



## Reflection on Spirituality

*Religion is a person sitting in church thinking about kayaking. Spirituality is a person in a kayak thinking about God.'*

This observation, used by some religious writers, is often attributed to Roger Caras, an American writer who is also a wildlife photographer. It creates a contrast between a structure with tradition (religion) and a more personal connection with something much greater (spirituality). In this issue of *ARCvoice* we have various reflections on the reason why regular church attendance is now declining more rapidly. Could it be because the rituals and language used week in and week out are becoming less relevant for more people? Do they have a numbing effect that leads us quite often to drift into a distraction towards whatever our 'kayak' is?

Although the above quote will appeal to nature-lovers like Caras, there are probably points in our lives where an experience or significant event causes us to ponder what is beyond us in a different way because the explanation from our religion doesn't quite gel with us. This could be a situation where we pause to think of an event like the sickness or death of a loved one. For example, my 'kayak' is a sailing craft. When the wind is strong and the waves are steep, the forces around me make it impossible for me to experience them without thinking about the influence or spirit that drives them or is within them. God has to be in all this somewhere. This takes me away from all the anthropomorphic images of God that have long dominated my thinking and senses through word, song and icons. How can the two perspectives be reconciled when it is an integrated and meaningful spirituality that I am seeking? Which of the two is more relevant to me?

A mystic such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin may help to shed some light. For Teilhard, God is present in matter and not just merely to matter. God and matter form a relational whole. This offers new meaning for me. We may believe and yet struggle with the concept of incarnation, for example, because we have been conditioned into thinking of God being

'elsewhere'. However, in the above perspective, God is the name of unlimited life underpinning all reality. If we are comfortable with the notion that God is present in each one of us and that presence manifests itself to a far, far greater degree in Jesus, then incarnation takes on a new dimension. Jesus becomes the fullness of God's presence and our understanding of our relationship with God deepens because God is in us too. Think about what significance this could have if we apply it to an understanding of Eucharist.

I share these thoughts with you realising that many of us struggle with particular aspects of our faith, coupled with a strong desire to find our spiritual self. Anyone would have difficulty continuing to participate in a regular activity, like weekly Mass, if they cannot find relevance in much of what is said and done in relation to it. If, along with many Catholics, our participation has waned, perhaps we can use our 'kayak' to pause and then move forward, hopefully, towards more satisfactory meaning.

**John Buggy**

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# Catholics not attending Mass

## Major decline in attendance

Patrick Nunan

I would like to add one other reason why I think there has been a major decline in attendance at Mass that I included in a joint submission to the 2020 Plenary Council. The following is part of that submission:

The first such example is the disastrous adoption of the *Vox Clara* version of the English liturgy. We all know that, in 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship decided to start with a new version of the English liturgy, again ignoring a new translation completed in the late 1990s by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). The ICEL had spent years refining the initial pre-Vatican II English liturgy version, consulted widely and had reached consensus on an appropriate English version. This was then discarded, and the *Vox Clara* version imposed without the priests and the laity being consulted. This heavy-handed, regal decree approach resulted in an English version that is, as Paul Collins says ‘pseudo mid-Victorian English that a minor 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic novelist might have used on a bad day’.

Father Ian McGinnity, the then chairman of the National Priests Council, said in 2011 when the *Vox Clara* version was introduced that when the church moved from Latin to English 40 years ago, the Vatican accommodated those who refused to change, and suggests the same should happen this time. At least, there should be a time of transition for people to adapt. ‘The liturgy is the place we interface with the people and with God’ – it’s a pre-eminent area. It’s about meeting around the table of the Lord, and it’s sad that it could be the cause of disunity. We would not like to see the Eucharist be a source of division or an exercise in control and power by a particular ideological position within the church.’

Many within the Church and those who left the Church because of the heavy-handed non-consultative approach, see the *Vox Clara* version as tainted, haughty and substandard.

As reported in *The Tablet* on 9 September 2017, Pope Francis has now issued a new order ‘*Magnum Principium*’ that amends canon law (canon 838.3) that bishops now have the power to complete translations of the Mass from Latin to local languages.

