



## Where to Now for Church Reform?

The Synod on Synodality came to a conclusion on Sunday the 27<sup>th</sup> of October without much fanfare. It had been preceded by volumes of submissions presented over more than three years as motivated Church organisations, groups and individuals tried to deal constructively with the critical issues facing the Church. They responded to the enthusiasm shown by Pope Francis who claimed that synodality was ‘a new way of Being Church’ and, although the details were always a little vague, there was great hope that it would open up a listening process from which action would quickly follow.

This time last year the heading of my editorial was ‘Optimism Should be Reflecting Reality’. I was not being cynical. The reality of a Church still steeped in patriarchy and clericalism is a long way from the openness and inclusion that Pope Francis was espousing. It was reasonable to expect that regarding the issue of the diaconate for women, an issue reflecting recognition of women’s equality to some extent, there would be expressions of support for its consideration. But no, it was ruled out without further discussion by the Pope himself.

Why did Francis do this? Many of us might say that he did not have to. Let the conservatives show their colours and keep the question open. His action seems to deny the principles he is advocating. One explanation could be that Pope Francis did not want to risk synodality, as a concept, to fall on the rocks on the very occasion that it needed to be demonstrated. Another reason could be that the pressure from conservative forces is so strong against ordaining women in any way that he could see that even a special study group will not influence a change in the foreseeable future. Stick to what is achievable. Unfortunately, this sets us back further in the quest to obtain the Church’s recognition of the equality of women. The Synod’s answer has been to look towards expanding the roles that women can take, but expansion of roles does not even imply equality. The setback allows ill-informed people like Bishop Randazzo (see page 3) to make ridiculous statements, seemingly in an attempt to raise their

status. To imply that the cause for women’s ordination is just a niche issue pursued by wealthy intellectuals is not only an insult, but denies the broad desire for meaningful participation for over half of the Church’s members.

What has this Synod delivered so far? Apart from the ‘good feeling’ expressed by the participants, it seems not much. Other key issues like appropriate recognition of LGBTIQ+ members and the need to consider married priests were ignored. It does insist that diocesan and parish councils be made mandatory which is a positive step towards accountability and transparency. However, it means little unless everyone has an equal right and the opportunity to participate. It is the appropriate detail which will make such structures effective that should be mandated. A Synod delegate said that the final document could be summarised in two words: ‘Be synodal.’ In Australia, at least, I doubt if the majority of the hierarchy understand what that means.

*John Buggy*

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## Letters to the Editor

I wanted to acknowledge to you my appreciation for your article, *On becoming a Wayward Catholic*.

That you are able (and willing) to give such a step-by-step account of your journey is amazing. Many of us have been on our own similar journey and you have helped us remember and acknowledge how it has unfolded.

WAYWARD is a good place to be, I suspect. It suggests that we are alive and well, have some spiritual energy still in action, and are prepared to keep making our way forward.

**Helen McDermott**  
**Kanahooka NSW**

Talking to my daughter, I mentioned that I wished all women would leave the Church as that might make the male clergy see the importance of women. She replied: 'We already have.'

Her group of friends from school days, all educated in a Catholic high school, now in their sixties, professional woman who number doctors, dentists, lawyers and in Wendy's case an interior designer who works at the high end of her profession in London, working for clients who count their budgets in millions. All of these woman made the conscious decision to leave a Church they saw as male-dominated who had no respect for women's intelligence. Maybe, on second thoughts, they would have been better to have stayed and joined Joan Chittister's 'Ministry of Irritation'.

**Noelene Uren**  
**Belrose NSW**

In her article **Why Catholics don't come to Mass** (ARCVoice - No. 94)

Philippa Martyr writes:

"The most interesting group for me so far are those who come across as quite conservative in their beliefs, but who have lost hope and stopped going to Mass. I'm not sure anyone knew about them before now. I think it's important we know more about Catholics who don't go to Mass any more. I also think that we should not kid ourselves that we can bring these people back by rearranging the church furniture."

Perhaps ARC Members could help Philippa by letting us know:

- a) If you have stopped going to Mass (and your reason/s)
- b) If you would ever consider returning to Mass

Send your replies to the Editor:

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## The Beginning of the end—my story

I remember one of the last Masses I attended and the acute feeling of boredom and irritation at the senselessness of so many of the gestures, rituals, elaborate décor and clothing which are such a long way from the simple Last Supper it is purported to represent. A 'cradle Catholic', I was well-steeped in the myth of Hell for anyone who missed their weekly attendance. Fortunately Vatican II has dismissed the 'mortal sin' aspect of my defection.

Having written off my car and no longer able to drive, kind neighbours have offered lifts to their church for Sunday Mass. But I have declined, and have since revelled in a good Sunday lie-in, some exercises and meditation. Surely, some would say, after a life-time of obedient devotion, I must miss this weekly attendance. The short answer is 'No' – nor do I believe there is a recording angel ready to list my defections and imperfections. I do, however, miss the coffee and socialising which happen after the Mass.

It is sobering to reflect on how fear of damnation was the driving motivation for my previous total obedience to a Church (i.e. man-made) rule, the real intent of which was clearly to ensure more 'bums on seats' and over-flowing collection plates.

**Margaret Knowlden**  
**Editor**

# The Selective Feminism of Bishop Randazzo

Alan Clague

**T**he bishop of Broken Bay, Anthony Randazzo, is also the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Oceania. In this capacity, he spoke to the international media at the Synod on Synodality on 4<sup>th</sup> October this year.

He spoke of the problems of poverty and environmental fragility in Pacific islands, and their exploitation for their minerals, forestry and fish by wealthy nations of the West. He also spoke of the problem of women in many parts of the world being treated as second class citizens – pushed to the margins into places of poverty, domestic violence, narrowed workplace opportunities and exclusion from participation in the community and the Church.

He considered it scandalous that a small minority with a large Western voice was pushing the issue of allowing women in the Church to become deacons or priests, as he considered this to be a ‘niche’ issue that was impeding the progress of women in more fundamental areas. It was being promoted by people of ‘might and power and authority and wealth’.

