



Optimism Should be Reflecting Reality

To move from an archaic authority structure, steeped in 'tradition', to synodality as the way of being Church into the future is an enormous mountain to climb. And judging from the Synod participants' comments about their exhaustion at the end of the first session of the Synod on Synodality, they were relieved to get to 'base camp'. Naturally they, and many commentators, want to emphasise the gains made. And there were some, but the mountain climb after reaching base camp is inexorably steeper.

This event so far is hardly a 'profound shake-up of the Church' as some participants and commentators have claimed. Nothing has happened yet. There is no sense of urgency that is implied in the thousands of submissions presented to the Synod from all parts of the globe during the past several years.

A lot was made about the 'levelling of the participants' by means of the round-table mixed seatings, evidently effective in enabling better conversation. However, we might expect the clerics at this time to hold back from any pontificating, chastened by the dwindling congregations and continuing sexual scandals.

One might have expected that, if no firm conclusions can be made at this stage, the credibility of the combined gathering might have been enhanced if it had expressed stronger recognition of the issues that a majority of Catholics see as critical at this moment. In particular, the equality of women is not endorsed by simply stating that their roles should be expanded. So many dedicated women already exercise roles in service and charitable institutions along with taking responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. Drawing them into decision-making processes where men always have the final say does not bring about equality, particularly in roles where they should be the decision-makers.

In the wider context, the expressed desire for overall mandatory lay involvement in decision-making is quite meaningless without carefully designed structures that provide the opportunity to participate, not just the right to do so. There will be no 'shake up' until this happens at every level. That opportunity must at least mirror the ideals of democracy or only the 'elites' will participate. The final document does not show any understanding of

this. Inclusion is easy to ignore and the lack of any mention of the LGBTIQ+ community in the final document is testimony to that.

There are some important issues that could be addressed immediately that will indicate how much the hierarchy have been influenced by the conversation. The suggested changes to seminary training should be implemented now so that priests and deacons are much better prepared to take on their roles, not just as ritual, but as people educated in the nature and responsibility of professional relationships. This focus has been sadly lacking and it is the reason why there is almost no accountability for how ministry is exercised. Reviews of how bishops, priests and deacons carry out their duties would be a very big step forward.

It is pleasing to read that disagreements over the issues have been acknowledged and noted. We hope that this discomfort is kept open over the coming year. This will be necessary if there is to be genuine acceptance that the theological thinking underpinning many of these matters is so much in need of revision. Just listening to the presentation by Michael Morwood, now on our website, should convince anyone of that. There cannot be strong optimism until this reality is faced by those who currently have the power to suppress it.

John Buggy

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Letters

Conversation with Bishop Tim Norton

Thank you for organising that wonderful session with Bishop Tim on Thursday. I felt very privileged to be able to attend.

*Marea Donovan
(Visitor)*

Thank you, Wendy and John, for organising today's discussion with Bp Tim. He is clearly one of the new leaders for the Church and reminded me very much of my acquaintance with the Bishop of Caxias in the north east region of Brazil. Given the short time we had today I refrained from active participation but I would certainly like to explore with him issues of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue sometime in the future. Keep up the good work!! Blessings.

*Mike Nelson
Burleigh Heads, QLD*

Thank you for your email and for the wonderful opportunity it offered us to hear bishop Tim's views and of his onerous roles. May the Holy Spirit continue to bless and guide him. You and John are to be thanked a thousand times over for allowing Bishop Tim to explain some things to us and include us as our Church struggles to rebuild and reform under the guidance of Pope Francis. God bless and thanks again..

(name withheld by request)

We write to thank you for including us in +Tim Norton's ARC conversation yesterday afternoon. It was very well done and indeed Tim gave us some hope (at last) and was for sure a breath of fresh air. Thanks to the ARC Committee.

Rod and Susan Page

A Family Split

I read your plea in the latest ARC and can relate to your problem.

I have this in my extended family, with my niece and her family clinging to pre-Vatican II teachings. This has led to the rejection of those family members who have followed a different path, resulting in much hurt and the breakdown of family relationships.

I am trying to be the bridge between factions (my sister and her husband are deceased) but find this very difficult as any attempt at discussion is rejected out of hand. I find a total lack of understanding of the individual faith journey, a lack of Christian charity and a seemingly lack of trust that we are all in God's loving care.

Of course it can all be traced back to the poor explanation of the Vatican II reforms provided in parishes at the time these were being implemented. I was just lucky to have been a catechist at the time and received a thorough grounding in these matters. I acknowledge it was hard to lose some of the old rituals which I had known from childhood and to accept freedom of an informed conscience with the responsibility this entailed. I do try to relate to these feelings in others who appear so fearful of any reform.

I am worried about the seven children of this family being denied the fullness of a deep spiritual life, while being indoctrinated in pre-Vatican II approach to Church life. This also spills over into our parishes which is sucking the life from these communities and adding to the dwindling numbers in the pews.

What to do about this? I am at a loss and would welcome any suggestions as the problem appears to be out of hand, not helped by the many Bishops who oppose the Pope's attempts to refresh and renew the vision of Vatican II.

*Elizabeth Lonergan
Springwood NSW*

The other form of abuse in the Catholic Church

I agree with John Crothers about the emotional abuse of women in the Church. I would go so far as to say the Catholic women have a case for a class action against the hierarchy on this matter. However, no doubt there is some legal loophole which would get them off this hook.

