate Way Compatible with Religious Life?' *Religious Life Review*, Ireland, Jan-Feb 1994 vol. 33, No.164; updated 2004.
4. Paul Cooney sm., *The Way of Despair: Psychological Abuse by the Neocatechumenal Way*, 1990, p.4.
5. Discrimination: One Aboriginal woman reported that the NCW presbyter 'called us **heathens** You've got no idea how he treats us when none of you whities is around' [JF, 14. 3. 2007].
6. Probably, the worst physical case of (a) was the situation of three NCW seminarians being ordered to hold-in-a-headlock a long-time elderly male parishioner waiting to speak to the presbyter; On Easter Night, 2007, the celebrating presbyter walked off the Altar in the middle of Mass, refusing to continue and depriving parishioners of Holy Communion – causing many to find they could no longer manage emotionally to attend because of a rise in blood-pressure, heart palpitations, breathlessness, a racing pulse and even trauma-counselling. A threat to lock people in the church presents a psychological example.
7. This was a matter for which the Judge (of the Catholic Tribunal of NSW and the ACT: Case No. 200 05 165) found in favour of the parishioner, and caused Precedent by ordering the presbyter to write an Apology for harm done (Canon Law 128) and to pay financial compensation.
8. See Online: Google: Guam – The Neocatechumenal Way.
9. Paul Cooney sm., List of reasons for requiring the *Removal of the NCW* from his Victorian parish.

Birth of a Dancing Star:
My Journey from Cradle Catholic to
Cyborg Christian
 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis)
 A Memoir by Sr. Ilia Delio



Review by Wendy Rowe

In recent years I had been fascinated by the name Ilia Delio. I used to see the name associated with Richard Rohr in many of his reflections I had received, but I did nothing about researching further. It wasn't until recently that I read an article in the *Merton Seasonal* about *The Pivotal Visions of Thomas Merton and Ilia Delio*. She of course goes on to describe this moment in her Memoir which in a way was similar to Thomas Merton's famous moment in Louisville.

Sr. Ilia Delio was named Denise Delio and was born the youngest of four children to an Italian-American couple in New Jersey. Her older siblings had left the family home by the time Denise was growing up. As she says, 'I accepted the Christian story as it was conveyed in homilies, feast-day celebrations, the prayers we recited and the songs we sang at Mass'. But from a static, fixed understanding of Catholic life in New Jersey, God burst forth in her life in such a way that she began to see the dynamism of God in her midst and a new type of person emerged in the 21st century.

It is very clear in the book that she has an exceptionally brilliant mind. She had initially trained as a scientist before entering a Carmelite monastery which did not work out. She then becomes a Franciscan sister where she discovered that the name Ilia is the Greek feminine name for Elijah. Her community allowed her to pursue her doctoral studies and to continue working in science.

She quotes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin often: how he spoke of love as the core energy of the universe. I like the way her story begins with her traditional Italian-American family in New Jersey and the detours and mishaps which occurred along the way. I will leave you to work out how her life evolved from cradle Catholic to the edge of cyborg Christian life becoming an adventure in love. She wrote this book to try and answer the question she was constantly asked: How to integrate science and religion. She says there is no quick answer but that science and religion are two forms of knowledge that emerge from the pursuit of self-knowledge. I leave the reader to work out if this is possible.

Sr. Ilia Delio is a Franciscan sister in Washington DC.

WENDY ROWE grew up in country NSW, was Loreto educated, started working in finance and left for Paris where she spent 28 years. Up until COVID, she organised conferences throughout Australia for senior school students and now volunteers in an aged care home in Yass and also at St. Clement's Retreat & Conference Centre, Galong. She is a member of ARC Secretariat.

Rows and Rows of Men

By John Crothers

Sometimes I think about the Church
 that we could be
 And I wonder how, I wonder when
 I think about the years ahead
 and the leaders that we need
But I just see rows of men

Look at people everywhere
 who'd love to share the role
 Look at their gifts, they never end
 They're ready now to play their part
 but it's out of their control
It's just the rows of men

Think of what our Church could be
 if we all could sing the melody
 It isn't really hard to see,
 there'd be lots and lots of harmony

We're like a bird that's trying
 to fly but only with one wing
 It's all so male, let's not pretend
 So many people turned aside
 with talents they could bring
But it's just the rows of men

I'm sure that if the truth be told
 they're trying to do their best
 But what's the message that we send
 If there's a place for everyone
 then where are all the rest?
I just see rows of men

Rows and rows of men



Webpage: [Rows of Men John Crothers](#)

A New Habit of Mind

PREFACE

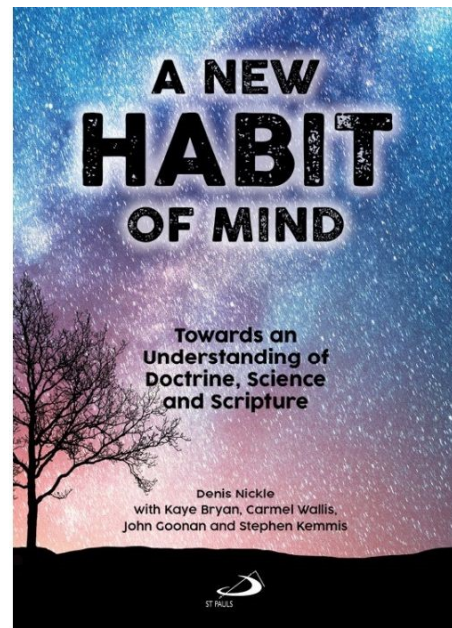
Many Catholics, particularly parents, teachers and others involved in faith formation, can be disconcerted by advances in knowledge, scientific developments and the like which appear to be in conflict with their own recollection or understanding of Catholic doctrine.

This situation has likely been more evident since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, called by Pope John XXIII and held over four sessions between 1962 and 1965 with a view to renewing the Church and making it more effective for its mission in today's world. That Council, possibly the most representative and authoritative since apostolic times, built on developments that had taken place in the previous twenty-five years – especially during the pontificate of Pius XII (1939-1958) – as the Church continued to emerge from an understandable historical habit of defensiveness with a more positive response to the theological challenges of the Reformation, new thinking generated by the Enlightenment period and scientific discoveries (Big Bang, Evolution) apparently at odds with Sacred Scripture.

This publication attempts to address three areas where these apparent conflicts are most prevalent:

1. Can Church teaching change or develop?
2. What is the relationship between faith and science?
3. How are we to properly understand Sacred Scripture – the Bible – especially when there appears to be a clash with modern scientific developments?

Each of these questions is addressed in the following pages using the documented words of authoritative Catholic leaders. *A New Habit of Mind* is addressed to those with responsibility for faith formation/education, and to everyone who is curious about where the Church stands on these issues. In attempting to cover all these topics within a manageable length, it is necessarily selective, but it provides some direction for those who might wish to delve deeper.



The title – *A New Habit of Mind* – 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’, (*‘novo mentis habitui, Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani Secundi proprio’*: Discourse to the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the new Code of Canon Law: November 20, 1965). Implicit in this comment is the possibility that there is in the Church a ‘habit of mind’ – a customary way of thinking, a mindset – different from that espoused by the Council and which is no longer appropriate or even acceptable.

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<https://erinearth.org.au/>

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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

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