Significant improvement in the treatment of women is a very recent phenomenon in Western society. The residue of Western exploitation of women can still be seen in many areas, particularly domestic violence. As Bishop Randazzo stated, violence towards women remains a real problem in Islander society. However, the Western push for

better treatment of women did not originate from the Church, but from secular society. If the Church is now vitally interested in improving the lot of women, this is most welcome, if somewhat belated. However, to claim that the Church’s promotion of women in secular areas is impeded by the existence of the promotion of women’s ordination is wrong, and demeaning to the Church. In Christian times, the existence of a patriarchal society has been underpinned by a patriarchal Christian religion. The persistence of an exclusively male clergy is the last sad residue of this patriarchy. The Church could remedy this anomaly by opening the priesthood to women.

It is doubtful whether Bishop Randazzo will be in any way reprimanded by this naked, insulting attack on proponents of women’s ordination. It can be contrasted with the way in which Bishop William Morris, Bishop of Toowoomba, was treated. In 2006, Bishop Morris wrote a pastoral letter in which he pointed out that the diocese had only eight priests of 65 years old or less and ten of 66-70 years. He stated that the Church may need to be open to the option of ordaining married men or women. This greatly offended powerful conservative elements in the Church, and in 2011 he was removed by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Church has, at best, a spotty record over the centuries in its treatment of women. Was Bishop Randazzo’s interview truly an attempt to show the Church’s concern for the welfare of women, or was it a cheap attempt to vilify the reformist Catholics who wish to see a whole-hearted acceptance by the Church of the equality of women and men?

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of the ARC Secretariat

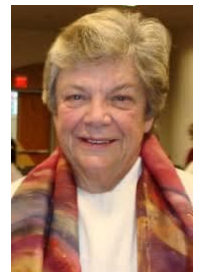
## Bishop Patricia Fresen RIP

**I**t is with great sadness that we announce the death of Bishop Patricia Fresen. Patricia passed away on September 3 this year after being hospitalised due to a sudden illness.

Rev. Dr. Patricia Fresen was born in South Africa, studied theology in Rome at the University of St. Thomas and the Gregoriana, and was then invited to join the faculty of the National Seminary in Pretoria. She later completed the Doctorate in Theology and after that she taught theology at the Catholic University in Johannesburg.

However, as a direct result of her ordination to the priesthood, in 2003 Dr. Fresen was forced to leave the Dominican Order, of which she had been a member for 45 years; and she had to vacate her position at the Catholic University. She subsequently left her homeland to take up residence in Germany. In recent years, Dr. Fresen returned to South Africa. Ordained a bishop in 2005, she ordained many women priests in Europe, Canada, the USA and South Africa. She was a well-respected conference speaker and retreat leader in all those countries.

Dr Fresen is affectionately remembered as a very honoured and inspirational Guest Speaker at a WATAC conference in Sydney in 2011. May she rest in peace.



*Margaret Knowlden*

# If women cannot be deacons, we should stop ordaining men deacons

Thomas Reese

**P**ope Francis has made perfectly clear that he is opposed to ordaining women as deacons. Although I disagree with him, I accept that we are not going to see women deacons during his pontificate.

But if Francis or anyone else opposes ordaining women deacons, there is a simple solution: stop ordaining anyone as deacons, and let both women and men serve many of the same functions as catechists.

The topic of women deacons has caused a good deal of controversy of late: Francis raised hopes that women might be ordained deacons in 2016, when he created a commission to examine the history of women deacons. This was in response to a request from the International Union of Superiors General, which represents some 600,000 religious women around the world. A second commission to study the possibility of women deacons was formed in 2020. Sadly, the reports of these commissions were never made public.

At last year's synod, the topic of women deacons was again discussed and received strong support from many delegates, especially the women delegates. However, this year the pope disappointed many by removing the topic from the synod agenda and setting up yet another commission to study the issue, which will report back in 2025. And when asked in his May interview with CBS News about women's ordination, the pope gave a flat 'no' to women deacons. He seemed to believe that women who acted as deacons in the early church were not ordained, although RNS columnist Phyllis Zagano and others have done extensive historical research showing they were in fact ordained. Deacons cannot celebrate Mass, hear confessions or anoint the sick, but they can baptise, preach at Mass and preside over weddings and funerals. As ordained ministers, they are members of the clergy, not laypersons. Permanent deacons remain deacons all their lives, whereas transitional deacons are eventually ordained priests. The permanent

diaconate was revived for the Catholic Church in the 1960s by the Second Vatican Council, where the council fathers thought it would be helpful in mission territories. But the hope that permanent deacons would spread the word in Africa, southern Asia and other places traditionally considered missionary lands never came to pass.

Today the United States is home to almost 20,000 of the 50,150 Catholic deacons in the world, or about 40%, according to the Vatican Statistical Yearbook. The U.S. and Europe combined have more than two-thirds of the world's deacons. There are only 500 or so deacons in all of Africa, fewer than in the Archdiocese of Chicago, which has more than 850. Instead, Africa's Catholic bishops prefer catechists, who may be men or women. There are more than 450,000 catechists in Africa who teach the faith, hold Bible study, run small Christian communities, prepare people to receive the sacraments and do Communion services when priests are not available. The African bishops put a great deal of resources into training catechists.

Those who advocate women deacons point out that only the ordained, whether deacons or priests, can give homilies at Mass or preside over weddings. Catechists can do neither, and expanding their role would neither give women a greater role in the church nor expand the number of people who can minister to the faithful. But in the case of giving homilies, this is simply canon law and can be changed, and laypeople can be delegated in many circumstances to preside at a wedding. The ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the couple, not the priest or deacon who only witness the marriage for the church. Similarly, lay people may preside at funerals without a Mass. And any layperson, even a non-Catholic, can baptise. In truth, there is nothing a deacon can do that a layperson cannot do. I am not saying that many male deacons do not do wonderful work for the church. I am simply saying that they could do the same work without ordination.

