



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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A new Era for ARC

Much has been in the planning since the discussion we had at the ARC Annual General Meeting in October last year. We agreed at that time to attempt to reach out to more, and younger, people in promoting what we do and to build a new website as a way of achieving this. And now we have completed it:

www.australianreformingcatholics.au

The emphasis on the Home Page is on giving enough information to encourage the viewer to be curious enough to at least contact us, or to join us after they learn of our approach and the events we are planning. For existing members, not only will it encourage you to add to the content, but a range of information will be much easier to access. We are in the process of finalising the indexing of all *ARCVoice* material into subject headings to enable a whole library of local and international articles to be perused easily. Then members will be able to see something of the history of the Church reform movement and also so much of the theology and progressive thought that has accompanied it. Bishop Tim Norton, Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane, who is a member of ARC, believes that such a resource would be of great value for high school teachers.

The website also gives us greater scope for gaining members' opinion about Church matters and what we could or should be doing to influence the reform that we advocate. We will be able to run various types of surveys to gain input and use these both to help govern what we say and do as an organisation and to prepare reports or submissions to various authorities. Input to surveys, information like the above, and some meetings and events will only be open to ARC members. Therefore, you will need to log in with a password to gain access to these parts. (Details regarding how to do this are on page 2 of this edition.)

We intend to hold our meetings and events via our Zoom room which we set up last year. This enables our members who are spread across Australia to

participate easily, provided that they have a computer and email address. Our next event will be a meeting via Zoom on the 6th of July with Bishop Paul Bird, the Bishop of Ballarat, where anyone will be invited to participate in a Q and A discussion of important issues in Church reform. See more details on the new ARC website. Bishop Tim Norton is also eager to meet and have a discussion with ARC members at some stage in the near future. Watch out for that too.

It is our hope that, progressively, these initiatives will encourage more people to join us as members. As usual, at this time of the year, as we invite you to renew your membership, we have sent you an extra copy of *ARCVoice* to hand to anyone who might be interested to join. We trust that you will help to take us forward by distributing *ARCVoice* and asking those around you, especially fellow parishioners, to have a look at the new ARC website.

John Buggy

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The New ARC Website

When and How to Register and Log In

You do not need to log in to view almost everything on the website. However, there will be some information that is available for ARC members only. Currently, that extra information is only the full access to all the past editions of ARCVoice dating back to 2001. You need to log in to view these. Initially the system merely wants to match a password that you create with your email address and that is done by a once only “Register” procedure, followed by a standard “Login” procedure.

The “Register” and “Log In” Procedure

1. Open the website by typing www.australianreformingcatholics.au in your browser and click ‘Enter’.
2. When the Home Page opens, click on the “Login/Register” button in the top right-hand corner of the screen.
3. When the “Login” form opens, type in your email address, **do not enter any password**, and then click **“Register”** (NOT “Log in”).
4. When the “Register” form opens, create a “User Name” (four characters will do). This makes it easier when logging in later on because you do not have to type your whole email address. If you prefer to use it, make sure you record it somewhere.
5. Fill in your first name, last name, and email address.
6. Create a password that you will need to use each time that you log in. The password must contain a minimum of eight characters containing at least one upper case letter, one lower case letter, and one number. Type it again to “Confirm password” (you may be able to check that the two entries match by clicking on the small circular symbol at the end of each line).
7. Then click on **“Register”** (NOT “Login”). You have now registered.
8. A notice will come up stating that you will receive an email when your registration is approved (*check your spam or trash box if it does not go to your inbox*). When you receive that email (it may be quite some time later), you can open the website again, click on the “Login/Register” button again, enter your User Name or email address and password. This time you click on the blue **“Login”** bar. You are now logged in.
9. The words “Your Account” are added to the bar in the top right corner of your screen and by clicking there you may view and add to your profile and /or change your password by clicking on the little black wheel located to the right of your name.

(You may receive an email saying that your account has been deleted. Simply ignore this glitch.)

Any problems? Email me at: jbuggy@ozemail.com.au or call me on 0419 217 543 – John Buggy

Letter

I just wanted to tell you that I had a look at the new ARC website and it is GREAT! What an improvement! I was very impressed – so much so that I registered with the site. It was inviting and interesting. Tell your colleagues great job!

Synod of Bishops: for the first time ever, women get to vote

Matthieu Lasserre

The Rome-based general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops reveals major changes that its president, Pope Francis, has made to the body's membership.

For the first time ever, women (some 40 of them) will be able to vote alongside Roman Catholic hierarchs and Vatican officials at assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. Cardinals Mario Grech, the Synod's secretary general, and Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, the rapporteur at the upcoming assembly in October, unveiled this and other changes during a press briefing on Wednesday at the Vatican.

Undoubtedly, the most important among the changes is the elimination of the auditors, people who were previously allowed to speak in the assembly, but did not have the right to vote. From now on, '70 non-bishop members who represent other faithful of the people of God (priests, consecrated men/women, deacons, lay faithful)' – all appointed or approved by the pope – will be able to speak and, above all, participate in voting on decisions the Synod makes.

Voting rights for women

'It is requested that 50 percent of them be women and that the presence of young people also be valued,' the two cardinals said during the Vatican briefing. This is a major change and is in line with the pope's desire to include more women in the Church's consultative and decision-making bodies. The members, who will make up about a quarter of the participants, will be selected based on 'not only their general culture and prudence, but also their knowledge, both theoretical and practical, as well as their participation in various capacities in the synodal process'.

Francis on April 7 approved the decision to give these 70 members the vote

'This choice is in continuity with the progressive appropriation of the constitutive synodal dimension of the Church and the consequent understanding of the institutions through which it is exercised,' says a fact sheet issued by the Synod secretariat. 'Furthermore, in addition to the 70 non-bishop members mentioned above, it is worth mentioning that it will also be possible to have non-bishop members among the pontifically appointed members,' it also notes.