While some men can see the injustice, I do not think they can fully relate to the hurt that many women experience from the misogynistic attitude of some of the Church leaders. Not only does this attitude deny us of one of the sacraments, and limits our active participation in the life of the Church, it also gives a subliminal message to the wider community (even in our secular society) of the worthlessness of women in general. This leads to all kinds of ill treatment, including, in my view, domestic violence.

The early Church recognised the importance of the female in ministry with the appointment of women deacons, who carried out a variety of tasks including the spiritual care of women. I find it difficult as well as demeaning to have to confess to a male, nor do I find the spiritual direction which speaks to my life experiences as a woman.

I have experienced all the hurtful actions of clergy towards women, as well as from some lay people, to the extent that I no longer find spiritual nourishment in Church rituals or sacraments. My spiritual life was being destroyed. I admire those who can hang on, but I had to escape so that I could survive spiritually.

These days I only rarely attend Mass, or take part in Parish life, although I worked as a catechist for 30 years. I remain grateful for the spiritual insights I have gained over the years from the nuns who taught me and other good women in Church life. These still guide me today and nourish my soul. May they be blessed.

*Elizabeth Lonergan
Springwood NSW*

‘I love my Church, but I wish my Church loved me more’

Tracy McEwan, Kathleen McPhillips & Miriam Pepper

New analysis of the world-first International Survey of Catholic Women completed by Dr Tracy McEwan, Dr Kathleen McPhillips and Dr Miriam Pepper, University of Newcastle, has found widespread support for Church reform among the 1769 Australian respondents – around 11% of the global total.

The results come as the world awaits the landmark Synod on Synodality at the Vatican this October – a rare invitation for members of the global Church to contribute their thoughts on Church matters. This important analysis will contribute to conversations around the status and inclusion of women across the Church.

‘Australian survey respondents were primarily found to be active in their parishes and listed their Catholic identity as very important to them. However, they also expressed frustration at the discriminatory structures of the Church. It is vital that the Synod does not discount



the insights of these women,’ said Dr McPhillips.

I feel as though I am not welcome as a woman and as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community (18 to 25 years).

On International Women’s Day in March 2023, co-author Dr Tracy McEwan was invited to present the international findings at the Vatican and personally handed a copy of the report to Pope Francis.

‘The International Survey of Catholic Women global report has been well received by the Vatican. We hope that the Australian representatives to the upcoming Synod will take note of the findings of this analysis, and convey the views of Australian Catholic women,’ said Dr McEwan.

We have taken considerable effort to ensure that ARC is at the forefront of significant Catholic Church reform. We have upgraded the website and now have a Zoom room for meetings and conferences, and have more people joining us to advocate for reform. This adds to our costs and we continue to rely on your support through your membership. Please continue to support these efforts through your annual subscription as a valued member of ARC. We will not cease mailing ARCVoice to you if the subscription is beyond your budget but please contact us about this or if you no longer wish to be a member.

ARC Secretariat

15 hidden gems in the Synod report that could lead to major church reforms

Thomas Reese

At the Synod on Synodality, the Western media focused on a limited number of hot-button issues—women’s ordination, married priests and blessing of gay couples. But hidden in the synod participants’ 40-page synthesis are some surprising gems that could lead to significant reform in the church.

The **first** is a new stress on lay involvement. Compared with other Christian churches, the Catholic Church is very hierarchical. This synod, especially the conversations at round tables, was structured so that lay voices, including women and young people, were heard and respected. ‘Synod path called by the Holy Father is to involve all the baptized,’ the report notes. ‘We ardently desire this to happen and want to commit ourselves to making it possible.’

Secondly, the synod promotes ‘Conversation in the Spirit.’ The term refers to a practice that ‘enables authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Churches,’ the report explains, adding that ‘conversation’ expresses more than mere dialogue: it interweaves thought and feeling, creating a shared vital space.’

Third, the report acknowledges disagreements and uncertainties. In the past, the hierarchy tended to cover them up, presenting a united front to the faithful and the world. But on its first page the synod’s report acknowledges ‘The multiplicity of interventions and the plurality of positions voiced in the Assembly,’ and admits ‘that it is not easy to listen to different ideas, without immediately giving in to the temptation to counter the views expressed.’

In each following chapter, any disagreements and uncertainties are listed under ‘matters for consideration’ that ‘require deepening our understanding pastorally, theologically, and canonically.’

The report also acknowledges its divides. ‘The Church too is affected by polarization and distrust in vital matters such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection,’ it reads. ‘We need to recognize the causes of each through dialogue and undertake courageous processes of revitalizing communion and processes of reconciliation to overcome them.’

Fourth, the report addresses the concerns of women. ‘Women cry out for justice in societies still marked by sexual violence, economic inequality and the tendency to treat them as objects,’ it says. ‘Women are scarred by trafficking, forced migration and war. Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous advocacy for women should go hand in hand.’

The church must ‘avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we desire to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, in order to understand more deeply the horizon of God’s project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion and competition.’

The synod concluded that in the church ‘It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry.’

Fifth, it did not forget the poor, ‘who do not have the things they need to lead a dignified life.’ Instead it insists on their dignity, cautioning the church to avoid ‘viewing those living in poverty in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us,’ as ‘objects’ of the Church’s charity. Putting those who experience poverty at the center and learning from them is something the Church must do more and more.’