The diaconate has drawbacks that catechists do not. As clerics, the diocese is financially responsible for them under canon law. If a deacon's wife dies, he cannot remarry unless he gets a dispensation, which is not always granted. If a deacon gets in trouble, the church must use the same complicated canonical process used for laicising priests. Limiting the diaconate and priesthood to men is painful for many women in the church, but if we cannot ordain women as deacons, there is no reason we have to ordain men. If the point of ordination is simply to give the deacon more status, this is another form of clericalism. There

are not enough priests, which means that people do without the Eucharist, without confession and without the anointing of the sick. Too many Catholics die without the sacraments because there is no priest available. If deacons were allowed in emergencies to perform the latter two sacraments, they would have something important to do that a layperson cannot do. But as they cannot, we can do without them. The church existed for centuries

without the permanent diaconate. If the church doesn't need women deacons, it doesn't need men deacons either. The U.S. church would do well to follow the example of the African church and forget about deacons and develop a catechists' ministry.

THOMAS J. REESE, SJ is an American Catholic Jesuit priest, author and journalist. He is a senior analyst at Religion News Service, a former columnist at *National Catholic Reporter*.

## Ireland's vocational crisis on display: Dublin seminary has just one student

Madalaine Elhabbal

Ireland's vocational crisis is on full display, as recent reports reveal that Dublin's Catholic seminary has just one student.

According to a report from *The Times*, the vocations director for the Archdiocese of Dublin, Fr Séamus McEntee, confirmed the disquieting number, stating: 'In September, we will have another man coming in... I wish there were more.'

Fr McEntee told *The Times* that he was in conversations with other men about their discernment of the priesthood, adding that he hoped they might come forward in the next few years and submit an application to the seminary. 'I have to discern with them for up to two years before I judge them fit to apply even', Fr McEntee explained. 'Then they go forward for panel interview and different assessments and so forth before they go into propaedeutic [preparatory study] year in Valladolid in Spain.'

The news comes amid the country's largest Church restructuring in roughly 900 years, as *CatholicVote* previously reported. The country's six dioceses are consolidating into three. Combined with the declining number of Ireland's practising Catholics, priest shortages across the country contributed to the Apostolic Nunciature in Ireland's decision to consolidate.

In December 2023, the Diocese of Clogher, which has just 44 priests ministering across its 85 churches, authorised lay people to act as funeral ministers, as *CatholicVote* reported.

MADALAINE ELHABBAL is a journalist for *CatholicVote*. She has reported from Rome on current events in the Church and is a graduate of Benedictine College, where she studied English Literature and French.

## Editor's Comment

It is hard for a lay person to be sympathetic and not see the funny side of their predicament. For fifty years the Catholic Church has resisted all requests for the ordination of women, and Rome's stubborn intransigence on this issue has surely come back to bite them.

Likewise, calls for married clergy have been ignored, despite Royal Commissions into sexual abuse by clergy. What parent today would encourage their sons (well aware of the principles of Feminism and Equal Opportunities) to join the priesthood—or their daughters to enter a convent?

The situation could be compared to war-time exigencies—when women proved to be invaluable in the Forces, the factories, the Land Army etc. Would working for the Church be so different?

We only have to look at how successful the appointments of women as priests and bishops have been in other denominations (e.g. the Anglicans and the Uniting Church) to know that the Catholic Church will have to reverse its decisions—even if eating humble pie causes a good case of Vatican indigestion.

If the Catholic Church has to fold up in Ireland, it is easy to see where to lay the blame.

*Editor*



# A tale of two churches

Michael Hawton

I do a lot of consultancy work in schools. My organisation's work is driving significant cultural changes in hundreds of Australian schools in an effort to reduce student anxiety, using a population-change approach. Our latest research is showing great results with child anxiety significantly decreasing in these schools.

Over time, I have come to know many educators and learned much from dedicated teachers – many of them Catholic – and the pressure they are under dealing with aberrant student behaviour and with challenging parents! What the teachers tell me is that, in many schools, they are experiencing a growing sense of 'us-and-them' between schools and parents, when it comes to parent involvement.

I see something similar happening in Australian Catholic parish life. The 'us' are some clerical priests and the 'them' are many parishioners. This is especially the case when it comes to sharing power in parishes and transparency in matters concerning the use of parish money.

Much has been written in *ARCVoice* over the years about the way that some clerics are wary of reform in the church and concerned that the laity might become too powerful. They worry that their version of the church will be eroded. The paternalism of clerics seeing parishioners in this way reflects a view that the priest should not be asked to listen to his parishioners nor collaborate with them to set reasonable parish goals. In some cases, parish priests have had trouble aspiring to a synodal view of the church, even though this is currently being espoused by the Pope and other church leaders.

I believe that a top-down approach by some clerics is driven by their fear and by the misapprehension that raising the possibility that some things could be 'better' implies criticism of them and their actions as leaders. The problem is that parish renewal is not a personal project but rather a

community project. It is something that can only be achieved through the cooperation of priests and parishioners and it needs good planning and improved processes.

The Catholic Church is full of smart people who have professional skills to offer the church, if only the clerical class can allow this to happen. However, much of the way clerics have been trained is to hold the laity at a distance. This need not be the case.

And, in fact, if the Church is not to die in certain places, we need to get our collective heads around the importance of genuinely including the laity in improved ways of fashioning worship, of serving the poor and by better communication with people (both within and outside of the church). Pope Benedict said that acting in these three areas reflects our Catholicity. And we can make improvements in these areas, while remaining true to Church guidelines.

If synodality is to work, a clerical mindset of maintaining tight control over parishioners' thoughts and actions needs to change. It's a fear of change that is stymieing the richness of what the church could be for both church-going and non-practising Catholics. Our Church leadership needs to be open to both the people who agree with their version of the Church and with people who bring other new ideas and gifts to the issues facing local parishes.

Parishioners can work collaboratively with their local clerics if those clerics will trust the spirit and church leaders need not be fearful of modern-day change processes. At the end of the day, we all want the same thing, which is to see a thriving parish life where the gospel message of Jesus is being lived-out more vibrantly in our parishes.