The presence of women religious formalized

Another notable change is that the Apostolic Constitution, which governs the composition of these assemblies, will now mention 'five women religious and five men religious' instead of the 'ten clerics' of religious congregations elected by their representative bodies who previously sat in the synod. Finally, representatives from the Vatican dicasteries will no longer participate ex-officio, but will be appointed directly by the pope.

Until now, the only woman with a vote at the Synod of Bishops, French Sister Nathalie Becquart was appointed in February 2021 as the institution's undersecretary. The XVI ordinary general assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in October in Rome. Participants will examine the texts sent to Rome from all continents as part of the Synod on Synodality, intended for reflection on the future of the Church. A second assembly will then be held October 2024 to conclude this synodal process.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/synod-of-bishops-for-the-first-time-ever-women-get-to-vote/7717>

Synodality and ordinary Catholics

If synodality is about renewal in the Holy Spirit, a renewal of liturgy is one of the forms it must take

Thomas O'Loughlin

When I ask 'ordinary Catholics' what they think of all the discussions about synodality and Pope Francis' call for us to become a synodal Church, I usually get blank stares. Some assume that I am one of those academic types that enjoys asking irrelevant questions; others simply say that they haven't got a clue what I am talking about.

We had better face an awkward truth: while theologians and clergy are agog about synodality – some eager, some disdainful – for a very large proportion of the People of God, it is just some complicated new idea that makes little sense.

I had better clarify what I mean by 'ordinary Catholic'. I mean someone who is not a cleric, nor a member of some special group within the Church (such as a prayer group, or the choir, or the parish council), and who probably does not subscribe to any special religious news service whether it is *La Croix* or *The Tablet* – and who probably just passes by the various leaflets, magazines and diocesan papers that are at the back of church buildings.

So, the question arises: what will reach this large group of sisters and brothers? How will their experience of being disciples be touched and enhanced by our turn towards synodality?

Experiencing synodality:

If this whole movement is to be more than just words, it must give disciples a richer liturgical experience. This is because it is at the liturgy that most ordinary Catholics have their experience of what it means to be Church. That experience must, somehow, do three things:

1. It must engage them as individuals within a community;
2. It must, to be true to the fundamental insight of synodality, involve a deeper listening to the word of God and to one another;
3. It must lead to a greater sense of their own dignity as brothers and sisters in baptism who are called as a people to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

If synodality is about renewal in the Spirit, a renewal of liturgy is one of the forms it must take.

What will it look like?

At a celebration of the Eucharist in the University Parish in Leuven, Belgium, The Begijnhofkerk has been re-arranged to show that we gather to hear the Word of God each time we celebrate.

In this arrangement the Word of God is being shared among the gathering. The assembly is arranged so that it is a community event of listening. They are not consuming a message being dispensed from the front of a lecture hall.

We are the people of memory. Only when we recall 'the mighty acts of God' can we recognise our identity as disciples of the Christ.

Listening is not just hearing words; it is giving the words a chance to seep into us. Yet most ordinary Catholics are arranged in row after row like children in an old-fashioned classroom. We now know that the lecture hall only works as a communication venue for those who are already highly involved, but (60 years after the reform of the liturgy) this much better format is strange to most Catholics.

It is worth noting that in this church-building they did no elaborate re-building work – they just put the chairs in a rough circle because this allows people to feel they are a community and it helps focus people in their listening.

We are all celebrants.

The great shift in liturgy at Vatican II was a move from the notion of a presbyter who celebrates on behalf of the baptised to the recognition that we, as God's sons and daughters, are all celebrating God's goodness. We are all celebrants.

But how does the ordinary Catholic get an experience of this?

The Begijnhofkerk has been re-arranged so that all can stand around the Lord's table. We are not consumers at the Eucharist. We are guests. We are a celebrating community.

If synodality is to take root, it will require an experience of solidarity in discipleship. In an arrangement like this, that solidarity can become a weekly experience.

THOMAS O'LOUGHLIN is a presbyter of the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and professor-emeritus of historical theology at the University of Nottingham (UK). His latest book is *Eating Together, Becoming One: Taking Up Pope Francis's Call to Theologians* (Liturgical Press, 2019).

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/editorials/synodality-and-ordinary-catholics/17519>

International Survey of Catholic Women

The survey was initiated by international organisation Catholic Women Speak in response to Pope Francis' invitation for submissions to the Synod of Bishops on Synodality.

The newly published *International Survey of Catholic Women* (ISCW) was presented at the Vatican to coincide with International Women's Day on Wednesday (March 8). The study surveyed 7,200 responses from participants across 104 countries, and comes as Pope Francis leads the Church in a discussion about whether women should have a greater role in its governance and ceremonies. Francis has ruled out female priests, but the diaconate is a possibility.

Led by Drs Tracy McEwan and Kathleen McPhillips from the University of Newcastle, the survey details 20 key findings and further presents four key recommendations from the responses.

'The survey captured the complex diversity, insights, and shared concerns of thousands of Catholic women from around the world,' Dr McEwan explained.

'We asked about identity, views on church reform and various issues impacting women, including women in church leadership and sexual abuse, among many other things.

'We found even when women have considerable struggles with Catholic institutions, nearly 90 per cent said their Catholic identity is important to them.

'Many continue to practise their faith despite significant concern, frustration and dissatisfaction with the institutional church.'

Catholic Women Speak invited the research team at the University of Newcastle, along with Professor Emeritus Tina Beattie from Roehampton University UK, to devise and run the survey and submit a report to the Vatican.

The work has already had global impact, capturing the attention of senior Vatican officials working on the Synod content and prompting an invitation for the team to present the findings in-person.

'The overwhelming response we've had is a clear indicator of just how silenced Catholic women have felt,' Dr McEwan said.