Sixth, it charges the church with combating racism and xenophobia, saying it must take action against ‘a world where the number of migrants and refugees is increasing while the willingness to welcome them is decreasing and where the foreigner is viewed with increasing suspicion.’ In addition, ‘Systems within the Church that create or maintain racial injustice need to be identified and addressed. Processes for healing and reconciliation should be created, with the help of those harmed, to eradicate the sin of racism.’

Seventh, abuse in the church must be dealt with, suggesting that the church explore the possibility of setting up a juridical body separate from the bishop to handle accusations of clerical abuse,

saying, ‘It is necessary to develop further structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse.’

Eighth, the synod participants called for reforming priestly formation. ‘Formation should not create an artificial environment separate from the ordinary life of the faithful,’ the report said, and called for ‘a thorough review of formation programs, with particular attention to how we can foster the contribution of women and families to them.’

It recommended joint formation programs for ‘the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers).’ It also called on episcopal conferences to ‘create a culture of lifelong formation and learning.’

Ninth, the synod called for a regular review of how bishops, priests and deacons carry out their ministry in their diocese, including ‘regular review of the bishop’s performance, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the diocese’s assets, and the functioning of participatory bodies, and safeguarding against all possible kinds of abuse.’

Tenth, the report took on liturgical language, saying the texts used in Catholic rites should be ‘more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures.’ It later suggested that liturgy as well as church documents need to be ‘more attentive to the use of language that takes into equal consideration both men and women, and also includes a range of words, images and narratives that draw more widely on women’s experience.’

Eleventh, it raised the possibility of offering Communion to non-Catholics, or what it called ‘Eucharistic hospitality (*Communicatio in sacris*).’ Saying it was a pastoral issue as much as an ecclesial or theological one, the report noted that such hospitality was ‘of particular importance to inter-church couples.’

Twelfth, the report took aim at what it means to be a deacon in the church. As it is, the diaconate is largely seen as a steppingstone to priesthood. The report questions the emphasis on

deacons’ liturgical ministry rather than ‘service to those living in poverty and who are needy in the community. We therefore recommend an assessment of how the diaconal ministry has been implemented since Vatican II.’

Thirteenth, reform of the Roman Curia must continue. The synod affirmed Pope Francis’ statement in the Apostolic Constitution ‘*Praedicate evangelium*,’ released in March of 2022, that ‘the Roman Curia does not stand between the Pope and the Bishops, rather it places itself at the service of both in ways that are proper to the nature of each.’

The synod called for ‘a more attentive listening to the voices of local churches’ by the Curia, especially during periodic visits of bishops to Rome, which should be occasions for ‘open and mutual exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.’

The synod also asked for a careful evaluation of ‘whether it is opportune to ordain the prelates of the Roman Curia as bishops,’ implicitly suggesting that laypeople might hold top Vatican positions.

Fourteenth, the report said canon law needs updating. ‘A wider revision of the Code of Canon Law,’ it reads, ‘is called for at this time’ to emphasize the synodality of the church at all levels. For example, it suggests, pastoral councils should be mandatory in parishes and dioceses. It also held up for imitation a recent plenary council of Australia.

Lastly, the synod wants to promote small Christian communities, ‘who live the closeness of the day-to-day, around the Word of God and the Eucharist’ and by their nature foster a synodal style. ‘We are called to enhance their potential,’ the synod’s members said.

You will not find these gems written about in the media, but if we let the media tell us what to see in the synod, we might miss important opportunities for church reform.

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Is God dead?

Greg Sheridan

Extract from

God is Good for You

A defence of Christianity in troubled times 2016

What will it mean for us, when God is dead? Who, then, can humanity converse with, when we lose our oldest friend?

The loss of Christianity, and not only of Christianity but of much other religious belief and practice, will change us in ways we cannot possibly imagine. There will be no purpose beyond ourselves and ultimately Western humanity will look in the mirror and say: I'm bored with myself. And then, out of that boredom, who can imagine? Human boredom and confusion have often had deadly consequences. In itself, this is not the reason for holding on to Christianity. You cannot believe something transcendent because it might be socially useful. You believe it if you think it's true and it attracts some part of our soul; you want to believe it. Yet our identity as human beings has been so intimately woven by our relationship with God. What will life be like without him?

Am I exaggerating the potential death of God?

In the West, Christianity is in radical decline. It is not exactly dying. It will always be there in some measure. But it won't be there remotely as a social consensus, a society's creed and myth – and more than myth – its sources of value and meanings. Human beings are formed in a culture, and a culture without God will form different human beings. The public square will be naked. It will not be naked for long. This is where we can talk about the death of God, as 19th-century radicals prophesied with joy and 20th-century Marxists thought they had accomplished. God will not be dead to individuals, but he will be in hiding in our society, banished from public consciousness. Rumours of his presence, reported sightings – fleeting glimpses – will persist, but the public culture will be inattentive at best, abusive at worst. And yet, at the same time, there will be an aching nostalgia for God.

It is no exaggeration to say that Christianity is in nearly existential crisis in the West.

Australia is about to become, if it has not already become, a majority atheist nation. This is something unprecedented in all the long Aboriginal and European and modern multi-cultural history of our land. It is worth considering what we stand to lose, wondering if perhaps still there is a way we might recover this Christianity, or some of it, if we want to. These are the questions posed in this book.