MICHAEL HAWTON is married with two children. He is a parishioner and company director and lives on the Far North Coast of New South Wales



Congratulations to  
Bishop Tim Norton  
on his appointment as the Bishop of Broome.  
Bishop Tim is an ARC member and  
we wish him every blessing  
as he takes on this new challenge.

## Reflections on my weekend at a Root and Branch meeting in Leeds, UK

Tony Flannery



Last weekend I attended the conference organised by Root and Branch in Leeds, entitled *Empowering Ourselves*. In the past fifteen years I have attended a great many Church Reform gatherings in different parts of the world, and they all, in their own way, had a lot to offer.

But I can say that I was particularly impressed by the group of people I spent the weekend with in Leeds, the Root and Branch movement.

The attendance was in person and online. By and large they were people of roughly the same vintage as myself, and the majority female.

They were as nice a group of people as you could ask to spend a weekend with; the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, and the quality of input and general conversation was stimulating and enlightening.

The most significant thing that impressed me about the people gathered was their commitment to the faith, and the church, even with all its failings. In the final session I commented on the amount of time, effort and energy they put into their struggle for Church reform, and I suggested that in some senses you could even say that ‘they were laying down their lives for their faith’.

But the pain and hurt among them was also obvious, and it consisted of two features in particular.

Firstly Pope Francis. These people, in some ways similar to myself, had been great supporters of him, but now the mood is darker. This has to do with the way he is dealing with the issue of women deacons. Francis appointed a commission, it studied and reported, but the report was not made public. He appointed a second commission, and the exact same thing happened. In the meantime the Synodal process produced statements saying that the issue of equality for women was one of the top concerns in most parts of the world. Francis’ response to this was to remove the question from the final Synodal

gathering next month, and place it instead in the hands of another commission, this time chaired by the DDF. The topic won’t be even on the agenda of the October synod. And then, to put the final nail in the coffin, he goes on CNN and states bluntly that women will never be ordained deacons in the Church, effectively blowing apart the whole synodal process, and doing so on a U.S. television network.

The handling of this whole process was deeply hurtful to the women I spent the weekend with, and I found it hard to blame them. It would be difficult to find a more committed group of people, who loved their church and to whom their faith was very precious. So why treat them in this way?

None of this was helped by Cardinal Hollerich, one of the main advisers of Francis, describing groups like Root and Branch, as ‘lobby groups’.

There was one further big hurt evident among this group. By their nature they are activists, wanting to be involved. Many of them had a long record of involvement at parish level or in other aspects of the life of the believing community. But a number of them had the experience that, after years of work and local level, and building up local involvement in many areas of parish life, there was a change of priest and the whole thing was just demolished. There was nothing they could do, except lick their wounds and go. The priest still has all the power, which he can exercise at a whim, and has Canon Law to back him up. In the cases I heard about this weekend, the relevant bishop did nothing.

Why is the Church so foolish that it allows its most deeply committed and involved people to be pushed aside in such a peremptory fashion with, in most cases, no come-back?

TONY FLANNERY (born 1947) is a member of the Redemptorist congregation, a native of Attymon, near Athenry in County Galway, Ireland.

*'Outside the Church there is no salvation'...Really?'*

(Michael Sibert, ARCVoice, Issue No. 92, March 2024)

## A Personal Response

Maureen Brian

**A**s a (now retired) teacher of the NSW Board of Studies Course, Studies of Religion (SOR) since its inception and implementation in the 1990s, I endorse all the well-substantiated arguments presented by Michael Sibert. As well, I offer some reflections based on my experiences.

This Course of Study is centred on the concept of Religion as a *living* phenomenon, evolving and adapting to contemporary understandings, needs and challenges. The SOR Course consolidates the 'faith formation' content inherent in the Catholic Religious Education programmes of Years K-10. At the same time, it validates, and also challenges, senior students at a higher intellectual and experiential level to explore, critique (and perhaps 'enhance') meaning in their own lives in response to Pope Francis' call for a 'paradigm shift' away from a 'desk-bound theology' (Jonathan Liedl, *ARCVoice*, Issue No. 92, March 2024, p.8) toward a 'world-view' in which Religion (in all its manifestations and challenges) has the potential to be a major source of personal fulfilment as well as a significant instrument of social cohesion and social transformation in a challenging multicultural, multi-faith and increasingly secular world (38% of Australians indicated 'no religion' in the 2021 census).

The Studies of Religion Course challenges students and offers them the freedom to evaluate the proposition that no one Religion has a 'monopoly on Meaning' (Michael Sibert). While the 'path' of each individual and each religious affiliation might differ, the goal common to all is one of human happiness and fulfilment, both for oneself and for others.

For those of us educated in the 'Green Catechism' era, the shift in emphasis inherent in the academically-demanding Christianity unit of study might appear daunting and even controversial; for others, it is liberating and life-enhancing with its stress on the positive interpretation of the doctrine of Salvation as the central paradigm (one is saved for the fullness of life), and its emphasis on Love (of God, oneself, others and, most radical of all: love of enemies), as the central ethical teaching and source of guidance.

The powerful, life-enhancing New Testament text (John 10:10): 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full' 'underpins' all the Christianity units of study. As such, it complements the Vatican II 'image' of Church as 'sacrament' and 'servant' to the world and offers a radical and provocative response to the older, sectarian and often divisive interpretation of 'outside the Church there is no salvation'. The course of study invites and empowers senior students to probe more deeply the fundamental questions of life and meaning both for themselves and for others.

Throughout the SOR course, students are exposed to the proposition that the great mysteries of faith are not 'puzzles' to be 'solved', but rather are 'gifts' to be 'probed', 'challenged by', 'rejoiced in', and for some (or 'many') 'lived by' through one's personal and communal quest for meaning, spiritual fulfilment and human happiness.

While the SOR course is not a study in Comparative Religion as such, (Aboriginal Spirituality as well as each of the five major Religious Traditions is studied as a living system of meaning' independently), students are given the freedom, and are provided with the 'framework', within which they might be empowered to evaluate for themselves the 'wholistic' nature of religion as a universal source of meaning.