Comprising quantitative and qualitative data, the survey included open-ended questions, which resulted in some significant insights.

One Australian responder commented: *'Being a woman in the Church is hard – we walk the line of being valuable members of society but voiceless in many elements of the Church. I am trying to find the path of being a modern woman and someone who fits within the role available.'*

Another in the UK wrote: *'I cling on to the Church by my fingernails, because of the Eucharist and in spite of many of its clergy.'*

'These are just two of the thousands of powerful statements we received,' Dr McEwan explained.

'Another fascinating insight is the stark responses between older and younger generations – and not in the way you might think.

'For example, we found many of those aged over 70 strongly supported same sex marriage, and the homily being preached by women, whereas support numbers were much smaller in the 18-40 age group.'

Respondents participated from Europe, Canada, USA, South America, the Pacific, Africa, Southeast Asia and Australia, among other locations.

'More research is needed to explore what this actually means for the future of the Catholic Church in these regions,' Dr McPhillips said.

'The volume of women engaging in the ISCW reflects their shared concerns on the current state of church culture and gender politics. We have thousands of Catholic women calling for genuine change here.'

Based on the survey findings, the team has made a series of recommendations, including:

- ◆ Greater access for women to meaningful pastoral and organisational leadership, including the ordination of women;
- ◆ enacting guidelines to eliminate sexual, spiritual and physical violence;
- ◆ requirements around reporting perpetrators to authorities;
- ◆ addressing corruption and economic mismanagement by putting in place transparent and accountable decision-making and management practices;
- ◆ ensuring Catholic social teaching addresses poverty, climate change, homelessness, war, and economic injustice.

The Catholic Church is Australia's principal non-government provider of healthcare, education and welfare. It employs almost two per cent of the Australian workforce and represents the 20 per cent of the Australian population who identify as Catholic.

'This work matters to everyone. The Catholic Church is present in so many areas of Australian life, including social policy, and we should all be paying attention', Dr McPhillips added.

Dr KATHLEEN McPHILLIPS is looking into the difficult issue of child sexual abuse in religious organisations in Australia. As a sociologist of religion, gender and mental health, Kathleen has been investigating the impacts of child sexual abuse on survivors as well as the responses from institutions.

Dr TRACY McEWAN is a theologian and sociologist of religion and gender. Her research, writing and presenting interests include: Catholic ecclesiology, gender, sexuality and violence; women's religious experience.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the spirit of change reflected in the article on page 3 of this edition and the disappointment expressed in the article below. Although Pope Francis has been criticised for having a bit of a 'blind spot' in relation to the aspirations of women in the Church, he has now given some influential women voting rights in a very high level forum. Meanwhile, in the three years since the article below was written, our own bishops, as a Conference, despite receiving a bit of shake up at the Plenary Council, have hardly moved in the direction that Pope Francis is hoping they will take. Could we expect that the Synod on Synodality held over this year and next will finally motivate them?

John Buggy

A Plenary of Broken Promises?

Gail Freyne

When the people in the pews get so restless that evidence of deceptive dealing at the top of the Catholic Church in Australia starts falling off the back of trucks these same leaders should know that they have a calamity looming on their collective horizon.

It is not only the Catholic faithful who are being manipulated. The federal government, and therefore all the people of Australia, are being duped. A lot of time and money was expended by taxpayers to fund the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Catholic Church's criminal and moral failings were exposed by this investigation and the barque, already foundering, began to take on serious water as the people departed, with their wallets, by the hundreds of thousands.

Finally realising that a public relations effort must be launched to staunch the flow, the Australian Catholics Bishops Conference (ACBC) initiated a series of initiatives. Perhaps the most important, launched after discussions with the Royal Commission, was the formation in early 2007 of the Catholic Professional Standards Ltd (CPSL), a new and independent body tasked to set standards within the Church for child safety, and then to audit and report on compliance with these standards by the bishops and religious leaders. Finally, the reports were to be made public, ensuring that a new benchmark of accountability was set for church leaders. Subsequently, the Church's official response to the Royal Commission mentions the CPSL on 64 occasions and notes that the company is responsible for the implementation of 60 actions which address recommendations of the Royal Commission. Clearly, CPSL was a key player in project 'Resurrection'.

If this project was to have any meaning beyond lip-service, the first essential was for CPSL to have functional independence. Words are important but commitment is judged by actions. But if news comes

from the back of a truck that CPSL – heralded as the standard bearer of church reform – is to cease operating by 31st December, who will take over the independent auditing of sexual abuse in the Catholic church if the CPSL is no more.

Some of the work done by CPSL is expected to be done 'in-house' – whatever that means – but with a strangulation level of financing and with no accountability to the faithful or the state. This is the ACBC demonstrating that it has learned nothing, returning to the mediaeval model of governance with clericalism rampant. The suggestion that the Church can police itself is, on all the available evidence, stupefying. This is more deceptive dealing and back to 'business as usual'.

A second effort at public relations was launched in May 2008 and called the Implementation Advisory Group (IAG). The word 'advisory' was a bit of a red flag but taken on its merits it was to be one of three groups 'to take forward the work arising from the Royal Commission'. The other two groups were CPSL – started then stopped – and the National Redress Reference Group, a device created by the ACBC to move the responsibility for just redress from the Church as a single entity onto the individual dioceses and religious congregations within the Church.

One task given to the IAG was of extreme importance: to respond to Recommendation 16.7 of the Royal Commission, designed to remedy the flawed structures and methods of governance that it had found responsible for the tragic institutional responses to child sexual abuse. A Governance Review Project Team (GRPT) was set up and they expeditiously produced a report entitled, 'The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia'. The 86 recommendations in the 200 page report almost all mirror the general consensus of views expressed in the 7,500 written submissions of ordinary Catholics during the Plenary Council's first preparatory phase.

