



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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Editorial

In considering the overwhelming task of influencing reform in our Church, it is important to pause sometimes to reflect on where we are in our history, the factors preventing reform, and the attitudes we should display if we are to show what the spirit of Jesus means.

The articles in this issue give us a chance to do just that. Thomas Reese draws our attention to the spirit of Vatican II, describing it as a 'revolution that opened our eyes to what we could be if we dared'. He points out the reason why conservative forces resist being daring because of arguments over the meaning in the text of the documents rather than moving with the spirit of what that Council intended.

The article by George Browning reflecting on Cardinal George Pell and the one by Paul Collins reflecting on Pope Benedict give insights into the reasons why these two Church leaders were stuck in a rigid mindset that the Kingdom of God and the Catholic Church are the same thing. This mindset led to a decree from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed then by Cardinal Ratzinger, that Protestant Churches 'were not churches in the proper sense'. Underneath this staunch conservatism it appears that both men were binding themselves to a slavish interpretation of the Oath Against Modernism, thereby viewing any deviation from 'their tradition' as sinful error. We have included the Oath for you to read so that you can appreciate what a strict interpretation would mean. Reflection on this theme is rounded off by Alan Clague's brief outline of some of the secular influences that have both bolstered this conservatism and while also exposing the need for significant reform of the Church's social teaching.

The reflection concludes with some positive thoughts on our way forward. The alienation of younger people puzzled by much of official Church teaching, suggests Maureen Ryan, has to be overcome so that they can see value in declaring themselves as Christian. Michael Sibert proposes that we now have to move beyond Cardinal Pell, beyond concentration on the needs of the institution in order to be

seen as meeting the needs of people as Jesus did. Frank Vavasour emphasises this by reminding us that Catholics should be visibly prominent in seeking peace and Noeline Uren muses that the values we have lived by in our relationship with people should be where our Christianity shone.

In a separate reflection, I was distressed to hear that, on the day of Cardinal Pell's burial Mass, a person who hung a ribbon on the Cathedral fence to commemorate a loved one who was sexually abused, was accosted physically by some worshippers. What a wonderful opportunity was missed to overcome some of the controversy, hurt and disappointment that surrounded that event. How much could have been achieved with a simple recognition by the archbishop of the pain that some people were feeling that day? Once again, the needs of the institutional Church appeared to be the priority.

John Buggy

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Letters to the Editor

The Pope's reasoning why women can't be priests

Since I am not a theologian and find the arguments difficult to comprehend and digest, I offer the following considerations.

Whilst the Pope is trying to give an explanation based on official Catholic theological teaching, he does not appear to be honest and transparent in his possible personal opinions. The fact is that his predecessor, now Saint John Paul II, has officially declared that the Church has no right to choose women based on his understanding of the Gospel, and that any discussion of the issue is off the table.

The main task of a Pope is to keep the barque of Peter afloat, and his decisions are based on traditions to accommodate the various camps in the Church. This is and has always been the policy of the Catholic Church. He tries to prevent any schism at all cost. Conservatives against progressives!

Having said this, I also consider the *status quo* in many Christian Churches or what is called the Protestant Sector. How does God look at the Women Priests of other denominations? Does the Pope say they will be condemned to a state of eternal damnation? In any case, Jesus never appointed Priests, and we are now also told after Vatican II to follow the gospel. The proliferation of Christian Churches over the Centuries can mostly be laid at the uncompromising attitude of the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The Pope says that the Church is the whole people of God, and not to treat women in equal ways to men is therefore unacceptable and contradictory! It cannot be expressed any more simply.

Peter Meury
Tumbi Umbi NSW

The church is not a woman. The church is a collection of people of every description who worship Jesus Christ and acknowledge the pope as it's head on earth. However, I think to say that the church is a woman is based on a male prejudice to keep women in subjection. And this male supremacy is outdated, just as the church always has to carefully consider the latest advance in the human compassion of our democracy. I hope that this changes before it is too late as the church is full of aged people in my parish and also is most others in Melbourne.

Trish Magee
Fern Tree Gulley, VIC.

Editor's note re changes (ARCVoice 87):

Missing is:

- the teaching that Roman Catholicism is the only way to salvation;
- the creation of married male deacons, the creation of Acolytes or Senior Altar Servers;

Questionable?

- The fact that many Catholics follow their conscience does not mean the law has been changed.
- Purgatory is still a teaching of the Church;
- Indulgences have not been abandoned;
- Catholic events, i.e. some of them are still practised in many parishes, especially those with other cultures;
- Non-attendance of Sunday Mass without a valid reason is still considered a grave sin;
- Humanae Vitae has not been officially abandoned.

Peter Meury
Tumbi Umbi NSW

Editor's reply

Thank you, Peter, for those corrections and omissions. Perhaps I am fortunate in that the only Church experience I have had over the past 25 years has been at St Anthony in the Fields, Terrey Hills, well known for its progressive practices. Under the Passionist priests, we never heard mention of Purgatory or Indulgences and there is no public shaming of those whose rarely, if ever, attend Sunday Mass.

Margaret Knowlden
Editor

The Pope cites the theological problem: The Church does not have a theology of women to address women and church ministry. To describe the church as spouse and woman, and to invoke Petrine and Marian principles is allegorical abstraction. This is confusing and unconvincing. The credibility of the Supreme Pontiff is impaired by such statements.

Pope Francis is in his eighth decade; he suffers infirmities of age. A way forward would be for the Pope to resign for health reasons. His successor will be a celibate male cleric. He should be middle-aged and fit, not aged and infirm. He could support a practical approach to the problem.

I accept that the Pope may have spoken off the cuff ('vaticanspeak'). I have not read the *www.* reference, but I do not expect it to provide further clarification.

Your note on the Vatican II 60th anniversary [*ARCVoice* 86] shows that change in Church practice does occur. The evolution of doctrine proposed by Cardinal Newman is not impossible, and not incompatible with contemporary scientific and social research. This is overdue for policy and dogma relating to sex, gender and family life.

Harding Burns
Rose bay NSW

Conservatives can win the debate over Vatican II only by ignoring history

Thomas Reese

The Council, comprising all the Catholic bishops of the world and called by Pope John XXIII, began October 11 1962, and closed December 8 1965, by which time Pope Paul VI had succeeded Pope John.

The last American bishop to attend the council, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, died four years ago at the age of 96. Pope Benedict XVI, who is 95, served as an expert as a young priest in his 30s.