Our approaching atheism is a perverse position in the history of humanity. It is perverse even by today's standards, because the West – meaning for the moment Western Europe, North America and Australia and New Zealand – is trending atheist as the rest of the world is trending religious. For Australia there is an especially acute irony. Every progressive instinct in our body politic tells us we need deeper engagement with Asia, yet Asian cultures are profoundly religious. Even as our culture seeks to consign the idea of God to the dustbin of history, as we engage with the contemporary societies of our near Asian neighbours, we must engage with their idea of God.

For our society, the figures don't lie. We will be joining our cousins in Britain, already an atheist nation, and we will be a little ahead of the trend in the US, which, despite its reputation of being God's country, is headed down the same road as we are, just a little behind us.

The 2016 census disclosed a startlingly abrupt change in patterns of belief in Australia. Just five years before, in 2011, 61 per cent of Australians identified themselves in the Census as Christians. In 2016 this number has dropped dramatically to 52 per cent. In 2006 the figure was 64 per cent, so in the half decade after 2006 there was a gentle decline. In the half decade after 2011 there was a radical decline. Nearly one in ten fewer Australians identified as Christian than five years earlier. One in ten! The rate of decline accelerated sharply and there is, sadly, little reason to think that trend won't continue.

Equally stark is the rise in the number of people who identified as having no religious belief. Its rise almost mirrored Christianity's decline. In 2011 the 'no belief' group was 22.5 per cent; in 2016 it was 30 per cent. Again, nearly one in ten Australians more

with no belief than five years earlier. In 2006 the no belief figure had been only 19 per cent so its small rise in the next half decade mirrored Christianity's small decline. Its leap after 2011 mirrored Christianity's fall off a cliff in that same five years.

These are big numbers and they represent big social dynamics. Christians are literally dying out in Australia. The age cohort with the smallest number of Christians in the census was the 25- to 34-year olds, with just 38 per cent owning up to being Christian. But don't take consolation thinking our younger brothers and sisters are more religious. No, for teenagers and children, parents tend to fill out the forms. Parents will claim a Christian identity which their kids will slough off by young adulthood.

It ought to be no consolation to us to know that we are emulating the Brits. As usual we are just a bit behind Europe, a bit ahead of America. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, in results reported in the British press in September 2017, Britain is now an atheist majority nation. Some 53 per cent of the UK population claim they have no religious belief. Only 41 per cent say they are Christians. The once mighty Church of England has fallen on hard times, with only 15 per cent of the population identifying as Anglican. That the decline has been slower is no real consolation to Catholics and certainly not occasion for sectarian gloating. The Catholic population in Britain was enlarged by massive immigration, first from Ireland then from Poland and other Catholic nations of central and eastern Europe. The decline in Christian numbers in Britain has been steady. In 1983 some two-thirds of

Brits said they were Christian. That has now declined to 41 per cent.

The age breakdown in belief is heartbreaking if you are a believer, for now only 3 per cent of British 18-to 24-year olds say they are members of the Church of England. According to a 2015 survey, regular church attendance in Britain was then down to three million people, or about 5 per cent of the population. You can argue with the starkness of such categories as Christian and non-Christian. It is true that there are many shades of grey in belief. But what you declare yourself to be is a pretty good indication of what you are. Other polls, seemingly more nuanced, give no comfort to believers. A YouGov poll at the end of 2016 found 28 per cent of people in Britain said they believed in God. 38 per cent did not believe in God. A further 20 per cent believed in some kind of spiritual power, but not God, and 14 per cent admitted they didn't know. The category of people who believe in some spiritual power but not God probably corresponds to that growing cohort in all Western societies which describes itself as spiritual but not religious. Is their state a halfway house from which they might one day re-enter the home of belief, or a waiting room for admission to the chamber of atheism? Or is it a kind of secular limbo, where the souls afflicted by neither unbelief nor belief can stay for the duration of their days?

GREG SHERIDAN is foreign editor of *The Australian* and a hugely respected journalist. He's also a man of deep Christian faith.

Editor's Note

Although this book quotes from Census figures up to 2016, there is nothing to indicate that the trends since have changed for the better. Church attendees are mainly elderly with notable absences of subsequent generations—and there are many funerals. Non-attendance at Sunday Mass during the COVID shut-downs may have aided the discovery of the joy of a good lie-in or of a morning on the golf course—and the realisation that an individual's non-attendance at Sunday Mass did not cause the world to collapse!

Past Beliefs

Noelene Uren

Some years ago I was accused by my then parish priest of being a ‘Supermarket Catholic’. He said I chose the bits I wanted and ignored the rest, and that I should take everything I was taught in faith. Needless to say, I never tried to have a serious discussion with him again.

I was reminded of this recently when my daughter sent me a clip from the American TV show, ‘The West Wing’. In it, the President is confronted by a young intern who disagrees vehemently with his acceptance of homosexuality. She declares: ‘Homosexuality is an abomination, it says so in the Bible’, and quotes chapter and verse of Leviticus to confirm her statement. She has chosen her adversary unwisely. This is a man who knows his Bible.

With charm he agrees that it is a valid quote and while he has her there he has a few questions for her. He is thinking of selling his youngest daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21-7. She is a college graduate, fluent in Spanish and with many talents. What price should he get for her? He then goes on to say that he is having problems with his Chief-of Staff who insists on working on the Sabbath. Must he kill him himself or could he just call the police?