Though the GRPT requested that the report be immediately published, the ACBC decided that, because they had commissioned the report, it belonged to them alone, and would not be making it

public until after their next meeting in November, 2020. Date unspecified. Their reasons for pocketing the report were that they needed ‘to take advice, consider the report in depth, conduct discussions’ etc. With whom was also not specified. But it certainly wasn’t with the people of God, who justifiably felt they could have simultaneously been considering and discussing their report. After all, this report is to form a substantial part of the agenda for the Plenary Council.

Fortunately, another pew dweller got restless and the report fell off the back of a truck. The immediate result of what became an embarrassing world-wide leak resulted in the ACBC, ‘in the interests of transparency’, re-arranging the publication schedule for ‘late July, early August’. We now know that many of the recommendations of the Royal Commission were adopted by the GRPT, but what will become of them is anyone’s guess. On one recommendation, that women should play a decisive role in the selection, formation and training of candidates for the priesthood and deciding their suitability for ordination, the ACBC is unlikely to be accommodating.

Women, that other half of the Church, remain a troublesome collection of souls for our leaders. Following upon a study twenty years ago that reported women felt widespread alienation in the Church, the ACBC established the stand-alone Council for Australian Catholic Women and the Office for the Participation of Women. These bodies were tasked to ‘find ways within the integral Church Tradition to engage the wisdom, talents and the experience of women for the enrichment of the Church and society, and for the fulfillment of their own lives.’ (ACBC response to *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*, 2000). Last November, a follow-up study, commissioned to assess what progress had been made, reported in ‘Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man Twenty Years On’ with startling consequences: Contrary to the advice of two of its leading members, Archbishop Prowse and Bishop Long, that ‘There is unfinished business from the action commitments made by the bishops in 2000’, the ACBC decided to dismantle both the advisory offices!

Women are still listening to the Spirit. But what voice does the ACBC hear? If it is a banker telling them they are in the red, that excuse won’t fly. There

were 2.8 million Catholic women in Australia in 2016 and in 2019 just 247 men studying for the diocesan priesthood. Yet there is no talk of closing the eight seminaries when one would clearly suffice. Women have been deceived again by two decades of fine words and broken promises.

In the context of all this deception, we move towards a Plenary Council, an idea first put to the ACBC by Catholics for Renewal in 2012. They suggested that the bishops should hold a plenary council in 2015 to mark the 50th anniversary of the close of Vatican II. What was ‘not opportune’ at that time has become urgent post the Royal Commission’s damning report.

If the abolition of the CPSL means no **accountability** in matters of the sexual abuse of children and other vulnerable persons, the withholding of a report that called for **transparency** in governance amounts to a refusal of transparency in governance. The concept of **inclusion** was laid to rest with the disbanding of the two offices concerned with women in the church.

It was all a chimera. Putting the spotlight, à la Boston Globe, on all the platitudes, broken promises and half truths that provide the context for this entire plenary process will bring to light not a new beginning but rather a blanket refusal to reform anything, to cede not an iota of power or control. After all the commitments to the government and promises of renewal to the faithful, we, both church and state, are all left with nothing more than ‘business as usual’.

But hold!

There must surely be many bishops and heads of religious orders who know that this is morally wrong. Where are they? We cannot reform the Church without them. We need them, to have the courage of their convictions. Without them, the upcoming Plenary Council, heralded as a new beginning by the Catholic Bishops of Australia, is daily looking more like a sleight of several amethyst-bearing hands.

GAIL FREYNE is a Family Therapist, Mediator and Author. This article was published in *Pearls & Irritations* on 24.6.2020

Original Sin in the 21st Century

Alan Clague

The Catholic Church and many Protestant Churches believe that all humans are born with ‘original sin’, which is removed by baptism. St Augustine of Hippo, who wrote extensively on the matter around the end of the fourth century, stated that humans inherited it from Adam and Eve, who sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, thereby introducing sin and death to humanity. He claimed it was transmitted through the generations by sexual intercourse. It was removed by baptism, but this meant that unbaptised infants, who had not committed any actual sins, were condemned to hell. It was confirmed by the Church at the Council of Orange and finally at the Council of Trent. Augustine’s condemnation of unbaptised infants to hell was later softened by stating that such infants went to a place of happiness called ‘Limbo’, although this has now been discarded. The Orthodox Church does not accept the existence of original sin.

A sin inherited from Adam and Eve remains the rationale for the Catholic Church’s doctrine on original sin today. This was quite acceptable in the time of the Council of Trent (1645-63) when the Bible was taken literally. At that time, from interpreting the Bible, the world was considered to be a few thousand years old, and the universe was geocentric. Humanity arose from two specially created humans, Adam and Eve, and it survived a universal flood by entering into an ark.

The world of today believes a different story. The universe was created about thirteen billion years ago. Life on earth was created about two billion years ago. *Homo sapiens* originated about a million years ago, and in the interim interbred with at least two other hominids. The Church has no problem in accepting the facts of science, so that the scientific creation story and the evolution of humanity from earlier forms of life are uncontroversial. Yet the myth concerning the origin of original sin persists in the Catholic Catechism together with the myth that Adam and Eve would have avoided death if they remained sinless. The effect of this is to give enemies of the Church a weapon with which to throw scorn on its beliefs.

What should be done about this situation? The simplest answer is to join with our fellow Christians in the Orthodox Churches and accept that the postulated existence of original sin, as understood by Augustine and modified by the Church Councils, was a response to problems of those times, and should be discarded in today’s world. The alternative is to re-jig the concept so that it is not both an affront to reality in the 21st century and a liability to converting a world that has moved on from the 16th century.

ALAN CLAGUE is a regular contributor and a member of the ARC Secretariat.