The distance from the council has allowed for different interpretations of the event.

The far right asserts that the council was a mistake; it destroyed the church by abandoning dogma and putting the Mass into the vernacular. They argue that the church should demand strict observance of its moral teaching (although they, too, ignore the demands of the church's social teaching).

The left argues that the council did not go far enough in its stated purpose: updating the church for the modern world. The council was a good beginning, these critics say, but more needs to be done—allowing women priests, for example, and allowing all priests to marry. They also prioritise the church's social teaching over the church's teaching about sex.

Not many Catholics are on the far right. Those who want to return to the Latin Mass are few but vocal. Public opinion polls show there is support for ordaining women and married persons, and less support for the church's sexual ethics or its social teaching.

Among church elites, however, the major debates in the last 55 years have been over the interpretation of the documents of Vatican II. Conservatives stressed the council's continuity with the past, while liberals stressed how the council had changed the church.

What confused anyone who followed these debates was the ability of either side to find passages in the council documents that supported their positions.

The source of this confusion goes back to Pope Paul VI's desire to have the council documents approved by consensus. A majority vote was not sufficient; not even a two-thirds vote would do. He wanted near unanimity.

To reach consensus, Paul demanded that the council placate its conservative minority. This meant that controversial issues were described with ambiguous language that was open to different interpretations. Sometimes one paragraph would

contradict another. And some issues, such as birth control, were simply taken off the table.

Progressives accepted these compromises because they thought the future belonged to them. But when John Paul II was elected, he took a conservative line on many of these ambiguous passages.

Believing that the post-Vatican II church was in chaos, John Paul pushed for stability. Further change was not going to happen under his watch. He brought Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, to the Vatican to make sure that their interpretation of Vatican II was the only acceptable interpretation in the church. Theologians and priests who did not accept it were fired from seminaries and removed from chanceries. Supporters, meanwhile, became bishops.

Conservatives can win the debate over Vatican II only by ignoring history. They approach the council's documents like biblical fundamentalists who read Scripture without understanding the historical and cultural context of the passage. They are like judicial textualists who simply look at the words in the law without respecting the intention of the legislators.

For conservatives, it is sufficient to quote the council text and the interpretation given to it by John Paul and Benedict. End of discussion.

Conservatives have tried to confine the council to a textual analysis, but that misses what the council meant to the participants and to those who, like myself, have lived in the pre- and post-Vatican II church.

For those wishing to understand the Council, there is no better place to start than *What Happened at Vatican II*, by the Jesuit historian Fr. John W. O'Malley. Here you will find a well-researched and readable account of the Council.

In that book is what Jesuit Fr. James Martin, the editor-at-large for *America*, calls the single best short paragraph on how the Second Vatican Council changed the church: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive acceptances to active engagement, from fault-finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principles, from behaviour modification to inner appropriation.

Conservatives have tried to confine the Council to a textual analysis, but that misses what the council meant to the participants and to those who, like myself, have lived in the pre- and post-Vatican II church. It was a revolution that opened our eyes to what the church could be if we dared.

THOMAS REESE is a Jesuit whose column for Religion News Service, 'Signs of the Times', appears regularly on *National Catholic Reporter*. This article was published on 27.12.22

George Pell: the Faith vs the Institution

George Browning

Cardinal George Pell's vision of a church beyond criticism, its edicts to be slavishly followed, and governed almost exclusively by elderly men sits very uncomfortably with Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of God and our contemporary world

The death of Cardinal George Pell has dominated the news cycle over several days. Understandably the focus has been on the scandal of child abuse within the Church and the way the Cardinal is perceived to have responded from his position of considerable power and influence. What I believe has received far too little attention has been his resolute support for the Church as an institution rather than commitment to the Church as the body of Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount is prefaced with The Beatitudes which describe the Christ likeness upon which the Kingdom of God is founded. It is not hard to recognise Pope Francis against the backdrop of gentleness, humility and meekness described here, hardly a 'catastrophe' as the Cardinal is supposed to have described his pontificate.

It must surely be beyond dispute that Cardinal Pell was a divisive force because in all circumstances he backed the institution, despite all its failings, while less obviously championing the mission for which the institution evolved in the first place and for which any justification for its continuation must rest.

The reality is of course that no institution will survive unless it is seen to transparently serve the mission for which it evolved. Ironically it is George Pell's position on the Church as an institution, not the pontificate of Pope Francis, that most threatens the continued life of the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Francis is seen by Christians across all denominations, as well as the world community, as exemplifying the life of Christ, through compassion, inclusiveness, non-judgemental acceptance, love of the poor, and personal humility of life. It is hardly a catastrophe for a leader to manifest the attributes of godliness. Rather than the pontiff being a catastrophe, he has renewed hope that even now the institution might be redeemed to serve the mission of Christ in diverse contexts and cultures.

Put the institution first, be it a political party, a bank, or a Church, and its demise becomes inevitable. Reform the institution in light of changing

circumstance and the need to serve the greater good beyond the institution, and it may find continued relevance.

Why did the Cardinal put the Church on such a high pedestal, requiring it to be beyond criticism and its edicts to be slavishly followed. A little anecdote may throw some light.

Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops of New South Wales met annually for fellowships and discussion, alternately hosted by one or another Sydney Archbishop during my time as bishop of Canberra and Goulburn. Archbishops Jensen and Pell found much common ground in their social and religious conservatism. Of course, they shared no common ground on the most important issue, their views on the channel by which God's grace and salvation is efficacious were mutually exclusive.

On one occasion I found myself becoming more and more irritated by the *ex-cathedra*-like address being delivered by the Cardinal. I rather rudely interrupted him and said: 'Archbishop, it sounds as if you believe the Roman Catholic Church and the Kingdom of God are co-terminus.' My fellow bishops of both persuasions did their best to behave as if they were not present! There was a long and rather embarrassing silence, which terminated by the Cardinal's assent by default to that proposition.

Now, clearly if that is your position, many of the initiatives of Pope Francis are a catastrophe. In this circumstance it would be a catastrophe to meet with leaders and members of other Christian Churches as fellow channels of grace. It would be a catastrophe to meet with leaders of other faiths as co-workers. It would be a catastrophe to weaken the power of the sacerdotal priesthood by welcoming lay people to positions of authority, or contemplating a place at the table for women.

Believing the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of God are co-terminus is simply not credible and most certainly has no biblical warrant. The activity of God and the movement of the spirit is in no way confined to the Church – of any flavour or colour.