For example, through their study of Environmental Ethics, students are invited to consider that Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, together with the central Buddhist precept of 'Do no harm' and the ethical code of the 'Eight-Fold Path', represent two independent, and yet intrinsically interconnected, radical pathways towards the same liberating goal of environmental sustainability. Michael presents us with the ultimate challenge in his provocative question: 'Really?' A powerful 'hands on' experience of an inter-faith initiative was that of a (pre-COVID) Affinity program in which Year 12 Students from a local Jewish school and from a Muslim school joined our Catholic students for the day. In small groups across the three Traditions, and with little or no teacher input, students engaged in dialogue concerning their



specific Tradition; assembled, and then visited a display of some of their respective religious symbols and sacred texts. Visiting students were led on tours of the School Chapel by the host students. A room was set aside for the Muslim girls to engage in 'Asr' (the third of the five daily Salat prayers). This was a challenging, yet highly meaningful, 'grass-roots' exercise in inter-faith dialogue, the effects of which cannot be evaluated in any census data or in any HSC Examination results. Through both ecumenical initiatives and inter-faith dialogue, students might be led to appreciate that in the universal quest for meaning, the respectful 'asking' of the question is just as 'empowering', or perhaps even 'more empowering', than being provided with the answer. 'Really!' Just as at the human level, we are so often faced with dilemmas between 'change' and 'continuity', so the Church as the 'inspired', living 'Body of Christ' always on its journey to the 'fullness of the Kingdom' offers at times new 'perspectives' (or 'interpretations') of some doctrines and practices. The earlier teaching that 'outside the Church there is no salvation', is given a much more inclusive interpretation, a 'paradigm shift' based on the 'universality' of the Church, in the Vatican II (1962-1965) document: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*).

All men [and women] are called to be part of this catholic unity of the People of God, a unity which is harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all men [and women] are called to salvation by the grace of God.

As I am writing this, the annual (Sydney) City to Surf event is in progress. As I observe (from the sidelines!) some of the 90,000+ participants, I am made acutely aware that the real 'winner' will not necessarily be the one who is first over the line, but rather the many who in the midst of hardships, heat and other obstacles, are struggling to reach the finish!

The doctrine of 'Salvation' calls us 'all' forward, in the footsteps of the young itinerant teacher of Nazareth, towards that 'unimaginable' goal: *The Fullness of Life* (John 10:10). The Studies of Religion Course makes one 'small', but significant, contribution to that end.

Really!

MAUREEN BRIAN is a retired teacher and a member of ARC

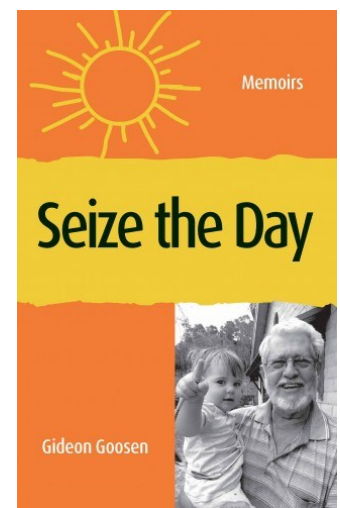
## New book by Gideon Goosen

This is a story of life and change. It is the story of one man's response to change in society, in church, in his own personal journey and the decisions involved in responding to change. It is a story that many people in the churches will recognise and affirm. It is a journey that involves faith – from his beginnings as a child in South Africa, through various university studies, teaching at tertiary levels, to life and career in Australia, and several overseas visits. Throughout, his church identity has been strong but challenged...by bishops who resist change, by clergy who cling to authority, by attitudes towards ecumenism that reflect a church sometimes unwilling to abandon its medieval structures to embrace and engage with contemporary society. This is an intensely personal story with a message for all who struggle with the challenges of being Christian in our increasingly secular world.

*A book many Catholics will cherish and enjoy.* – John D'Arcy May,  
Trinity College, Dublin

*This is a book that celebrates successes and helps make sense of confusion, as Gideon opens his arms to creation in all its forms whilst in each moment raising his heart to his God.* – Liz O'Callaghan,  
Former School Principal, Diocese of Parramatta

*Gideon Goosen has shared his life journey, relationships, travels and his responses to the radical change that has marked recent Catholic Christianity.* – Francis J. Moloney, SDB, AM, FAHA, University of Divinity



GIDEON GOOSEN lives in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales and is married with three children and seven grandchildren. He taught theology at the Australian Catholic University until his retirement in 2006. He holds doctorates in philosophy and theology and served on the NSW Ecumenical Council for many years as chair of the Theology Reflection Committee. He is the author of several books and articles, and is involved in ecumenism and renewal at the local level.

# An Idea for the next Catholic Reformation

John A. Dick

Perhaps it could emerge from the current Roman Catholic synodal movement? I would like to see a Roman Catholic constitutional convention, with a broad selection of lay and ordained members, assisted by historians, theologians, and sociologists.

The task would be three-fold:

- First:** Draw up a constitution for the Roman Catholic Church, as one of several – very valid and important – Christian traditions. The constitution would clarify that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Christian Community is broader than just the Roman Catholic Church.
- Secondly:** Create a new administrative structure, covering all aspects of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical governance, from the bishop of Rome to local bishops and to local parishes.
- Thirdly:** Clearly establish that the bishop of Rome, the pope, could be a man or a woman and should be elected for a limited term of office by an international body of lay and ordained representatives. She or he would be the chairperson of an international administrative board of directors. Much of the old Vatican bureaucracy could be dismantled.

Under the new Roman Catholic Constitution, there would be no need for a papal electoral college or a smoking stove in the Sistine Chapel. The cardinal electors could be retired and hand in their red hats. The old stove that sent up white smoke when a new pope was elected could be put in a papal museum or simply recycled.

We need to move ahead. Broad-reaching church reform is necessary. But, I would emphasise that church reform is about much more than the necessary structural institutional changes.

Genuine church reform must be primarily about how people experience and live their Christianity; about one's pattern of life; about how one lives respectfully with others and lives with self respect.