His brother is also a problem. Does the whole town need to be present to stone him for planting different crops side-by-side? Also, can he just have a small family gathering when he burns his mother for wearing garments made of two different threads? Then there is the question of their football teams. He points out that touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean. If he orders the teams to wear gloves, can they continue to play?

With each of these statements the President cites chapter and verse from Exodus or Leviticus, thus

demonstrating that all the teachings of an ancient peoples do not necessarily apply to modern times and a slavish adherence to these teachings has no place in the modern world.

This whole segment reminded me of a song from the George and Ira Gershwin opera, *Porgy and Bess*. In the song, which John Crothers quoted in a previous *ARCVoice*, we are told that:

*The things that we're liable
To read in the Bible,
It ain't necessarily so.*

There was a final verse, written as an encore and not so well known:

*Way back in 5000 BC,
Ol Adam and Eve had to flee.
Sure dey did dat deed in
De Garden of Eden
But why chasterize you and me?*

Which brings us to the belief still taught today that the Fall resulted in Christ being sent to earth to redeem humanity from sin. We know, in the 21st century, that our species evolved over centuries of time and did not spring up magically in Eden. Yet this idea of sin, death and redemption is what the Church continues to base its teachings on. If you have ever held a newborn baby and wondered in awe at the perfection of this tiny creature newly arrived in the world, watched the dawning awareness in the eyes and thrilled at the first smile of recognition, could you possibly credit that this small being is marred with original sin which must be cleansed?

Am I a supermarket Catholic? Yes, I am. I choose to try to follow the teachings of Jesus: ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ The rest I am happy to leave on the shelf where they belong, gathering dust until one day the Church will have the courage to throw them out.

NOELENE UREN is a Member of the ARC Secretariat
and a long-time contributor to *ARCVoice*.

From Co-dependency to an Adult Faith

Robert van Mourik

Co-dependency occurs when one places an excessive reliance on another at the expense of their own mature development. For example, some Christians rely on being told by their church what to think. The difficulty with co-dependent relationships is that they are not apparent. In the context of church and religion, co-dependent relationships can be unwittingly accepted as normal, but this is unhealthy.

Co-dependency exists and has been fostered by the church. It denies the inherent wisdom each of us has, and impacts our spiritual growth. If we are to develop an enriched adult faith, we need to move away from co-dependency to personal responsibility for our faith development. Yet we may be unaware that we might be in a co-dependent relationship.

Iliia Delio describes a co-dependent relationship with God as a co-dependency that is problematic. We have imagined and created a powerful divine Being, whose name is 'God', who lives in heaven and watches over us. We built churches and composed prayers to a God who reigns almighty, from above, a God who is all-powerful and all-knowing, a God who protects the faithful and judges the fallen. The quicker we can dispel this mythic God, the greater the chance of discovering the real God.

Diarmuid O'Murchu describes adult faith as coming of age. He writes that the inherited distinction between the humanity and divinity of Jesus is overloaded with cultural and ideological baggage, no longer capable of delivering this maturity. If we are to develop an adult faith, we must understand church history and how these co-dependent relationships have evolved.

In the early years there were many Christianities e.g., wisdom, healing and matriarchal. This diversity of thought was lost in the drive to organisational control, codification as canon and the elimination of heresies. Unity and diversity lost out in the drive to uniformity.

Nevertheless, historical research highlights the

fact that a spirituality of paradise on earth, rather than a life hereafter, prevailed right into the eleventh century. An empowering faith in the Risen Christ, rather than a devotion of atonement, seems to have dominated the first Christian millennium. This complex foundational picture marked a spiritual coming-of-age which subsequent Christian history has poorly understood.

The reformation by Protestant churches provoked a defensive institutional response, a counter-reformation. Clerical power became a major issue at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which put in place a robust structure to safeguard the one and only truth, which the Catholic Church alone could deliver. To that end it created a superior person in charge, best described by four key words - Male, White, Celibate, Cleric—a clerical elite.

These clerics enforced their power chiefly by perpetuating a form of devotionism that kept people feeling unworthy, obedient and passive. Almost inevitably, people began to internalise a tyrannical, demanding God that could never be satisfied, a God that would never give the graces necessary for salvation unless we bombarded him day and night. This required repetitive prayers, rituals, exaggerated use of statues and holy pictures, and frequent attendance at church services. In this way, people were kept in perpetual childish immaturity, embracing a faith with little or no sense of adult growth and development.

The early Christians, like Jesus, were radically counter-cultural and not what the church became. Its early impetus was lost to alignment with state power and the growth of church bureaucracies. These structures sought their own power, creating divisions and excluding the other—such as women and minorities—contrary to the very message Jesus sought to promote, namely an inclusive society embracing mercy, compassion, and justice.

It can be argued that the church has trained people to be co-dependent, reflected in a model of church known as 'pay, pray and obey' and congregations whose own wisdom is diminished. The growth of clericalism and questionable doctrines such as original sin and penitential atonement theory, for example, have created for clergy a business of sin management, as described by Richard Rohr. It has also resulted in many living their lives in fear of eternal damnation, in part due to a failure to 'obey the rules'.

A maturing adult faith implies spiritual growth, just as there are differing stages of physical or emotional

development. Richard Rohr describes the early stages as having relative importance as ‘scaffolding’, but they are not the building itself. We don’t need to continue protecting the scaffolding once it has served its purpose. But we still honour and respect it. In the first half of life, our task is to build a container. Eventually we realise that life isn’t primarily about the container but the contents. As we grow through the stages, we transcend early stages and include them in our expanding worldview.