The watershed moment in Matthew's Gospel narrative is almost certainly Peter's acclamation of faith at Caesarea Philippi: *You are the Christ the Son of the Living God*— to which Christ replies: *You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church*. As is well known, Πέτρα is Greek for rock. The 'rock' is Peter's statement of faith. Over the centuries it has become obvious that statements or acts of faith are more likely to emerge from the weak, powerless and humble than from the powerful. The Church and its leadership must be built on such as these. To be in the company of 'these' is, more often than not, to be in the company of women and, as Jesus said, to be in the company of children.

The vista of a Church governed almost exclusively by elderly men sits very uncomfortably with Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of God, quite apart from being a very uncomfortable fit with our contemporary world.

There have been several watershed moments in the history of Christianity. Constantine's declaration that Christianity was the official religion of Empire, the 16th century invention of the printing press and the Protestant Reformation, the rise of scientists such as Galileo, Newton and Darwin, the Enlightenment, Europe's colonisation of the new

world, have all been such moments. There can be little doubt the 21st century is another such moment. Christianity is not at risk. God in Jesus needs no defender. But what is as yet unknown is the structure and shape of Church which will best support the living faith of millions.

George Browning was Anglican Bishop of Canberra Goulburn 1993 – 2008. He founded the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Barton ACT. He was president of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network 2013 – 2022. He is now its patron.
(from *Pearls and Irritations* – 22/1/23)

Moving Beyond Cardinal George Pell

Michael Sibert

It has been interesting to read some of the many words written on the legacy of Cardinal George Pell. He certainly remains a divisive figure posthumously.

I think Father Frank Brennan's article in *The Tablet* 21/1/23 is instructive in highlighting the formative ideas that seemed to drive Pell's attempts to defend and prosecute his view on the ideal structure of the Church, particularly the role of Bishop and their relationship to the laity. The memo, under the pseudonym 'Demos,' circulated to members of the College of Cardinals in anticipation of the next conclave is evidence of how 'wedded' he was to his ideology and therein lies the problem with his contribution to the Church. To me all ideology is essentially an 'ego project' and, although very human, ultimately self-serving and limited in scope and value.

Anglican Bishop George Browning's article published in this issue highlights the distinction between the Church as institution and the church as the 'body of Christ' and clearly articulates why Pell's views on the ideal church will not stand the test of time. Paul's 'body of Christ' metaphor however, as a model for Church, has both pragmatic and mystical dimensions that are both vital and timeless. Paul's vision transcends attachment to the particulars of timebound ideologies.

In relating discussions on Pell's legacy to an agenda that seeks to move the Catholic Church forward and envisions an effective church for our times, I make the following observations. Firstly, we

know from the Gospels that Jesus did not establish an institutional church. And, as Karen Armstrong notes in *St Paul: The Misunderstood Apostle* 2015, Jesus's followers would not begin to call themselves 'Christians' until the end of the first century, and the term 'Christianity' occurs only three times in the New Testament. She also avoids calling the early communities of the Jesus movement 'churches', because this term inevitably evokes imagery of spires, pews, hymn-books and global hierarchical organisations that simply did not exist in Paul's day. Instead, she uses the Greek *ekklesia* (later translated 'church') which, like 'synagogue', refers to 'an assembly of people, a community or congregation'.

Just as the first-century followers of Jesus existed as 'an assembly of people, a community' with minimal institutional arrangements, perhaps we in the 21st century would be well served to worry less about 'institutional' issues, like what is allowed or not allowed, and focus more on what works in today's context (i.e. primarily on facilitating people's encounter with God).

Secondly, while the ideological battles within the Catholic Church will continue, the course of Christian history looks set to seriously dilute their significance. Elle Hardy's book *Beyond Belief: How Pentecostal Christianity Is Taking Over the World* (Feb 2022) is instructive on this possibility. Paraphrasing Amazon's synopsis, Hardy highlights how Neo-Charismatic Pentecostalism has some 600 million followers worldwide, and by 2050 their numbers will grow to 1 billion. Hardy considers that this is a movement focussed on the Holy Spirit, with believers gaining direct experience of God and all that comes with it: success for the mind, body, spirit and wallet. And Pentecostalism is also a cultural movement. It speaks to the most impoverished people in Africa and Latin America, and inspires anti-establishment leaders from Europe to Australia, South Korea to Brazil. It throws itself into culture wars and online

activism, offering meaning and community to rootless Westerners (no doubt including many disaffected Catholics) adrift in a fragmenting world.

We might ask ourselves where is the ‘body of Christ’ today and in which direction is it moving? The Neo-Charismatic movement (which transcends denominational affiliation) and Pentecostalism seem to have side-stepped institutional issues like clericalism, to be positively focussed on what is working for followers of Jesus in their daily lives.

The above reflections pointed to a potential pitfall for the reform movement. Those of us calling for reform need to be wary that we don’t amount to anything more than the ideological flip side of that which we oppose and thereby remain dependent on

the ‘established order’. Avoiding this pitfall will always depend on checking that our efforts are animated by a deep connection to the spirit of Jesus, who always had the needs of people front and centre and never let himself become wedded to or constrained by the Jewish institutions of his day. Ultimately, I think we need to be prepared to let go of big ‘C’ Catholicism in favour of small ‘c’ catholic universality, in all its messiness, and thereby stay true to the animating genesis of the Jesus movement.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:28

Michael Sibert is a teacher at a Senior Catholic College and a member of the ARC Secretariat

A Short, Secular History of the Catholic Church

Alan Clague

Jesus’ public life was devoted to instructing his followers on how to lead a life in harmony with God’s wishes. He gave no instructions on the organisation of his followers, except he appointed Peter as the leader. Initially, the community maintained close contact with the Jewish synagogue worshippers, obeying dietary restrictions and requiring male circumcision, but Christians were eventually rejected by the Jews. Peter decided that non-Jews could be admitted, and most of the old Jewish laws were abandoned. Paul went further, advocating gender equality, and giving slaves parity with free citizens.

By the end of the first century, Church leadership reappraised the situation. People disagreeing with leadership had emerged, probably forerunners of the Gnostics. Leadership by women was too daring a move, and was suppressed by the male leadership. Pope Clement wrote a letter to the Corinthians which implied that he was the most senior authority in the Church. A strong authority within the Church based on bishops had emerged.