The historical Jesus did not establish or lay down any pattern or plan for church structure. He clearly did emphasize, however, a necessary pattern of life, which we see in the 'Sermon on the Mount' found in Matthew 5-7. It is a message of love, compassion and selflessness. Jesus encourages his followers to love their enemies, to forgive others and to care for the poor and marginalised.

Paul the Apostle reminds Christians as well, in 1 Corinthians 13, that 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres.'

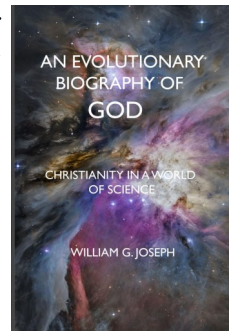
Constructive and effective reformation promotes healthy religion.

For many years I promoted and conducted performance appraisals for church ministers, calling attention to signs of their involvement in healthy or unhealthy religion. I was appraised as well by colleagues.

1. Healthy religion is grounded in contemporary life with all of its ups and downs. It deals with reality not fantasy.
2. Unhealthy religion is grounded in fantasy and longings for the 'good old days', which, we know from history, were not so good for a great many people.
3. Unhealthy religion is anchored in historical ignorance and antiquated and discredited theological understandings. The disciples of Jesus, for example, were men AND women. Women DID preside at Eucharist in early Christian communities. The historical Jesus did not ORDAIN anyone.
4. Healthy religion builds bridges between people and promotes collaboration.
5. Unhealthy religion separates people into qualitative classes. It demonises 'those who don't fit in' and validates hatred and cruelty through racism, misogyny and homophobia.
6. Unhealthy religion imposes power OVER people in often dismissive and demeaning ways through abuse, control, repression and coercion. It uses guilt, fear and overly-strict rules.
7. Healthy religion empowers people and promotes love and respect, and compassion and collaboration.

For your summer reading I strongly recommend an excellent book by William G. Joseph: *An Evolutionary Biography of God: Christianity in a World of Science*. It is well worth reading and available on Amazon. Bill is a Roman Catholic priest, physicist and computer scientist. He is also a very good friend. Bill brings his knowledge and awareness to bear on biblical narratives by looking at them through the scientific knowledge we have today, with attention to the profound human truths they are dealing with. In the process Bill calls us to a deeper and richer contemporary belief. I find his book energising.

JOHN A. Dick is a historical theologian. His areas of research, lecturing, and writing are religion and values in the United States, secularization and religious fundamentalism.



## Extract from Presentation made to the Bishops' Committee for the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia (app. 1990)

Rosemary Breen

I welcome this opportunity of adding my voice to the many voices of women throughout Australia who have made presentations for this research project. On the whole, I am speaking for myself but am including views of women who could not speak because of distance, the restricted times of the hearings or because they worked in some way for the institutional church and feared getting a bad name for themselves and risking their jobs.

During most of the 60s, I was studying at the Dominican University in Fribourg, Switzerland, where the theological winds from Germany, France and the Low Countries were blowing hard. We devoured everything that came off the press from the Council deliberations and were gradually filled with tremendous hope at this new vision of Church. (Pope John XXIII is the only pope I have seen in audience and, despite the pomp, the 'sedia gestatoria' and all the trimmings, he came over as a true man of vision.) It was John XXIII who indicated that we should be sensitive to the signs of the times, for that is where the working of the Spirit is to be found. (Perhaps this listening to women by the bishops is part of this 'sensitivity'). It was John XXIII who declared: 'If you have a right, you have the responsibility to claim this right.' Women are beginning to do just that.

Recently I have come to the conclusion that I belong to the 'dangerous' generation, as far as the church is concerned, for in this generation are women who are educated in theology and scriptural exegesis, women who are articulate and competent in their professional lives and, above all, women who were brought up in the pre-conciliar church, when most of the practices and

doctrines seemed to be set in concrete, never to be changed. We remember being taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church and that we must never share in the prayers and services of a false religion. (The poor old Anglicans were included in this!)

We remember being told why the Latin could never be changed. We remember the ban on women without hats in church (which led to such nonsenses as walking with a hand or a hanky on one's head!) We remember spitting out meat, inadvertently taken into the mouth on a Friday. We remember when women were cautiously permitted to make responses at Mass but only when a suitable man was not present, and then only from a distance. We remember the churching of women (which originally was a purification after the contamination of childbirth!). We remember the rules about wearing gloves to touch the 'sacred vessels' – laws and regulations which had built up over the centuries and under which the Gospel message was being submerged. We remember agonising over the correct titles for the male dignitaries of the Church (which paralleled the offices and titles of the imperial court): 'Your Grace', 'Your Eminence', 'My Lord'.

The Church had become a bureaucracy with clerics as officials. Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were not allowed in church choirs (castrati were still used in the Sistine chapel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ouch!) Pius X (now a saint!) reiterated this ban. It seemed that the Church spoke on every aspect of life and women always came as poor seconds. Canon Law, written by men for men and often unrelated to the experience of women, in 1917 spoke of 'women, children and idiots'. I have a cartoon on my fridge showing a Moses-like figure reading from a tablet of stone to the crowd below: 'And men shall be in charge and have the best jobs and women shall dust and obey.' And a tiny group of women on the fringes are saying 'He's making it up'. Many of the rules governing church practices are simply 'made up' and, therefore, can be changed. (Sr Juana Ines de la Cruz 1651-1695) □

ROSEMARY BREEN is a shining example of how much one woman can achieve without Ordination. The Church, WATAC and the wider community have all been blessed by her presence and her activism.

This excerpt is from a presentation made during the nineties.  
It shows how little has changed.

# Painful times for Church reformers

John Warhurst

Two recent events frame the many discussions within the church reform movement, while many of its constituent groups continue to engage with the international Synod on Synodality. Pope Francis suddenly announced in a major interview with an American television network that ordaining women deacons, a long-held aspiration of the movement for women's equality in the church, would never happen. For many reformers this was the final straw, dashing any remaining hopes for concrete action on what was still supposed to be a 'live issue', though sidelined to a Synod study group. Remarkably though, some like the irrepressible campaigner Phyllis Zagano, are still optimistic that long-term reform, years beyond the current Synod, might still be possible.