Ex-Student Reflection

Georgie Spyrdz

My name is Georgie and I have recently completed my thirteen years of schooling, all of which were at Catholic schools. I am a baptised Catholic and would consider myself a practising one, but other Catholics might not, as I only attend Church on Easter and Christmas. I could easily be viewed as a stereotypical member of the modern Australian Catholic Church. Much of my connections and involvement with religion came through my Catholic education. In primary school, I was an enthusiastic student, learning about Creation and Bible stories, the sacraments and basic morals and ethics. I attended my Confirmation and Communion classes each weekend for about a month with most of my class before taking the sacraments alongside them. In my junior years of high school, I studied Catholic ethics and morality further, including modern ethical problems and the contemporary Australian Church, as well as the history of the Catholic Church in Australia. By the time I reached Year 12, I found that I was growing bored of these lessons as they all seemed to be conveying the same message: ‘Follow the example of Jesus Christ, love everyone, attend Church, seek guidance through prayer.’

While I understand these lessons and messages are important to teach students at Catholic schools, the majority of whom are baptised Catholic, my teenage brain could not handle the repeated messaging. Secular society could define this as indoctrination, but I viewed it as being necessary tedium. It was not until I began my Stage 6 studies that I grew to enjoy studying religion. And not just my own. It was mandatory that every student take a religion-based subject, either Catholic Thought or Studies of Religion. I could not bear to endure another two years debating Catholic morality and ethics, so I chose Studies of Religion, which also contributed to my ATAR. It was an entirely secular subject, being developed by the New South Wales Education Standards Authority. It was the first time I was studying religion that was free of Catholic bias.

It took me a while to get used to approaching tasks and viewing my lessons with a secular perspective, but I grew to really enjoy the subject. In fact, I believe the subject brought me closer to my Catholic faith than any of my previous Catholic studies had, even though I was studying Buddhism, Islam, ancient religions, Indigenous spirituality and contemporary religious expressions alongside Christianity. I realised that, as a young adult, I was able to actively choose the parts of Catholicism that resonated with me, and leave the fundamentalist details behind. My study of Christianity highlighted the

importance of the beliefs in forgiveness, the dignity of the human person and the Kingdom of God in my Catholic worldview, all of which are expressed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and Catholic ethical and moral teachings. My study of Buddhism, Islam and other religious expressions highlighted beliefs and concepts of love, dignity and morality that are common to many religions. Studies into contemporary religious expression also helped me realise the importance of finding my own version of spirituality which, although heavily influenced by my Catholic faith, did not have to be exclusively that.

It was not just inside the classroom that I found myself growing stronger in my faith. Morning prayer, liturgies and my Year 12 Retreat all allowed for a few moments of devotion and reflection in my busy and stressful life as a HSC student. While not every student would appreciate these moments all of the time, as an individual, I did. I realised that the wider Church community does not have a great daily impact in the lives of my generation, whether Catholic, Christian or otherwise. We all know who the Pope is, but I found that the Pope was not my closest guide. It was the teachers at my school and the learning opportunities that I was provided that guided me most. Catholic schools serve as the most critical connection young people have to Australia’s major religion. It is well-known that Church attendance is decreasing every year, but Catholic schools maintain high levels of enrolment and attendance. It is my belief that Catholic schools should encourage individual religious journeys by presenting students with core religious beliefs, ethics and practices, and allowing students to take what resonates and leave what does not. Repetition of religious ‘truth’ only seems to push students away from the Catholic faith, as they believe that religion is all or nothing. To me, it is a large aspect of my life and worldview, but it is not all of it.

Catholic education has been most influential in my religious journey. Sometimes my path has been closer to faith or further away. I found that the option to study religion from a secular perspective strengthened my understanding and connection to the Catholic faith and gave me the opportunity to express this through liturgies and prayer at school. I loved studying at Catholic schools, but the balance between religion and secularism in my final two years was the most beneficial influence on my faith journey thus far. It is my hope that all students in Catholic schools are provided with a similar opportunity, which I believe would foster individual faith journeys that culminate in a stronger Australian Catholic community.

GEORGIE SPYRDZ graduated from three years of Catholic School education in 2022 and is currently studying History at ANU Canberra.

Multifaith Dialogue Needed to Achieve Effective Inclusivity

Mike Nelson

I have long been interested in Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Argentinian Jesuit who became Pope. I think my interest in him arose because of my attachment to Liberation Theology and my own South American connections, given my wonderful Brazilian wife, who continues to broaden my education and sensibilities! So I have watched Francis, who took the name of our favourite saint, grapple with the issues confronting the Church and have at various times cheered and groaned, I suspect along with many others who struggle with the connection between faith, life and church.

All too often the Church (with a capital C) seems divorced from reality and even more so, the reality of the call of Jesus to be God's love in the world. Francis was not a great supporter of Liberation Theology in his time as Archbishop, but one senses that he now has a different view, which is far more inclusive, just as his view of religion seems to be more inclusive, at least at the level of conversation and sharing with representatives of the great world religions. This is, of course, in opposition to the traditionalists and the Pellian exclusivists and it is no surprise that they have come to regard Francis as an enemy and a danger to the Holy Catholic Church. A Pope who consorts with heretic Protestants and even with Muslims – God forbid!! Next thing he will be praying with the Dalai Lama!

Despite Francis' slow and cautious exploration of the tradition of Christian exclusivity and its hold on truth – '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' – there is no doubt that this tradition is failing God's people in contemporary societies. I do not propose to enter into a detailed examination of this failure except to posit that it is not merely a matter of the Church's failure to embrace diverse religious communities and, in particular, the LGBTIQA+ community, but the Church's failure to see God's presence and God's hand in every aspect of the world, and in particular, in the non-Christian religious traditions. This is a profound tragedy and gainsays the life and example of Jesus himself, who said, according to John, 'In my Father's house, there are many rooms....' and then went on to spell out the amazing welcome that we will all receive on the other side of death.