The Gnostics were a major challenge to this centralised power structure. They were not subservient to Church authoritarian structures, they accepted gender equality, and were allowed great individual theological freedom. This can be seen in the plethora of Gnostic ‘gospels’ that have been rediscovered recently. Furthermore, this fragmentation of Christianity weakened the Church at a time when persecution of Christians was an existential threat to Christianity’s very

survival. The Church reacted vigorously to the presence of Gnosticism and other heretical versions of Christianity. The best-known reaction is the writing of St Irenaeus ‘Against Heresies’, in which he critically evaluates Gnosticism. This secular enforcement of discipline enabled Church survival.

The secular situation of the Church changed dramatically with the advent of Emperor Constantine at the start of the fourth century. The Church became an important ally of the emperor, and this brought it great wealth. At this stage, a major theological dispute regarding the divine nature of Jesus threatened Church unity. The disunity prejudiced the value of Christianity in unifying the empire after civil war, so, at Constantine’s insistence, the issue was resolved at a series of Church Councils, beginning with Nicaea. The affirmation of Christ’s divinity and the trinity caused the acrimonious secession of some Christian groups. The secular had intervened in a religious matter.

The twin issues of the increasing wealth and increasing secular power of the Church ensured that senior Church positions began to attract men whose primary interests were secular rather than religious. Jealousies between clerics in the two centres of religious power, Rome and Constantinople, ultimately resulted in the partition of the Church into separate, mutually antagonistic Catholic and Orthodox churches. The papacy became a secular prize fought over by the great families of Italy, enabling them to siphon wealth from the Church. To help protect that prize, many Popes from the 11th century until the end of the 17th century had the policy of appointing close relatives as cardinals (typically a nephew [Latin: *nepos*], hence the practice was called ‘nepotism’). At a lower level, the issue of priestly celibacy, so beloved by conservative Catholics today, also had a secular aspect. Married priests had the tendency to siphon off Church funds to support their families. This was avoided by making

celibacy mandatory. This secular greed was made more obvious in arguments about the legitimacy of individual Popes, resulting in a division of popes and antipopes at Rome and Avignon.

An area where the secular overwhelmed the religious is the promulgation of religious artifacts. Many churches have fragments of the alleged cross on which Jesus was crucified, discovered in the fourth century by St Helena. Their amount exceeds that of a typical cross. The headless skeleton of a man in the Cathedral at Santiago di Compostela was identified as that of St James the Greater. It became a rallying point for the Spanish in their efforts to remove the Moors from Spain. It is certainly as fraudulent as the Shroud of Turin. Religious artifacts were subverted to achieve a secular benefit for their holders. Related to the secularisation of artifacts was the abuse of indulgences by selling them. This precipitated Martin Luther to break away from the Catholic Church, with the advent of Protestantism.

The shameful use of religious fervour was channelled into primarily secular activities on many occasions. The Crusades were overtly an attempt to win back the holy sites of Israel from the Muslims, but became an excuse to plunder. In 1204, elements of the fourth Crusade even attacked and plundered Constantinople, destabilising the region, and adding to the final rift between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Also, in the 13th century the Pope authorised a Crusade against the Albigensians of Southern France. They had achieved great local success, in part because they revolted against Catholic Church corruption. After years of fighting they were ruthlessly destroyed in actions that have been described as genocide. The final secular outcome of this crusade was the takeover of independent Languedoc by France. Another secular use of religious fervour involved the treatment of the Jews. Until abolished by Protestant reformers, usury, the charging of interest on a loan, was considered a sin by Christians, but not by Jews. Thus, bishops in need of a loan could only use Jewish moneylenders. When the time came to repay the loan, the unscrupulous ones commenced a pogrom to punish these evil people who murdered Christ – hence no need to pay back the loan!

The 20th century continued the abuse of secular power. The advances of science signalled the end of the biblical creation story as history, damaging religious authority. The emancipation of women and the movement towards an egalitarian society were seen as threats to the patriarchal *status quo* in Catholicism, and elicited a strong conservative reaction by Church leaders. Pope St Pius X initiated a suppression of ‘Modernism’ in the Church, declaring it a heresy in his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, suppressing its adherents, and initiating an oath against modernism to be sworn by all priests. (See article on P.15.) Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* attempted to confine

women to the rearing of children. Pope St Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* attempted to prevent women from using contraception. This encyclical is of particular relevance because he was advised to the contrary by his own Commission.

How should religious controversy be approached in the 21st century? In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul admonished the community for quarrelling over religious matters. They should be ‘*united with the same mind and the same purpose*’ (1Cor1:10-13). Rather than resolving differences, the Church hierarchy chose vigorous suppression of those advocating change. The biblical approach to religious dispute resolution was the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-23). Peter had accepted the inclusion of gentiles, and the debate was about whether the males had to be circumcised. ‘After there had been much debate’ (Acts 15 7), the issue was decided by Peter and supported by James, the apostles and the elders. This contrasts with the relentless suppression of reform by St Pius X and the appointment of a cohort of conservative bishops by St John Paul II.

What is the ongoing legacy of the past influences of secular evils on today’s Church? Some of the great unresolved reform issues of today are remnants of secular issues of the past.

- ◆ **Clericalism:** The corruption of the Church by power and wealth is one aspect of clericalism. The corruption by wealth, so prominent in the past, has been largely replaced by the corruption by status – the ontological superiority of a priest who can say Mass and administer the sacraments is expanded illegitimately into other interpersonal areas. This showed itself most destructively in the issue of paedophilia by priests and religious, not only in the paedophiles themselves, but also in the reluctance of the bishops to act decisively in eliminating it.
- ◆ **Married Clergy:** There is no need to be afraid of married clergy – their existence is authorised in the New Testament, and the Church is well organised now to prevent low level corruption. In addition, it would help reduce the twin scandals of illegitimate children and paedophilia by clergy.
- ◆ **Female Priests:** The issue of female priests needs to be considered in today’s context, not that of the first century, when the secular idea of male supremacy was being defended. Late first century leaders chose to ignore Paul’s statement that in Christ there is no male or female, but even they allowed female deacons.
- ◆ **Synodality:** There is a great reluctance by conservative Catholics, particularly senior clergy, to embrace synodality. They are very comfortable with a pyramidal managerial structure, having non-ordained people at the bottom. Saint Paul realised that this was flawed. He wrote: ‘*To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the*

common good. To one is given through the spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.’ (1Cor12:4-10).