The *Instrumentum Laboris*, issued by the Vatican in June 2023, sets out an operating model for a synodal church, potentially the most significant initiative by the church since Vatican II. It represents entirely new ways of thinking about how things are done throughout all levels of the church from its cardinals through to parishes. It uses language entirely removed from the development of the church after the Council of Trent. Implementing this process could result in an entirely new church in which the non-ordained laity can have an important role. It would give new meaning to the sense of the faithful.

The Christian story can be reframed and aligned with Jesus’s vision for the kingdom of God, a society offering mercy, compassion and justice for all and the fullest realisation of human potential. Pursuing this vision is the mission of the church. Our growth in knowledge in many fields, such as psychology and quantum physics, helps us conceive new ways in which we can imagine ‘God’ at work. This knowledge and our spiritual growth invite us to reconsider our views on our responsibility for the environment, distribution of wealth, the merits of unbridled capitalism and other beliefs we now take for granted.

It is our responsibility, we who are not clerics, to step up and be proactive, to pursue our own spiritual growth and contribute to the church’s mission.

ROBERT VAN MOURIK is a Moderator of the St Lucia Spirituality Group (Brisbane) which seeks to support those who wish to develop a more mature understanding of what lies at the core of spiritual beliefs. This article is an abridged version of a discussion paper available upon request: smsg4067@gmail.com

Tomorrow’s Catholic

Michael Morwood

I stand by what I have written in *Tomorrow’s Catholic*. But I am open to advice and direction. In the Introduction to the book I made these comments:

The task ... is to help people converse with one another and share the convictions and the questions they have about God, Jesus, the church, themselves, their religious worldview, and their bonding with the rest of creation ...

A major concern with this book is to communicate with the reader in simple language – an approach that has its advantages and its inherent disadvantages. But if the task of adult faith

development is to engage people’s experiences and questions, present information for reflection and discussion, and so develop understanding and growth in faith and commitment, that task requires simple language if it is to involve as many people as possible.

What I find interesting now is criticism coming from some people saying some of the issues in the book are too complex for ‘ordinary’ language, that only a language that ‘is technical and precise’ can deal adequately with them. I wonder whether the technical and precise language has in fact dealt ‘adequately’ with some of the deepest ‘mysteries of our faith’. Here we are in an age of quite extraordinary breakdown of allegiance to traditional faith, and we are being told that we can only ‘adequately’ speak about God, Jesus, Church etc. in technical and precise language. Can’t we hear the alarm bells ringing??

Need for a Theological Reformation

Michael Morwood

Did you miss the wonderful presentation by Michael that we held via Zoom? You don’t need Zoom to catch up. Simply go to the ARC website www.australianreformingcatholics.au, click on the button on the ‘Noticeboard’ page and you can watch it all on **YouTube**. (Note: You can only access the video through our website.)

Views from the pews from afar

Maureen Ryan

As an Australian Catholic, I find it quite interesting to attend Mass in another country.

In the UK, I have participated at Mass as a visitor a number of times before the COVID pandemic. Catholics, being in the minority, often have small and simple, even frugal, churches. But I have found most of the Catholic communities to be welcoming, and the liturgies and homilies flavoured with the spirit of Vatican II. There was one exception in England where I attended Mass a few years ago and the choir sang all the hymns in Latin. Nobody else sang at all! The whole ambiance was back to the 50's. We were not encouraged to talk when we arrived but were directed to be as silent and reverent as possible. But this one Catholic community was in contrast to all the other Catholic Church communities I had experienced.

So, on this overseas trip, I was keen to see what the Catholic communities are like in the Borders region in Scotland. Having so far not been to Mass whilst being a tourist in Scotland, I eventually managed to get up a bit earlier and walked to the handsome stone Victorian Church on a Sunday morning. The atmosphere inside the church was Victorian but uncluttered, not gloomy but quite light. The round stained glass window high above the altar depicted Jesus welcoming the children. Originally the church had been built by the Presbyterians in 1867 in Romanesque, revival style and became a Catholic church in 1985. So, I wondered whether the stained glass window was installed by the Presbyterians or the Catholics. My first thought that it was unusual, but it gave us a picture of a loving God.

The positive atmosphere continued as the small singing group, accompanied by guitar music, sang the most uplifting (but unknown to me) entrance hymn. Even the priest (who was not introduced) sang the final verse solo with a wonderful voice.

The Liturgy of the Word continued with the Gospel being based on Mat 18:21-35 'The Parable of the unforgiving Servant'. The priest gave some background information about the value of a 'talent'

being more than a lifetime of wages. He went on to say that forgiveness provides healing for the person who forgives and then connected the gospel to God's forgiveness of all of us.

But then the homily went downhill. The priest connected all sins to 'Original Sin' which he said we inherited through the sin of Adam and Eve. He told us that we were corrupted by Original Sin.

He reminded us that 'Confession' forgives our sins but people were not experiencing this healing forgiveness because they are not coming to Confession.

He told us we all had to come to Mass to pray for all the non-practising Catholics. We needed to offer our praise to God on their behalf. He continued by saying it was our duty to worship God at Mass. We do not come to Mass to get/pray for anything for ourselves but because God needs us to worship Him!!!