*The Tablet* article says the (bishops) ‘are required to ‘faithfully’ prepare and ‘approve’ translations which are then confirmed by Rome. The words ‘faithfully’ and ‘approve’ are both new. This throws open the possibility that the 2011 English Roman Missal – which became mired in disagreement with claims that the Vatican had overly controlled the process – could be changed. The onus will now be on local bishops to take the initiative. Francis’ law also reverses moves by his predecessors to centralise the translation process, which saw Vatican officials editing, and re-writing the work of bishops’ conferences. The foundation stone to his new law, Francis explained, is the ‘great principle’ of Vatican II which stressed that ‘liturgical prayer be accommodated to the comprehension of the people so that it might be understood.’ This task, he pointed out, had originally been entrusted to the bishops in countries across the world. His law comes soon after a landmark speech to Italian liturgists where he declared (sic) that reforms to Catholic worship instituted after the 1962-65 council are ‘irreversible’, something he declared with ‘magisterial authority’.

Accordingly, there is nothing stopping the ACBC to immediately promulgate the change from the *Vox Clara* version to the 2001 ICEL version and have it implemented.’

Over the past few years, I have continued to push the ACBC to adopt the 2001 ICEL version. I have never received a response to that suggestion. The *Vox Clara* version was pushed through by George Pell et al as an attempt to return the Catholic Church to pre-Vatican II days.

PATRICK NUNAN is a member of the ARC Secretariat

## Reasons:

Michael Sibert

1. **The paedophilia crisis** within the 'previously trusted' priesthood and religious orders has led to a high degree of mistrust and subsequent protest vote by many.
2. **The educational gap**, (once respected) between the priesthood and the laity, no longer exists. This factor is very evident in the way many homilies fail to cover or engage effectively with issues faced in contemporary, well-educated lay lives.
3. **Loss of the cultural authority** that the Catholic Church had prior to the 1960's cultural revolution. The pervasiveness of a culture of 'individualism' now means most people no longer do things simply because they are told they should. Many Catholics reserve the right to decide for themselves what they choose to commit to. For many, the Mass simply does not add enough value to their lives to make the commitment worthwhile.
4. **Tight hierarchical control** of the Eucharistic liturgy stifles creative and adaptive initiatives that offer the potential to present the best of the Catholic traditions insights in a manner that would speak to and nurture contemporary lives. Younger generations have voted with their feet. They are absent and would only return if their peers were in the pews and the liturgy spoke to their lives in a meaningful way. Interestingly, liturgies presented in our schools without the involvement of a priest and with greater student involvement in presenting the liturgy are often received very positively.
5. **Greater creative lay involvement** would correlate strongly with greater engagement and provide a much stronger case for regular attendance.
6. **Wide acceptance of the mental health benefits of maintaining a good work-life balance** means two-income time-poor families prioritise their available free time towards health and recreation activities over formal religious participation. Many would also view this choice as attending adequately to their spiritual nature.

MICHAEL SIBERT is a member of the ARC Secretariat

I stopped attending Mass during the Pandemic, after gradually finding less and less relevance in the readings and rituals. I found myself unable to say many parts of the Creed and would often wonder why I was there.

I am a member of the Arcadia Vinnies Conference and I, therefore, find myself having to attend Mass twice a year to give a talk about the Winter Appeal or Christmas Appeal. Each time I do this, I observe the whole operation of the Mass as a slow-moving decline into irrelevance. The opportunities afforded by the Royal Commission have been squandered; nothing has changed and that's just the way Rome likes it.

My friends and I had always had a 'post Mass' coffee session at a local café. We continue this in spite of the fact that half our number no longer attend Mass. I am on excellent terms with the priests in our Parish; they seem to be realistic about the challenges many of us face regarding the Church. I find the work I do with Vinnies, both in the Conference and volunteering at the Welfare Centre at Hornsby, is a far more worthwhile and satisfying expression of my faith.