The pyramidal structure helped Christianity survive the Roman persecutions, but in more advantageous times it opened the door to corruption and incompetence. The past exclusion of the non-ordained from senior positions in the Church inhibited the full flowering of the Church’s talent.

This short review of secular influences on the Church should not be interpreted as defeatist. The

world has moved to a more egalitarian situation in terms of race and gender. The Church has started to open up its power structure. Sexuality is being discussed more on the basis of science, rather than on the prejudices of the past. The existential problem of today is the danger of major wars. The Church, contrary to its stance at times in the past, is now a strong defender of peace. Reform groups need to be relentless in their quest to remove the residual elements of what is really secularism and authoritarianism posing as deep religious tradition, so that the Church can take its rightful place as the earthly arm of the Kingdom of God.

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

The Honesty of Youth

Maureen Ryan

Over the Christmas season we had a visit from our 14-year-old grandson. He lives with his family in regional NSW and goes to a co-educational Catholic High School.

During his religious education lesson his class participated in a religion survey. Apparently, it was during the time of teacher shortages because COVID was spreading through the school. That day his class was not following the regular RE curriculum.

Approximately 28 pupils completed the simple survey and the survey question was connected to their spiritual/faith beliefs. My grandson was amazed to learn that only three students said they were Christians. Two of the three Christians, including my grandson, followed the Catholic faith and the third was an ‘Egyptian Christian’.

Of the other 25 students, the majority claimed to be atheist and the rest were not sure what they believed in. It seemed to my grandson that they didn’t see that it mattered whether they believed in God and/or religion.

I asked my grandson what their parents could think about their lack of Christian beliefs. He answered that he did not think the parents would be worried. He said that they sent their children to a Catholic school so that the children could make up

their own minds about religious faith. He also said that the parents would probably think that the Catholic school was a better school than the local state High schools. I think that my grandson deduced these conclusions from the group discussion following the survey.

As I know that about 90% of Catholics are disengaged from the Catholic Church, I would conclude that the parents would probably have very little connection with the Catholic Church themselves, both as adults and, even previously, during their childhood years. The only time that many of the parents would have been exposed to the Catholic Faith was through the Catholic schools or through effective Sacramental preparation (if available in their parish).

As I know that the Catholic School system works very hard at sharing the Gospels and the Christian values with their pupils, all I can assume is that the families’ lack of connection to the Catholic Church was caused by the Church’s out-of-touch theology, liturgy and teachings in today’s modern world. This has alienated these families and this alienation is spreading to the subsequent generations.

MAUREEN RYAN is a Member of the ARC Secretariat. She lives in the Blue Mountains, NSW, and is involved in Sacramental preparation in her local parish. The aim of the family-oriented preparation for the Sacraments is to help the families to have a deeper understanding of the Gospels and to encourage a new way of belonging to the Church.

Why Should Catholics Work for Peace, Justice and Security?

Frank Vavasour

The Catholic Church in Australia through its recent Plenary Council has concentrated on renewal necessary for its very viability. However, Australian Catholics give insufficient attention to public policy developments that threaten the justice, peace and security of everyone. Perhaps, owing to the fear of becoming ‘too political’, they shy away from taking any visible action, not realising that scripture compels them to take strong steps to achieve security in the world.

Here are some scriptural points pertinent to non-violent security:

- ◇ Israel’s God was not like the Gods of other nations who fought for supremacy (Genesis 50:19-20). [The US has never resiled from being supreme militarily.] The ‘Do not kill’ commandment and the ‘eye for an eye’ rule feature in Exodus (21:23-27). Killing is problematic in war; the response to the Twin tower ‘9/11’ attack was vengeful and disproportionate; and the morality of assassination is unquestioned. The cycle of violence, therefore, has not been broken.
- ◇ The Psalms recommend not placing trust in horse and chariots – the major weapons of the day (Ps 20). Even in the Old Testament there is instance of non-violence by Elisha when confronted with violence in *2 Kings* 6:8-23. Tolerating Jeroboam’s tyranny led to ruin (*1 Kings* 13:2) while, in contrast, the escape from Egypt’s slavery became a founding experience for Israel (*Exodus* 32).
- ◇ Isaiah (740 BC) was a national figure who tried to persuade Judah’s kings (Ahaz & Hezekiah) not to form military alliances with other nations but to trust in God, even when under threat of Assyrian invasion. (Is 30-31). ‘Isaiah saw political alliances as a religious question. Peace

for him was justice and security. Armed Forces employed by the State cannot bring security to the community, no matter how great they are. Witness is a religious activity with inevitable political consequences.’ (Brendan Lovett, 1984).

- ◇ Jesus followed the line of prophets; he embodied peace and lived it out: ‘Peace’ was the first word he used to greet his disciples and he sent them to the Galilean villages to discuss ways to support each other – other than to take-up arms. ‘Enough of that’, he said to his disciples when they declared they had only two swords. It is highly instructive and indispensable for peace too, how Jesus did not demonise even Herod or Pilate; rather he encouraged love of enemies (Mt 5:43-5).
- ◇ John of Patmos accepted Daniel’s plan of not resorting to guerrilla warfare but to engage non-violent resistance, ‘armed’ with the assurance that God had already provided the victory (*Dan* 12:1-3). The book of *Revelation*, therefore, encourages Christians creatively not to accommodate the deceitful, seductive, threatening and, inevitably, violent ways of the ‘beast 666’, ‘which looks a lot like the Roman empire’. **‘The church in every age must name the beast’**, as Adela Yarbro Collins powerfully states.

Naming the beast

Many of Judaic and Islamic faith as well as Australian Christians overlook or rationalise their scripture when it comes to violence in relation to war and, with the exception of the conflicts in Iraq and perhaps Timor-Leste, have been less than prominent in protests. But non-violent demonstrations and public protests are shown to be effective (*Why Civil Resistance Works* – Chenoweth & Stephens, 2011). The ‘beast’ is the consortium of super powers which promotes the

build-up of armaments, acting in their own interest, or investor self-interest trumped up as national interest. Catholics should be at the forefront in ‘naming the beast’. In doing so, they should be aware of the major peace groups in Australia (IPAN, ICAN, MAPW, AWPR, PCA) whose values are also supported by scripture.

Why should Australian Catholics Resist Militarism?

Australia has always been a sub-imperial power and, particularly in the last decade, has been shown to uphold US imperial power with policy goals the same as Washington’s (Clinton Fernandez, 2022). Fernandez outlines the precedence of investor-rights over sovereignty in Australia together with (most) states of the world and details the ownership of Australia’s mining companies – all US majority owned, bar one.