I do not propose to enter into a detailed exegesis of the texts. That task has been undertaken many, many times by scholars far more proficient than I and yet,

most of the holy men and women who have sought to understand Jesus' teaching have found themselves puzzled by the apparent inclusiveness and generosity of God that Jesus has suggested. Surely Jesus did not mean that there are rooms in heaven for people of other faiths, or did he mean just that? Of course, there are many other instances in the Gospels where Jesus demonstrated, both in parable and example, a breadth of acceptance that did not just stray outside the contingencies of Judaism and Temple worship, but overturned and destroyed contemporary religious norms. In doing so, he earned the ire and even hatred of his institutional contemporaries and, in particular, the Pharisees. He paid for his teaching and example with his life.

In recent years I have found myself increasingly comfortable in the presence of my non-Christian contemporaries, most of whom have accepted me and welcomed my interest and participation in their customs and rituals. I am not for one minute claiming that every Buddhist, Baha'i, Jew or Muslim practises an inclusive faith! Quite the contrary. Fundamentalism afflicts all faiths, even those which eschew dogmatism. Fundamentalism is increasingly seen to be a destructive force, which distorts and destroys the spiritual basis of all religions that it touches, whether it be evangelical Christianity, Muslim exclusivism, Hindu separatism or even Buddhist militancy. The list is long and disheartening, and one can only wonder at the reaction of the founders of our great religions to the corrosive and destructive impact of modern fundamentalism.

We Christians can have a clear insight into Jesus' view of legalist fundamentalism in his disputes with the Pharisees, who were the contemporary fundamentalists of Judaism. When Jesus referred to them as 'whited sepulchres', he was surely criticising the purity of their claims and demands, as well as their failure to understand the inclusive love of the Father. Jesus' critique surely extends to those who exclude, demean and denigrate, whether they be princes of the Church or terrorists seeking to purify their own form of religious belief or practice. Jesus' views are surely shared by the great founders of the world religions, despite differences in particularities. For instance, it is difficult to see the Buddha condoning the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar, or to see the Prophet Mohammed encouraging and supporting Islamic terrorism. And surely the Bub (the prophet of Baha'i) devoutly wished for all to come together in peace and harmony. The great heroes of Judaism, Moses and the prophets sought the beauty and serenity of faith to bring together God and the world. We should do likewise in our witness to the power of God's love among us, transcending barriers and opening doors to an inclusive and fertile life together, acknowledging our

differences but rejoicing in the power of God animating each and every one of us in his creation.

In my small experience of multifaith, I have come to wonder at the narrowness of the Christian churches, including the Holy Catholic Church, and the failure to recognise the contribution and the worth of non-Christian religions towards building a better world together. This failure is, in a small but important sense, represented by the conflict over the place and contribution of Cardinal George Pell, who embodied the role of reactionary traditionalists in maintaining exclusivism rather than the higher religious values of acceptance of difference and welcoming of commonalities. Pope Francis, who is certainly no rabid

reformer, nevertheless appears to be nudging the Catholic Church toward a more inclusive direction. The multifaith movement which includes many adherents of the Catholic Church worldwide is gaining strength, presently in tiny increments, but eventually, by the grace of the God of all, to provide channels for the future religious integrity of this world which so desperately needs the love of God to sustain and maintain the creation.

MIKE NELSON, now retired, was an Anglican priest who became an organisational consultant with a particular interest in ethics. He is a member of a multifaith group and is also a member of ARC.

The Philosopher's Daughters

Edited by Peter Vardy

Darton, Longman & Todd. London. 2023.

Reviewed by Peter D. Jones

Over many years, Dr Peter Vardy visited Tasmania to talk to high school and college students at day conferences where, in an inimitable style, he threw out challenges on issues of faith and ethics designed to get his audience asking questions and thinking about many contemporary issues.

As a well-known English philosopher, college principal and author he found himself confined at home in the Yorkshire Dales during the pandemic. So he decided to record questions posed by his inquisitive young daughters, Petra and Thora, then send them out to some of his many acquaintances around the world: senior clergy, theologians, scholars, teachers and other friends he has made over years of study and lecturing.

The contributors range from well-known public figures, including cardinals and archbishops from several different countries, as well as prominent scientists and philosophers.

He then responded to each of the fifty questions himself, adding a second or third response from his 42 correspondents, but setting the tone with an introduction, that opens with the words, 'Children ask the best questions'.

What follows is a series of thought-provoking questions from his two daughters about everything from human relationships and finding happiness to age-old queries about defining God or the meaning of stories in the Christian Bible that many scholars have

also asked over the centuries without coming up with a satisfactory answer. Some of the answers are a bit of a let-down but many are thought-provoking and informative. Elon Musk might think twice about how he spends his excess income after reading the response to the question about why do people want to go to Mars instead of fixing things on Earth. Young people might be inspired by the answer to a question on why adults do not listen to Greta Thunberg. Or, if they are obsessed with image and fashion, they can reflect on the question about why this is so, or another asking why adults get excited about new cars when one day they will get old and rust away. If you wonder why our political leaders and senior clergy so often went to expensive independent private schools, the answer to the question about this life of youthful privilege might provoke some interesting reactions.

The questions on human relationships really give food for thought: two which make you think hard are why we spend so much on weddings when so many fail and why do we spend so much on funerals – though I would have added that there are a lot of alternatives around these days like bush weddings or woodland burials. Those of us at the other end of life than Peter's daughters might also want to reflect on their question about euthanasia.

The one question I would like to have added myself, as it has baffled me all my life, is why do most people get more conservative as they get old (and vote accordingly) yet some retain their youthful idealism – and a very few actually move the other way as they achieve the wisdom of the elders?