There was no mention that 'Original Sin' was an artificial device first named by Saint Augustine to explain why infants should be baptised. It was a heavenly insurance policy! This unnamed priest's homily was all about duty and a God who needed our worship as the price of forgiveness.

There was nothing about a relationship of love between God and the people of God. There was nothing about raising up of the people of God to be one with Jesus Christ,

I looked around at an older, sparsely scattered congregation who were not really participating despite the fantastic music ministry. I also noticed that there were no prayers for the families of the thousands very recently killed in floods in Africa let alone any encouragement to give some financial aid in the name of their Christianity.

The whole atmosphere was that we just all were not good enough. There was a sadly delivered comment about the closure of some local Catholic churches because there are no priests to preside. There was a welcome for those who had been 'forced' to travel some distance to find a Mass to attend.

It all felt very one-sided with the smooth, talking priest making us all feel guilty, the silently scattered attendees rather than a participating community, and not even any servers to share in the leadership. Therefore, I think it was not surprising that so many are not participating at Mass any more let alone coming to 'Confession'.

The only note of joy was provided by the ever-faithful musicians.

Looking up again over the altar at the circular, stained glass window depicting Jesus and the Children, I now felt that this window represented a manipulating organisation treating its members like children. Perhaps everyone who was not there had worked this out years ago.

By contrast, we visited a Church of England in Ripley (Yorkshire). We did not attend any service but just wandered in and were met by members of the parish eager to explain the various architectural and spiritual aspects of their very old church. They explained that to encourage their congregation to return after the COVID pandemic they provided

cups of coffee and warm blankets before the service.

In addition, we had an interesting conversation where we learnt that the congregation were seriously considering replacing their beautiful, antique, oak pews with chairs so they could discuss the service more easily. (This is something I think we could do in the Australian Catholic Church.)

As we finished this interesting and somewhat inspiring visit, I reflected that I could not imagine any Catholic Church offering a cuppa before Mass!!

MAUREEN RYAN is a Member of the ARC Secretariat

On the Holiness of Work

Arising from within
 deep unconscious impetus
 My life is art, my actions, poetry

Joining thought with feeling
 passionate values, idealistic reach,
 working in holy ground, Education

My yoga is action
 my salvation in ordinary duties
 like Martha, not Mary,
 I listen and work at the same time

Ego detached, without a why or wherefore
 Work, not retreat carries me upwards
 God's initiative, not mine, manifests
 union, Self-discovery, God
 in my work ... I am saved.

Amen!

Michael Sibert

Letter to *The Tablet*

I suffered for two years of Philosophy at seminary (Letters, *The Tablet*, 9 September 2022) and my conclusion was that it had been a waste of time. Questions like ‘What is Life?’ have been debated ever since man began thinking and, as far as I am aware, none of them has ever been given a final answer.

Worse, training in philosophy puts a barrier between priests and other people who have not had this training. It affects your mind and the way in which you talk. Only a tiny fraction of people study Philosophy. Far more use would be if all priests had to take a university degree, leaving the subject up to them. Then they would learn how to speak to people who had been trained in science, history or other subjects.

Keiran Proffer
London

The Importance of Philosophy

Peter Vardy

In the Letters section of *The Tablet* on September 22nd 2023, Keiran Proffer wrote that he spent two years studying philosophy during his seminary training and argued that this was a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth and the perception that this is true is not only highly dangerous, it is a denial of a central element in the Catholic tradition.

More than any other religious tradition, the role of reason and faith in Catholicism have been seen not just as compatible but as necessarily complementary. Faith is in no way against reason and, whilst theology can move beyond reason, there is no contradiction between them. It is like two railway lines running in parallel with theology going further than reason but in no way contradicting it. St. Thomas Aquinas was pivotal in bringing out the centrality of philosophy for faith but he was building on a long tradition starting with the Greeks but including the major Church Fathers. St. Augustine, in particular, was pivotal. At the Council of Trent the works of Aquinas were of crucial importance in refuting the rising challenge of a solely Biblically-based faith found in the different Protestant denominations.

Nowhere was the significance of philosophy made more abundantly clear than in the masterly encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by John Paul II (although it is likely that the then Cardinal Ratzinger – later Pope Benedict – was influential). The encyclical is a quite brilliant and accessible account of the history of philosophy culminating in an attack on some increasingly dominant movements in modern philosophy. The

encyclical strongly endorses the importance of philosophy and also reason. It affirms the importance of philosophy as an autonomous discipline which is vital to engage with a post-modern world. It bemoans the lack of concern with truth and sees much of modern philosophy as having become pre-occupied with linguistic analysis and having lost sight of the importance of its traditional role – which included a search for wisdom as well as the attempt to understand purpose and meaning.

The introduction to the encyclical argues that the following questions arise from the fundamental search for meaning across the world in all cultures which mark human beings out from animals: ‘Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?’

Philosophy, or the search for wisdom through reason, is one of the noblest tasks that a human being can undertake: ‘Philosophy shows in different modes and forms that the desire for truth is part of human nature itself.’ The encyclical says that wonder is fundamental to being human: ‘Without wonder, men and women would lapse into deadening routine and little by little would become incapable of a life which is genuinely personal.’

Humanity has a spiritual heritage, an implicit philosophy including: ‘The principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject.’ The Church ‘...sees in philosophy the way to come to know fundamental truths about human life.