Structural imbalances engineered by elites need to be addressed. Research shows the aid and supportive diplomatic measures to our neighbours may outstrip benefits supplied by military means for our security. The Australian **military** budget 2022 has skyrocketed to **2.2%** of GDP, the **Aid** portion of Australian Government spending has declined steadily to **0.21%** 2021-2022 {climbing since to 0.8%, Fernandez}. Still, Australia spends ten times more on Defence than on Aid. The priorities are all wrong.

Other ‘partnership agreements’ such as AUKUS, QUAD, RIMPAC and the Forward Posture Agreement (FPA) have also sprung into being without prior discussion in Parliament, with the Public or with our ASEAN Pacific neighbours. The FPA (2017), for instance, allows for the prepositioning of material and troops on stations on Australia’s soil exclusively for the use of US Forces. This means the US can launch a war from bases in Australia, guided from Pine Gap, which are beyond Australia’s control, leaving it difficult for Australia to disengage from any such conflict.

The Australian Government publishes its Strategic Defence Review in March 2023; it has the hallmarks of being a pro-military, foregone conclusion, announcing the type of nuclear submarines to be purchased. Many media articles alert us to the nature of these developments and the folly of buying into the nuclear submarine program.

In October 2022, Profs. Joseph Camilleri, Richard Falk and Chandra Muzafar presented their essential and urgent steps for peace in the short and long term, including in respect to Ukraine. The Independent Peaceful Australian Network (IPAN) held a conference and other events in Canberra in November 2022 presenting to Parliament its People’s Inquiry, ‘Charting Our Own Course’, questioning the involvement of Australia in US-led wars. Palm Sunday Speakers (April 2nd, 2023) intend to address some of these issues.

The above representations may have little impact on the March Review and decisions made in respect to it. ‘Governments are reactive and will not instigate these types of reforms on their own,’ says Camilleri. Although it was a pre-election promise that Australia would sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – which, by the way, the Australian Bishops’ Conference has endorsed – this has not happened as yet. Australia’s signature of this comprehensive Treaty would make a definite difference towards peace. However, given the new AUKUS and QUAD agreements that have been made, the acquisition of nuclear arms is unclear, so Australia’s signing of the TPNW is less likely.

Undeterred by the politics, therefore, and not overwhelmed by recent developments, it is necessary that the whole Australian Church be educated and awake. Encouraged by scripture, Catholics, along with their bishops, would do well to be courageous in pressing for public policy and action that overcomes the deception of militarism as the path to peace and security.

FRANK VAVASOUR is an active member of a number of peace groups. He is a long-standing member of ARC.

The Dash

Noelene Uren

A friend gave me a copy of a poem entitled ‘The Dash’. It refers to that little line that appears on a death notice between the date of birth and the date of death. Those two dates aren’t really important. It’s the dash in the middle that counts, and how we spend it. As the poem says,

*For it matters not how much we own;
the cars— the house— the cash.
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash.*

Of course we can’t really go past the Scriptures for guidance on how we live our lives, but I’ve always had a fondness for Shakespeare. When it comes to insight into human behaviour, whatever it is, Shakespeare will have words to express it. So if we’re talking about how we should live our lives, I’d like to reflect on the scene in Hamlet where Polonius is advising his son, Laertes, on how to live his life as a young man. He tells him not to give ‘Any reckless thought his act’; to ‘Be familiar, but by no means vulgar’; to ‘Neither a borrower nor a lender be,’ and ‘The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.’ But the one I like best of all is,

*‘This above all, to thine own self be true
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou can’st not then be false to any man.’*

To thine own self be true. I always thought that Polonius must have had a high opinion of his son. The ‘self’ Laertes was to be true to must have been a good person.

But how do we define a good person? I recently read a book where a cynic defined a good person as one who would do you over but not enjoy it. I’m sure we can do better than that! Maybe it’s a person of high principles, but that is also open to question. Once a parent in my school described me as ‘a scary lady’. I thought I was very approachable. I later talked to my family about it and my son said, ‘But you are a scary lady’.

When I asked why, he replied, ‘You always stick to your principles and very few people these days do that. That makes you scary.’

I thought this was a lovely compliment until I really thought about it; then I started to have doubts. Was sticking to my principles just stubbornness or even sheer bloody mindedness that would not allow me to give in?

What about integrity? The definition says ‘uprightness, virtue, moral soundness’. Fine, but I’ve known some people, and I’m sure you have, who considered themselves models of virtue, yet their attitude to others was often appalling. Are any of you old enough to remember the green catechism? (Don’t nod. As the lead actress in a play I saw recently said, ‘Never say your name out loud, your face might hear.’) Anyway, in the green catechism, amongst the sins listed were backbiting, calumny and detraction. I’ve known a few self-styled virtuous people who were guilty of all of those.

Being true to our religious beliefs? That should keep us from being false to anyone, but the trouble with that is that rules and regulations can get in the way. There was a tremendously moving scene in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The Jewish father, played by Topol, has had two of his daughters rebel against the matchmaker and choose the husband she wanted. He has capitulated. In each case, the daughter loves the man of her choice and each one is a good, Jewish lad. But then the third daughter wants to marry the man she loves and he is a Gentile. In the scene I remember Topol is ploughing a field. He debates the question with himself but in the end he can’t accept his daughter’s choice. He punches the air and shouts, ‘No, no, no.’ So he rejects his daughter. His strong religious beliefs outweigh his love for his daughter. It was a moral dilemma that could leave any of us torn.

So is love the only answer? Love is open to a wide range of meanings and emotions so how does it affect the choices we make and how we live? Thinking about this, I recently came across a quote that really appealed to me. It was, ‘It’s not love that makes the world go round but loyalty—to the teachings of Christ, our partners, families, friends, community, fellow human beings, our country.’ So I may not be able to say to anyone other than those dearest to me: ‘I love you’; but I can say: ‘I will always be loyal to you.’ What greater promise could we make and how better can we express, ‘This is the self to which I will always be true.’ Maybe this is the best way to spend our ‘Dash’.

NOELENE UREN is a retired Primary School Principal. She is a Member of ARC Secretariat and a long-time contributor to
ARC*Voice*

Reflecting on the Ratzinger papacy

Paul Collins



I actually have a letter personally signed by Joseph Ratzinger. It was the last in a three-year-long correspondence between the then Congregation (now Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) and myself, focusing on ‘errors’ in my 1997 book *Papal Power* (London, Harper Collins). The letter was clear that the DDF was preparing to censure me, which I forestalled by resigning from active priestly ministry.