So, as the editor and father of Petra and Thora observes, children really do ask the best questions and we should make more effort to listen to them and consider a thoughtful response instead of brushing them off or as many of us were told when young, 'Oh, you'll see sense when you grow up'. □

Catholic Guilt

Margaret Knowlden

Pope Pius X has a lot to answer for. Despite his seemingly impressive papacy from 1903 to 1914, he will be most remembered for (a) his unyielding stance against ‘modernism’ and (b) his insistence that children who had reached the ‘age of reason’ (i.e. seven) should be permitted to receive Holy Communion and make their First Confession.

In her memoir, *Leap into the Light*, Paola Fornari Hanna recalls her experiences:

A spotless soul was required for anyone receiving First Holy Communion, so I, along with all the other First Communicants, would have to go to Confession, which meant kneeling in a darkened confessional – a sort of sentry-box with a partition to separate the penitent from the priest. I would have to say, ‘Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession.’ And then I would tell him my sins and he would give me Penance in the form of prayers to say. That last part seemed easy: I liked saying prayers, although it did seem odd to me that the one to the Virgin Mary started with the words ‘Hail Mary, full of grapes’.

I remember my parents talking Confession through with me. I couldn’t think of anything I’d done that would qualify as a sin, apart from once refusing to eat my soup.

‘Just tell the priest you’ve been a good girl,’ my mother said, but that felt like a bit of a cop-out, and didn’t match the format I’d learnt. So in that dark, scary confessional, I told him a) that I had been disobedient – I reckoned having rejected the soup might justify this, and b) that I had told a lie – in case the soup incident wasn’t bad enough, or perhaps disobedience wasn’t a sin that left a stain on your soul, in which case I had lied to him. ... The priest told me to say three *Hail Marys* and one *Our Father* as Penance, after which my soul was sparkling and I was able to dress up in beautiful long white dress ... did I really believe that the Host was the Body of Christ? I think I did, and I was careful to swallow it whole, so as not to hurt Him with my teeth.

Recently I asked my brother and sister what their feelings were about religion when they were small.

‘I believed that having Communion meant taking Jesus into my body’, Enrico said. ‘I remember Confession at school and having difficulty in finding naughty things. A classic when we got older was “having impure thoughts”. That was considered bad: not a “venial” but a “mortal” sin.’

Although we never discussed these things at the time, we all went through similar thought patterns, even through to our late teenage rejection of almost everything that had been inculcated to us.

My Last Confession

Father, I’m coming to tell you that this is my last confession. I just can’t do it any more. I’ve tried to find the answers: they’re not there. I don’t understand why I need to come here and tell you my sins, whatever those may be. Why can’t I just acknowledge my weaknesses to myself? I can understand values, and principles, and morals, but I can’t take the trimmings. I can’t take the bits that don’t add up.’

‘I will pray for you, my child.’

‘I can even take prayer,’ I said. ‘Prayer makes sense.’

How many of us wish we had had the same courage as Paola? Instead, steeped in ‘Catholic Guilt’, we presented ourselves for this regular ritual of examination of conscience, and the recitation of what was often a shopping list of minor misdemeanours. In the light of hindsight, it is painful to know that, for some priests, confession provided an opportunity for grooming their victims.

Confession was also a powerful means of controlling a potentially wayward flock. Threats of mortal sin for non-attendance at Mass on Sunday ensured that the churches were full and the plates overflowing. Under pain of mortal sin, struggling Australian Catholic families were also compelled to send their children to fee-paying, over-crowded Catholic schools.

Did we really believe that absolution would wipe away all sins, leaving our souls in ‘Persil-white’ condition? Or was it just one great big ‘con-job’ which encouraged dishonesty. How many ‘sins’ were committed (e.g. eating a meat-pie on a Friday) so as to have something to confess?

Exactly when did the confessional cease to draw in penitents? Vatican II, with its emphasis on the primacy of conscience, was the catalyst which gave Catholics the right to think for themselves and to cast off those practices which no longer made sense. Despite Canon Law 989 (*After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year*), gradually the old-style confessionals and times of Confession disappeared from most churches. The shortage of priests would have to be another factor.

The Third Rite of Reconciliation was introduced for special circumstances where there is no opportunity for individual confession such as war or national emergency. In practice, the priest gives a general absolution of sins after the community have reflected privately and said a prayer expressing their repentance. A sensible move. However, diehards in Rome stepped in and the practice was forbidden.

So where to from here? Let’s face it – most priests are not psychologists and ‘sinners’ would be better served by professional counselling. Meanwhile, new churches will most likely not include a ‘confessional’, while existing ones are removed or converted into broom-cupboards. Confession, along with quaint Catholic practices like ‘Fish on Friday’ and earning indulgences to ‘get souls out of Purgatory’ will be consigned to the history books and, thankfully, ‘Catholic guilt’ will become a thing of the past.

Deo gratias!

MARGARET KNOWLDEN is Editor of ARCVoice.

The Prenuptial Situation and Declarations of Nullity

Alan Clague

A Catholic whose marriage has broken up cannot remarry in the Church if their spouse is still living, unless the Church ‘nullifies’ the marriage. Remarried Catholics with a living first spouse remain one of the groups excluded from the eucharist in conservative parishes. One group of marriage breakups occurs when an injured party, most frequently the wife, is forced to leave a marriage due to physical or mental violence or desertion. The pre-Vatican II Church had a poor history of supporting the injured party in such circumstances, with parish priests frequently advising the wife to remain in the marriage. Although this situation has improved in recent years.

What criteria exist within the Church to allow such a broken marriage declared null? The rules outlining marriage nullity are outlined in a number of Church Canons (1095, 1096, 1097, 1098, 1099, 1101, 1102, 1103). They do not actually nullify a valid marriage, but merely define that the marriage entered into was always invalid. Canon 1097.2 relates to an error in the quality of a person, so that they are unable to fulfil the purposes of marriage. In the pre-Vatican II Church, the primary purpose of marriage was defined in the Council of Trent as firstly the bearing of children and secondly sexual intimacy. This was stated in the Code of Canon Law of 1913, and was reaffirmed by Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti Connubii*.