At the same time, the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.' The purpose of the encyclical is to reflect upon the role of human reason. '...at the present time in particular, the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected.' Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.'

Well before President Trump and the supposedly 'post truth' world in which we are meant to live, the encyclical recognised the problem: 'A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth.' 'Everything is reduced to opinion.'

The result is that we now live in a world dominated by materialism, consumerism, post-modernism, relativism and nihilism. As the encyclical says: 'As a philosophy of nothingness, (Nihilism) has a certain attraction for people of our time. Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth. In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.'

The encyclical called for a 'new evangelisation' and for the Church to re-discover the central place of philosophy. With this goes a commitment to the idea of a search for absolute Truth. '...it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason.'

In other words, the Pope is warning against the danger of nihilism and post-modernism and calling people back to a passionate search for ultimate Truth. Faith means accepting that there is such a thing as ultimate truth that is worth seeking.

However, instead of responding to the call of Pope John Paul II and his successors, many Bishops have minimised the importance of philosophy and

this has been a contributing factor in the decline of faith among young people. In the revision of the syllabus for Religious Studies GCSE in England some years ago, Catholic and Anglican bishops as well as other interested groups advocated a move away from the previous focus on Philosophy of Religion and Ethics to what is, essentially, a more catechetical approach. Sadly this has alienated many of those studying the subject. Many teachers across the country campaigned against the changes and, as result of this, changes were made to safeguard the central place of philosophy in the 'A' level – however many young people are put off studying the subject at 'A' level because of their GCSE experience. Sadly, also, many priests do not take advantage of their philosophical training to teach about the centrality of reason to the development of faith for adults.

When the Anglican Church separated from Rome, it retained much of the Catholic tradition including the sacraments, the role of Bishops, the Apostolic Succession (although Rome denies that this is maintained in Anglicanism) but it failed to embrace philosophy. Sadly, therefore, Anglican clergy have little training in philosophy and ethics. The result is a more general, Protestant-based, emphasis on the Bible alone. This is a real weakness as it fails to address a generation in which the role of reason is central. In philosophy departments there has been a decline in any interest in Metaphysics, Philosophy of Religion and even Ethics.

There is an increasing tendency in some religious education circles to see the subject as about 'teaching world views'. This, however, can easily lead to relativism. What matters is a search for ultimate Truth – this may be hard to achieve but, if religion at its best is about anything, it is about ultimate Truth.

Instead of abandoning philosophy, the Church needs to re-embrace it and to show that faith and reason are indeed handmaids. Young people need to see that the Church is a strong supporter of reason and in no way denies the importance of philosophy. The questions about the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, miracles, prayer, life after death, genetics, and the like are fundamental and to neglect them gives the impression that they do not matter. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Dr PETER VARDY is a former vice-principal of Heythrop College, University of London

Uniting Church leads the way for Women-Priests



The Uniting Church came into being in 1977, an amalgamation of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and a large portion of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. These churches all admitted women to the ordained ministry, with the small Congregational Church having been the first to do so. Winifred Kiek was ordained for that church in Adelaide in 1927, followed by Isabelle Merry in Melbourne ten years later.

By the end of the 20th century, there were 262 women licensed as priests in 19 of Australia's 23 dioceses and 154 women deacons in 20 dioceses (*Australian Clerical Directory 2001*). Women would not finally achieve full equality in the Anglican Church of Australia until a church court decision in 2007 opened the way for women to become bishops. The first women bishops were appointed in 2008 (Kay Goldsworthy was consecrated bishop in the Diocese of Perth on 22 May 2008; Barbara Darling was

consecrated in the Diocese of Melbourne on 31 May that year).

Now, Rev. Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau, a Tongan woman, has been elected as the next Moderator of the NSW and ACT Synod. Rev. Havea Hiliau told the Synod meeting she was 'deeply humbled and ever so grateful that I have been called by God...to be your Moderator Elect' by the nomination. 'I thank you for your bold, courageous, risky and prayerful decision.' She paid tribute to her late parents, who she said worked to give her a better life in Australia.

Rev. Havea Hiliau is currently minister at Northern Beaches Uniting Church. She is the first person of Tongan descent to hold the role.

She told the Synod meeting that she was a preacher and a storyteller, and 'will continue to tell the story of Jesus Christ as Lord'. She will serve as Moderator from 2023. 'I will listen to the church and explore where the Wild God leads us'.

As well as moderating the Synod meeting every 18 months, the Moderator speaks on behalf of the Uniting Church and exercises pastoral leadership.

Source: *The Encyclopedia of Women & Leadership in twentieth-century Australia*

Editor's Note

We can only hope that Pope Francis is serious in his call for a 'paradigm shift' in Catholic theology' and that it will include the ordination of Catholic women who have been patient for far too long.



WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

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

At the Oct. 4 opening session of the hotly anticipated Vatican summit on the future of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis said he had *taken note* of some of the press coverage about the 'global expectations' for the assembly.

The example he gave to the some 460 delegates at the October 2023 Synod of Bishops? That the synod might decide to ordain women as priests!

Perhaps he saw the 12-metre-long 'purple tent' we opened just before the synod began? Or maybe he got wind of our prayer vigil at the Basilica of St. Praxedes on the eve of the Synod, championing the voices of women around the world?

Without a doubt, the unwavering voice, witness, and widespread media coverage of the Women's Ordination Conference is having a major impact.

ARC Secretariat

Have your say!

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

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome.

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

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