Personal interactions aside, I have real respect for Joseph Ratzinger because he saved Catholicism during the last years of John Paul II, who was seriously ill for several years before he died on 2 April 2005. Those years were difficult as the pope’s ability to govern and make decisions declined. Ratzinger, his closest collaborator, saw this close-up and intimately. Clearly, John Paul should have resigned.

After John Paul’s funeral the cardinals gathered in Rome for formal pre-conclave discussions and, more importantly, informal meetings. These interactions gave them a chance to size each other up and look for a consensus candidate.

Ratzinger was quickly elected in the April 2005 conclave. His only challenger was Jorge Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires. As pope, Benedict received a mixed reception. Traditionalists were ecstatic; Vatican II Catholics respectfully welcomed him. Hans Küng said: ‘The name Benedict XVI leaves open the possibility for a more moderate papacy.’ Calling himself ‘Benedict’ signalled he wasn’t going to be ‘John Paul III’.

No one in the media had given Ratzinger a chance of being elected; he was seen as too close to John Paul. So, I was shocked when, standing in the Piazza of Saint Peter’s with ABC TV News, his election was announced.

Who was Joseph Alois Ratzinger? Born in Marktl-am-Inn in Bavaria in April 1927, he grew up under the Nazis. There was no sympathy for National Socialism in the Ratzinger household, but at 16 he was drafted unwillingly into the Hitler Youth and then into the German army. After the war he entered the Munich-Freising seminary and was ordained priest in 1951.

In 1958 he entered academic life teaching first at Bonn University, then Münster. In 1966 he was

appointed professor of Catholic theology at Tübingen University. He played an important role at Vatican Council II (1962-1965) and was associated with the reformist majority.

But after the Council he became disillusioned with what he saw as the crassness and banality of the new vernacular liturgy, the exodus from religious life and priesthood and the student riots of 1967-1968. He resigned from Tübingen in 1969 and joined the theology faculty at Regensburg University.

In 1977 he was appointed Archbishop of Munich. He was not well received by the local clergy who found him remote and there were a number of sexual abuse cases that he handled badly. It was already clear in Munich that good governance was not his gift. In 1991 John Paul appointed him to head-up the DDF, where he remained until his papal election in 2005.

He was very busy at DDF issuing statements, disciplining theologians and authors, condemning liberation theology and earning nick-names like ‘God’s Rottweiler’ and *Der Panzer Kardinal*. Well-known theologians like Hans Küng, Charles Curran, Edward Schillebeeckx and many other less famous theologians were condemned to silence or to losing their appointments.

Among a series of ill-advised documents, the DDF issued the Declaration *Dominus Jesus* (2000) which insultingly claimed that the Anglican and Protestant communions ‘were not churches in the proper sense’.

In the early-2000s, with the sexual abuse crisis exploding, the DDF decreed that all credible cases were to be reported to it for review. Bishops were told that everything was subject to ‘pontifical secrecy’ and cases were not reported to local police. At least, Ratzinger became aware of the crisis.

There was absolutely no doubt about Benedict’s intelligence and what theologian Uta Ranke-Heinemann calls his *esprit de finesse* by which she means his perceptiveness and sensitivity. Essentially, Benedict was a European intellectual who was redeemed by his genuine Bavarian Catholic piety

and his love of music, especially Mozart. Mozart's music 'touches me very deeply, because it is so luminous and yet at the same time so profound'. Benedict was a concert standard pianist.

As pope it became clear again that governance was not his strength. Despite long experience in the Vatican, he was unable to bring the bureaucracy to heel and several of his appointments were disasters. An example is Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone as Secretary of State, the equivalent of papal prime minister and foreign minister. Bertone was narrow-minded and parochial. Things in the Vatican went from bad to worse with internal conflict, document leaks and stories of a 'gay lobby'.

Endless discussions of the 'danger of relativism', by which Benedict really meant post-modernism, did nothing for Catholics in the global south, particularly Latin America, who saw him as deeply Eurocentric, lacking understanding of their reality.

Benedict's jaundiced views on worship led to his granting widespread permission to use an outdated Latin liturgy introduced in the 16th century to satisfy

a noisy reactionary clique. Another disastrous error was the imposition of a 'new' literal English translation of the Latin of the Mass and sacraments which has left us with almost unspeakable English. He also lacks an historico-critical sense which meant he tended to see issues abstractly rather than in a living, existential sense.

Benedict's most important act was his resignation because in one fell-swoop he relativised the papacy and drained it of its 'mystery'. It showed him as a normal man who admitted that he had 'come to the certainty that my strengths, due to advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry'. That required humility; the last pope to have resigned was Celestine V in 1294.

It is ironic that the pope who denounced relativism actually relativised papal authority and set a precedent for subsequent popes to do the same. Thank you, Benedict XVI.

PAUL COLLINS is a former practising Catholic priest, a writer, a historian, an environmentalist and a broadcaster.

**Extract from William Martin Morris,
Benedict, Me and the Cardinals Three
(the story of the Dismissal of Bishop Bill Morris by Pope Benedict XVI)
Pages 160-161**

... we were led into an even larger room with Pope Benedict seated behind a desk ... As he began to speak I remember thinking, am I really hearing what Benedict is saying, for I felt as if I was being transported back in time to my meeting with Cardinals Re, Arinze and Levada, that I was listening once again to Levada, stating that I was teaching things that the Holy Father had said could not be taught or spoken of. That is, that I was doing this by raising such matters as discussing the recognition of Anglican, Lutheran and Uniting Church orders as well as **discussing the ordination of women**, matters which had been spoken of definitively by the Pope and the Church. Pope Benedict was using exactly the same language as Levada had used, focussing on the misreading and misinterpretation of matters raised in my Advent Pastoral Letter of 2006 which had addressed local pastoral questions and matters which were and still are in ferment generally across the whole Church. He said my doctrinal teaching around these matters contained errors and, because of this, my pastoral leadership was flawed by teaching on these matter and allowing them to be discussed. At that point I said to the Holy Father that I had not taught these matters and to say so was a misreading and a misinterpretation of the 2006 Advent Letter.