This priority was abolished with Vatican II. *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, gave equal importance to mutual love of the couple and the upbringing of children. This change was reflected in the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983, which stated in Canon 1055.1 ‘The matrimonial covenant is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children’, thereby giving equal priority to ‘the good of spouses’. The

change opened the way for the argument that a person who was violent to their spouse, or deserted their spouse, possessed a quality at the time of marriage that rendered them unable to fulfil this primary purpose of marriage. At the same time, in many countries, the status of women had improved vastly, so that many unsavoury character traits in a possible partner, which would have been endured earlier, would now lead a woman to refrain from marriage to that man. In such cases, the critical element is that the defective quality was existent prior to the marriage and not something that has arisen following marriage, such as violent behaviour subsequent to brain damage.

Since the latter part of the 20th century there has been a remarkable increase in marriage annulments, particularly in the USA, which, with 6% of the world’s population, had 60% of annulments in 2007. In 1968, the USA had 338 annulments but in 1991, there were 63391 annulments. The number has decreased since then, perhaps related to the decreasing number of Catholic marriages. The increase has been attributed to the change in Canon Law and what has been described as ‘a better understanding of the human heart and mind’. Other anglophone countries also showed increases in annulments, but elsewhere, particularly in Africa, the incidence was much lower. This would seem to be anomalous in a Church which is international.

The ban on remarriage of divorcees with a still-living former spouse is a source of immense grief to divorced Catholics who wish to remarry but still remain active in the Church. The Church in Australia should ensure that Catholics who have been deserted by their spouse or have left a violent spouse are made aware that the Church may assess an application for annulment using these guidelines.

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of the ARC Secretariat

(Editor: This article outlines a profound change in the way that applications for declarations of nullity may be treated. We would be most interested in any comments from ARC members.)

Pope Francis wants to break the silence on homosexuality

Hervé Giraud

A senior bishop in France says the pope is inviting us to shun any temptation to judge and, instead, listen to people where they are.

Since the very beginning of his papal ministry, Pope Francis has spoken out repeatedly on the issue of homosexuality. 'If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?' he replied to a journalist in 2013.

The pope expanded on his thoughts three years later in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, following two assemblies the Synod of Bishops dedicated to marriage and the family.

We discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. (AL 250)

The pope then made it clear in an interview in October 2020 that 'homosexual people have a right to be in a family'. He said homosexuals 'are children of God and have a right to a family'. 'Nobody should be thrown out or be made miserable over it. What we have to create is a civil union law (*convivencia civil*). That way they are legally covered', he said. And just a few weeks ago, the 86-year-old pope once again addressed this topic by calling for the repeal of discriminatory laws. He did so in an interview with the Associated Press, published on January 25, and once again on February 5 during an in-flight press conference while returning from a visit to Africa – including South Sudan, a country that criminalises homosexuality.

The pope wants to engage the entire Catholic Church

The pope's various interventions suggest that he is trying to awaken consciences. He is doing so in consideration of the many people and associations he meets who have already been working in this direction for a long time; he is doing so not out of ideology, but in line with the search for a just Christian attitude in which he wants to involve the entire Catholic Church. In this way, Francis reminds the Church that it must make its own 'the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception' (AL 250). A few points seem to emerge from Pope Francis' successive words that recall the radical nature of the evangelical demand for love of neighbour. First, his

direct evocation of the issue of homosexuality and homophobia places him on the side of homosexual persons and their families. In this way, he stands up for the most vulnerable, especially young people who are victims of homophobic comments that fuel hatred and violence. The Gospel is for them, for their lives.

Urging us to break our silence

But because of this, Francis also offers an example of a type of free speech that urges us to break our silence. Homosexual persons are the first to suffer from the taboo that exists in our families or our Christian communities. 'We are all children of God, and God loves us as we are', Francis has reminded us. If he is inviting us to abandon any temptation to judge, it is to replace it with an attitude of listening to people as they are... without reducing them to what they do. The pope wants us to accompany people, to walk with them, to support them in their search for their own answers. With his successive declarations, the Jesuit pope is pointing towards the progressive path that the Catholic Church must take. Aware that homophobia will not easily disappear from society and that it can even feed on measures that intend to fight it, Francis is inviting Catholics to simply contribute to the defence of every human being. The 86-year-old pope is not unaware of ideologies or their excesses, and it is therefore with firm resolution that he continues to start from the reality experienced by people, especially young people who may be rejected by their families or humiliated in their classrooms or sports associations because of their homosexuality.

The proclamation of the Gospel is also at stake

For each person to be respected in his or her uniqueness, which is made up of richness and complexity, the formation of consciences is urgent. The proclamation of the Gospel is also at stake, so that Christ's faithful do not remain 'at proclaiming a merely theoretical message with no connection to people's real problems' (Synod 2014, no. 32).

Finally, the pope has denounced countries that condemn homosexuals. 'The criminalisation of homosexuality is an issue that must not be disregarded,' he has repeated. This is something he hammered home in his most recent interview. 'Being homosexual is not a crime. It's not a crime...it is a human condition', Francis said. Much more, he wants the Catholic Church to help repeal these discriminatory laws. At a time when some countries are tightening their legislation, Pope Francis is seeking to make this belief accessible. It is necessary to fight against homophobia because, like all forms of hatred, it destroys and sows evil. It is important to speak about it simply... just like Francis.

HERVÉ GIRAUD is the archbishop of Sens-Auxerre and territorial prelate of the Mission de France, which was established in '954 to carry out evangelical work in poor, understaffed Catholic dioceses of the country.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/pope-francis-wants-to-break-the-silence-on-homosexuality/7336>

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