Karen de Souza  
Maroota NSW



# The Future of the Catholic Church

Br Peter Carroll FMS

With the Feasts of Pentecost and Mary Mother of the Church behind us and the Plenary Council ahead, it's opportune to consider the future of the Church. I'm not a prophet or a futurologist, and of course, in the end, the future of the Church is about hoping against hope in the Spirit. However, it seems that we can't simply carry on as we have been, when foresight and planning are possible and even required of us.

To start, where do we stand today? We are certainly shrinking; we are a smaller 'flock' than in the past, and undoubtedly we will become smaller. Our social influence has also shrunk; compared to what it once was, it is now near negligible. There is also marked diversity; in fact, growing diversity. The style of Christianity appropriate to each cultural group is quite different. We are also a Church of polarisation. Those who hold different opinions have formed themselves into groups in such a way that there are barriers between different groups. In many cases they no longer live together, pray together or work together.

So, what do we need? I'd suggest the Church of the future needs to be characterised by seven features. Firstly, our identity as a Roman Catholic Church is indispensable. The relationship of Christianity and the Church to Rome is absolutely necessary for us Catholics and not merely the result of historical or sociological accidents. However, the Petrine ministry, for us a matter of faith, may be conceived and required by the situation of the modern world in a very different concrete shape. What could that be?

Secondly, we will be a de-clericalised Church. The Church is much more than its officeholders. Those who love, who are unselfish, who have a prophetic gift in the Church, constitute the real Church and are far from being always identical with the officeholders. Next, we will need to be a Church concerned with serving. Of course, the Church must be concerned with itself, but also with all people. We must stand up for justice and freedom, for human dignity, even when it is to our own detriment, even when an alliance (perhaps tacit) with the ruling powers would at first sight seem beneficial. Next, we must be

concerned with morality, but without moralising. The Church must be one which defends morality boldly and unambiguously – but without moralising. However, we cannot be simplistic or arbitrary: for it isn't always easy and clear to say how these concrete questions of human morality should be answered both in the light of the Christian message and with regard to our contemporary world – especially when new areas of morality emerge.

Fifthly, we have to be a Church with open doors, that considers the fluidity and indefiniteness of our frontiers in a positive way. Next, we also need to be unafraid to give concrete directives. The world needs the Church to nominate imperatives, even in, maybe especially in, socio-political action by Christians in the world. The Church must be free to proclaim concrete imperatives both in the sphere of the Church's own life and with reference to social policy and social criticism.

Finally, we need to be a Church of real spirituality. If we are honest, we must admit that we are in many ways a spiritually lifeless Church. The Church's public life is dominated to a terrifying extent by ritualism, legalism, administration, and a boring and resigned spiritual mediocrity continuing along familiar lines. How can we remain the Church of mystery, of evangelical joy, of redeemed freedom? In a Church of true spirituality one thing must be vigorously proclaimed: Jesus.

It seems that we must be a more open Church and an ecumenical Church. The Church of the future will be built from the grass roots – from below, most probably from basic communities that result from free association and initiative. We must also be a more democratised Church with more obvious participation by the laity, particularly women. We require a synthesis involving spirit, love, hope and humility. And this will lead us to offer a genuine service to the world.

Now friends – a confession: none of the ideas above, in fact very few of the words, are mine. They've been appropriated from that famous twentieth century theologian, Karl Rahner SJ, and were published in a book, entitled *The Shape of the Church to Come*. The book was a collection of thoughts he directed to the German Church. The year: 1971, 50 years ago.

I'll leave it to you to draw conclusions!

PETER CARROLL FMS is member of Marist Brothers Australia and the President of Catholic Religious Australia

# Collective efficacy can work

Michael Hawton

The recent Roman Synod on Synodality focused on ‘journeying together’, with the aim of enabling the church to be ‘more participatory and missionary’. This should be exciting news for local parishes, especially in the Year of Hope that is 2025.

A key way for the Church to be more participatory, at a parish level, is to have a parish council which is open, listening to its community, welcomes involvement and is transparent in its decision-making. At a very basic level, parish pastoral councils should be established around a central objective of making parishes more vibrant in the service of the gospel message of Jesus, which is something I think needs to be developed to counter the messages of a post-modern philosophy.