It was like pushing a button on a tape recorder for Benedict repeated the exact statement he had just made, but finishing this time with the words that 'it was **'God's will that I should resign'**. I responded by saying that I did not believe it was God's will that I should resign as I had never broken *communio* or taught against Church teaching. He then went on to say that I was a very gifted and charismatic person but too practical in nature and that I lacked the appropriate charism to be a diocesan bishop, as I was not in step with the theology of the Magisterium of the Church and that my gifts could be used by the Church in other areas but not as diocesan bishop.

The 'appropriate charism' which Bishop Morris appeared to lack was his daring to even mention in his Advent Letter the words 'Ordination of Women', suggesting that it was one of several possible solutions to the problem of the shortage of priests. Pope Benedict's apparent knowledge of God's mind seems to me to be taking Papal Infallibility way too far.

Editor

The Oath Against Modernism

Pope Pius X - 1910

To be sworn to by all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers,
religious superiors, and professors in philosophical-
theological seminaries.

I . . . firmly embrace and accept each and every definition that has been set forth and declared by the unerring teaching authority of the Church, especially those principal truths which are directly opposed to the errors of this day. And first of all, I profess that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (see Rom. 1:19), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated. Secondly, I accept and acknowledge the external proofs of revelation, that is, divine acts and especially miracles and prophecies as the surest signs of the divine origin of the Christian religion and I hold that these same proofs are well adapted to the understanding of all eras and all men, even of this time. Thirdly, I believe with equally firm faith that the Church, the guardian and teacher of the revealed word, was personally instituted by the real and historical Christ when he lived among us, and that the Church was built upon Peter, the prince of the apostolic hierarchy, and his successors for the duration of time. Fourthly, I sincerely hold that the doctrine of faith was handed down to us from the apostles through the orthodox Fathers in exactly the same meaning and always in the same purport. Therefore, I entirely reject the 'heretical' misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another different from the one which the Church held previously. I also condemn every error according to which, in place of the divine deposit which has been given to the spouse of Christ to be carefully guarded by her, there is put a philosophical figment or product of a human conscience that has gradually been developed by human effort and will continue to develop indefinitely. Fifthly, I hold with certainty and sincerely confess that faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source. By this assent, because of the authority of the supremely truthful God, we believe to be true that which has been revealed and attested to by a personal God, our creator and lord.

Furthermore, with due reverence, I submit and adhere with my whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili*, especially those concerning what is known as the history of dogmas. I also reject the error of those who say that the faith held by the Church can contradict history, and that Catholic dogmas, in the sense in which they are now understood, are irreconcilable with a more realistic view of the origins of the Christian religion. I also condemn and reject the opinion of those who say that a well-educated Christian

assumes a dual personality: that of a believer and at the same time of a historian, as if it were permissible for a historian to hold things that contradict the faith of the believer, or to establish premises which, provided there be no direct denial of dogmas, would lead to the conclusion that dogmas are either false or doubtful. Likewise, I reject that method of judging and interpreting Sacred Scripture which, departing from the tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith, and the norms of the Apostolic See, embraces the misrepresentations of the rationalists and with no prudence or restraint adopts textual criticism as the one and supreme norm. Furthermore, I reject the opinion of those who hold that a professor lecturing or writing on a historico-theological subject should first put aside any preconceived opinion about the supernatural origin of Catholic tradition or about the divine promise of help to preserve all revealed truth forever; and that they should then interpret the writings of each of the Fathers solely by scientific principles, excluding all sacred authority, and with the same liberty of judgment that is common in the investigation of all ordinary historical documents.

Finally, I declare that I am completely opposed to the error of the modernists who hold that there is nothing divine in sacred tradition; or what is far worse, say that there is, but in a pantheistic sense, with the result that there would remain nothing but this plain simple fact—one to be put on a par with the ordinary facts of history—the fact, namely, that a group of men by their own labour, skill and talent have continued through subsequent ages a school begun by Christ and his apostles. I firmly hold, then, and shall hold to my dying breath the belief of the Fathers in the charism of truth, which certainly is, was, and always will be in the succession of the episcopacy from the apostles. The purpose of this is, then, not that dogma may be tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age; rather, that the absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning may never be believed to be different, may never be understood in any other way.

I promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or in writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God. . .

Source: *Wikipedia*

Until **17 July 1967** the **Oath against Modernism** was compulsory for all ordained Catholic clergy. Generations of priests were bound by its edicts. Father Joseph Ratzinger, ordained on **29 June 1951**, would have been influenced by the Oath and, despite his early enthusiasm for Vatican II changes, it may explain his about-face back to his previous traditionalist stand. This may well apply to others of the ageing curia. Dare we hope that, with Pope Benedict's death, Pope Francis (and future Popes) will now feel freer to heed their own consciences and bring about changes for which the world is crying out. Ordaining women priests would be a good start.

George Pell, ordained on **15 August 1966**, would have been among the last to take the oath.

Editor



WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

A voice for women's equality in the Roman Catholic Church



One of our favourite quotes from the Vatican is from Archbishop Gänswein, Pope Benedict's personal secretary: *I am of course aware that there is a **noisy movement** which has as its main ideological goal the fight for the female priesthood.*

We embrace this quote because while the Vatican and other misogynistic enterprises try to dismiss women with these kinds of labels, ('bossy,' 'pushy' - we've heard them all!), **this 'noise' is the call for justice.** We refuse to be silent in the face of inequality, and do everything we can to amplify the voices of women in the church.

And in 2022, oh, were we *noisy*.

Women's ordination was in the headlines and in the air **every single month of 2022.** Women's ordination is no longer 'the elephant in the room' but the question of the hour.

And the Vatican knows it.

From the USCCB national synod report calling women's ordination to the priesthood 'a matter of justice', to an *America* magazine editor putting the question to the pope directly, and even our response published in *America*. What was once a punishable taboo topic is now a mainstream conversation.

WOC's prayerful, playful, and prophetic noise has changed the conversation.

Without a doubt, 2023 will be an important year for the church and particularly for the question of women's ordination. **Please include WOC in your giving to ensure our holy noise continues to be heard in the halls of power.**

It is no exaggeration to say that this is hard work, and we will face enormous challenges in the year to come.

Our call for your support this season is both urgent and necessary so that we may continue to build our capacity to make noise, make change, and make sure women's ordination is front and center. We're noisemakers all year long, but let's celebrate extra hard as the new year approaches.

Thank you for your solidarity and support! WOC is possible because of you.

Kate McElwee
Executive Director

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Have your say!

ARCVoice 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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