About the same time the official Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021 reflected once again the local church's abysmal state. Its decline, one factor in generating calls for reform, has continued unabated. Frequently reported under the headline 'the church is now online and multicultural', this report showed that regular church attendance, admittedly in the COVID era, had plunged again since 2016, from a dismal 11.8 per cent to just 8.2 per cent of Catholics (itself now only 20 per cent of the Australian population). The attendance figure, a good measure of identification and belonging, for male Catholics is now below 8 per cent, while women are higher. In one diocese, Maitland-Newcastle, the overall figure is less than 4 per cent. The attendance figures also highlight the increasing diversity of the Catholic community, with 13 per cent of Catholics attending Mass in a language other than English. The attendance figures for Eastern Rite Catholics are sky-high and, in some cases, rising.

My reflections follow involvement in a local meeting in late April and a meeting of Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) in early May, which discussed its draft submission to the Synod.

In both cases the resilience of church reformers continues to amaze me. The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform maintains its long-running series of excellent Zoom speakers. But inevitably the level of trust and optimism is slowly fading away. Even the official report on the Australian submissions to the second assembly of the Synod in October was open about the consultation fatigue within the church.

This is in marked contrast to the situation that existed in 2017. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse had just concluded its enquiries as had the church's own Truth Justice and Healing Commission. Many Catholics, sensing the crisis, were keen to hold the church authorities to account.

Later that year the Plenary Council began to take shape and extensive community consultations followed. There was widespread engagement through several hundred thousand participants and 17,500 submissions. A significant minority of Catholics possessed enthusiasm for reform and, more importantly, still trusted that their voices would be listened to by bishops.

That is no longer the case seven years later. We Australian Catholic reformers are tired and, in some cases battered and bruised, from engagement with the church. We are also older. Most of us have lost hope that reform will occur in our lifetime.

"The reality is that the official Church treats reform groups with disdain. It doesn't even recognise their positive contribution to public church debate by empowering Catholics."

We are now witnessing a changed dynamic within the movement. The balance within its component parts has changed towards a more pessimistic view of officialdom. A minority is still hopeful; a few even remain optimistic, but most are struggling.

The majority view now is that reform groups have been too reactive to the official church. This view, always one strand, is that engagement has proved to be a dead end. We instead need to model what being church should look like and stop trying to reform the institutional church because that goal is no longer achievable.

There is a widespread agreement now that the Plenary Council didn't deliver. This is a bitter pill for reformers to swallow given the enormous effort which went into community engagement.

The Australian church missed 'catching the wave' of some popular enthusiasm during 2017-2022. Worse than that, it has given reformers no credit and instead ground their voices down by obfuscation and delay.

The majority view among reformers now is that the Synod won't deliver the necessary reforms either. It has been made clear that 'embedding cultural change' is the Pope's objective. That is, building 'a synodal church'.

The Synod has steered away from confrontation and hot button issues. Women's equality, a regular priority in continental submissions, ironically is one of them and, despite kind though patronising words, the Pope has now made clear that won't happen.

What the church needs now is not faithful engagement but disruption. It certainly needs disruption on the 'woman's equality' issue. What that might mean in practice is not clear, but something must be done even if fragmentation follows.

Most reformers now believe that the western Church is dying, or at least the Vatican II Church is dying. The Mass Attendance figures for 2021 confirm this. Whatever survives in Australia won't be the Anglo-Celtic Vatican II church, but something quite different.

By participating in strictly circumscribed diocesan events, many think we are colluding with officialdom. That is a sad conclusion. Behind the relatively benign idea of consultation 'fatigue' lies

the darker notion of consultation 'resentment'. The 'Emperor Church' has no clothes. The scales have fallen from the eyes of many reformers.

Similar themes are evident internationally. There is still some remarkable willingness to engage, but the balance has moved from relative optimism to prevailing pessimism.

For international groups like CCRI the central issue must be equality for women. Some are still optimistic that Francis remains on track; that perhaps the 2024 session of the Synod may not be the last; that the Study Groups will evolve into something productive. But this is a minority position. Nevertheless, the majority persists with the 2024 Synodal process in Rome, still hoping that our voices will be 'heard' by the institutional church.

Where to from here? Reformers may still throw a light on the Synod as distinct from trying to influence it through participation. But that distinction must be clear.

Group and individual effort and advocacy still play a positive role. Shining lights among Australian reform groups include Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), Sense of the Faithful (SF) in Melbourne and Concerned Catholics Tasmania (CCT). WATAC models an alternative church through Australian Women Preach, SF does valuable evidence-based tracking of Plenary Council implementation, CCT engages with the Tasmanian church community and pressures the official church as best it can despite the conservative environment in that state.

These are painful times for the church reform movement. The distinction between hope and optimism has been explored by writers like Vaclav Havel and Seamus Heaney. Like them I don't expect 'things to turn out well' though I remain convinced that there is 'good worth working for' within the church.



# A Look at Catholic Anti-Semitism

Alan Clague

Given the events of recent times in Israel, it is of interest to review the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Jews over the ages.

Until 1955, the Good Friday prayers included 'Let us pray for the perfidious Jews'. The last vestiges of official Catholic anti-Semitism were finally removed by the great reform Council, Vatican II, in *Nostra Aetate*. 'The Church....decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed at Jews at any time and by anyone.' This brought to an official end almost two thousand years of discrimination against Jews by the Catholic Church.

The early Christians were Jews living in Jewish communities who continued to attend synagogues. As predicted in John's gospel, Christians were banished from the synagogues after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. In the gospels, Jews were blamed for Christ's execution. Jews considered Christians to be heretics and idolators. *Dialogues with Trypho*, written by Justin Martyr about 150 AD, recounts his discussion with a Jew, Trypho, in which Trypho criticises Christian beliefs and Justin Martyr attempts to correct him. Attempts to convert Jews continued throughout the centuries.

After the Christianisation of Europe these attempts took on an often murderous turn. Some well-known saints were involved. For example, St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria and Doctor of the Church, provoked attacks on Jews, with the expulsion of many survivors from the city. The official policy of the Church towards Jews was outlined by Pope St. Gregory I (the Great) (590-604). Although critical of Jews, he decreed that they should retain their rights under Roman Law. There should be no molestation or forced baptism, but they could not own Christian slaves, and he maintained boundaries between Judaism and

Christianity. Jews were accused of various crimes – poisoning of wells was a common one – and were tortured until they confessed to crimes they did not commit, frequently implicating other Jews as well. They were given the choice of cruel execution – typically burning – or conversion. Anti-semitic myths abounded: Jews were often accused of desecrating consecrated hosts and of eating unleavened bread mingled with Christian blood at Passover. Another anti-semitic myth that emerged at multiple times and in multiple countries over the centuries was that of the Christian child, kidnapped and crucified by the Jews. An analogous story occurs in 'The Prioress's Tale' in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It tells of a Christian boy whose body was thrown into a cesspit after his throat was cut by Jews.

The Crusades had a devastating impact on Jews in Europe. For various reasons, the Crusaders and their local communities embarked on major attacks on the local Jews, murdering thousands. The Vatican and local Church authorities attempted to restrain the people, but to little effect. The murderous anti-Semitism of the Middle Ages did not have purely religious origins. Many Jews were rich, and were not bound by the anti-usury laws of Christians, so that they became money lenders.

When the time came to repay the loan, it was often convenient for a debtor bishop to initiate a pogrom, and eliminate the creditor. The only part of Europe that was not involved in these anti-Semitic activities was Lithuania, which did not adopt Christianity until the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Jews thrived there until the introduction of Christianity. There were many conversions from Judaism to Christianity over the centuries. As many of these were related to extreme duress, their authenticity was often doubted by Christian authorities, particularly as some former Jews continued with various Jewish practices. The examination of Jews for authenticity of conversion reached its peak in the notorious Spanish Inquisition, although Jews had been targeted earlier, along with heretics, by the Inquisition in other countries. More than 13,000 converts from Judaism were tried in the 12 years after 1481, and Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492. Some went to Portugal, and the Inquisition was set up there in 1536. The Inquisition in Spain was not actually abolished until 1808. Over 30,000 persons were burned at the stake.

The attitude of Popes after Gregory I to the Jews was varied. Some were supportive, issuing protective Papal bulls entitled *Sicut Judaeis*; others issued edicts against Jews. Some popes were supportive in some areas, but anti-semitic in others. At times, edicts favourable to Jews issued by various Popes were actively resisted by the population. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council ruled that Jews had to be distinguished from Christians by a difference of dress, which was enacted by forcing Jews to wear a coloured sign on their clothes. They could not be appointed to public office.

In 1271 Pope Gregory X issued an encyclical protecting Jews against forced conversion and other discriminatory practices. He repudiated the myth of Jewish sacrifice of Christian children. In 1751, Pope Benedict XIV issued the encyclical *A Quo Primum* which forbade Jews to live in Polish cities with Christians. Treatment of Jews in the Papal States combined religious and secular elements.

The Inquisition was introduced to Rome in 1542 by Pope Paul III. Pope Paul IV established Jewish ghettos there in 1555 and severely restricted their activities. Jews were partially expelled in 1569 and 1593. In 1775, Pope Pius VI placed further restrictions on Jews in the papal states, but these were removed by Napoleon. They were re-established by Pope Leo XII after his accession in 1825. During the papacy of Pius IX, 1846-1878, treatment of the Vatican Jews varied. In the early, more liberal phase of the papacy, Pope Pius IX improved the lot of the Jews, and in 1848 he abolished the ghetto. The loss of the Papal States to a unified Italy, and his temporary exile to Naples, turned him against reform and led to the declaration of Papal infallibility at the Vatican I Council. He introduced the ghetto and other restrictions on Jews. In 1870, the Papal States were incorporated into Italy and the ghetto was abolished. It was the last remaining ghetto in Europe. Leo XIII (1878-1903) did not issue any papal criticism of Jews, but influential Vatican publications, such as *Osservatore Romano*, were repeatedly anti-semitic. This stopped with the advent of Pope Pius X in 1903, although he refused to endorse Zionism.

In 1938, a draft encyclical, *Humani Generis Unitas*, was prepared for Pope Pius XI as a condemnation of Nazi antisemitism. It stated: 'It is not possible for a Christian to take part in antisemitism.' However, the Pope died before it could be issued.

The role of Pope Pius XII has been controversial. He did not publish *Humani Generis Unitas*, and only indirectly criticised in his own writings. Nonetheless, under his control, the Vatican saved many Jews from death. Two of the officials particularly involved in rescuing Jews, Monsignor Montini and Bishop Roncalli, went on to be Popes St. Paul VI and St. John XXIII.

Since Vatican II, all popes have had positive interactions with Judaism. Pope Paul VI issued *Nostra Aetate* and opened the way for Vatican recognition of Israel by visiting it in 1964. Pope St John Paul II established formal diplomatic relations with Israel. He visited Auschwitz, Israel and the Great Synagogue in Rome and made many positive statements about Judaism. Pope Benedict XVI made many pronouncements supporting dialogue and reconciliation with Jews and condemning antisemitism. He visited synagogues. After he lifted the restrictions on the Tridentine Mass, he altered the part that was derogatory towards Jews.

Pope Francis had positive interactions with the Jewish community in Argentina when Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and this continued as Pope. In February this year, at a time of rising antisemitism, he wrote a letter 'To My Jewish Brothers and Sisters in Israel', exhorting Jews and Catholics to seek 'ways to repair a destroyed world'. The improved Catholic attitude to Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, epitomised by *Nostra Aetate*, should give hope to Reforming Catholics that the Church is capable of implementing those further reforms that we believe will allow it to reflect the will of God in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

ALAN CLAGUE is a member of the ARC Sectariat and is a contributor to many issues of *ARC Voice*.

## Have your say

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinions and reflections 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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