Our church faces a few hurdles to make viable parish councils a reality – not the least of which arise from its own history. For example, I doubt that any methodology around how to create dynamic and inclusive parish pastoral councils is even taught in Australian seminaries, now, or in the past.

The idea that people acting together is more effective compared with a ‘command-and-control’ structure (in which the priest is solely in charge) is not new. Educators call the ability of groups acting effectively in the service of good outcomes ‘collective efficacy’. They know that their joint efforts, through meeting regularly (weekly or fortnightly to begin with) will produce better and sustainable outcomes compared with what any one individual can achieve.

To make a parish pastoral council work collectively and achieve its goals, there needs to be some belief that there will necessarily be differences of opinion, and even conflict, but that this can be harnessed to make even better decisions. Even the early church Fathers (James and Paul come to mind) differed in their version of the early church, and they had disagreements.

In any functioning parish pastoral council, there should be opportunities for people to work through conflict – and to work toward decisions that will meet most people’s needs.

Over a lifetime, I have seen too many instances where people cut off each other, because they have taken offence at another’s opinion or because they can’t reconcile what another person is saying with their own world view. This can also see people in positions of power prematurely exclude those, or foreclose on conversations they don’t agree with. How often have we all seen this?

We see this in modern culture in the form of ‘cancel culture’ where a group jumps on opinions different from their own opinion – and excludes them.

If the outcome of the recent Synod is for more discussion to be had, there will necessarily need to be certain ground rules that the church leadership and parishioners take account of, if viable parish pastoral councils are to succeed. For the clerical class, who may be threatened by a perception that their powerbase is being eroded, it will require of them a degree of trust and patience. It may be a struggle for many priests to listen and withhold judgement and to maintain inclusivity.

In my last article for *ARCVoice*, I suggested that the clergy need not be afraid of modern-day change processes. Moreover, if these processes are to be effective catalysts for ‘good’ change, they cannot be achieved without the involvement of a somewhat-jaded group of non-practising Catholics and a large group of younger Catholics. People are looking for a way to practise their faith and explore a meaningful spiritual life and it behoves existing parishioners, in collaboration with a dwindling clergy, to provide the means of involvement and to establish opportunities for listening, consulting and participating in the building up of local parishes.

I truly believe that it won’t be easy to stop the desire for collaboration that has been borne of the recent Synod and the Pope’s emphases on participation, listening and discernment. For the moment, the Church is at an inflection point which will be hard to halt.

I also think that the ideas of a new generation of parishioners (people in their 30s, 40s and 50s) should not be stymied by older Catholics who just want things to stay the same. Look at the way that progressive companies and organisations use the ideas of a younger generation to act as catalysts for progress. If the Australian church does not listen with an open heart, if it does not change, it will eventually die as we know it. The uncomfortable reality, as Dr Phillipa Martyr has pointed out in her

recent *ARCVoice* article ('Why Catholics don't come to Mass', *ARCVoice* – No 94), is that parishioners are getting older and dying and some will eventually succumb to illnesses and not be able to attend mass.

At this point in time, we need to embrace the lessons of the recent Synod and collective efficacy processes – and how they can be a counterpoint to an outdated 'command and control' version of parish life. It is only by acting together with all that that entails that we will see parish life grow and prosper.

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## The Church of Christ

The church of Christ must be an inviting church

A church with open doors

A warming motherly church

A church of all generations

A church of the dead, the living and the unborn

A church of those before us, those with us and those after us

A church of understanding and sympathy, thinking with us, sharing our joy and sorrow

A church that laughs with the people and cries with the people

A church that is not foreign and does not act that way

A human church, a church for us

A church that like her mother can wait for her children

A church who looks for her children and follows them

A church that visits the people where they are, at work or at play,

At the factory gate and at the football stadium, and within the four walls of the home

A church of those in the shadow, of those who weep, of those who grieve

A church of the worthy, but also the unworthy, of the saints and of the sinners.

***Cardinal Franz Konig***  
***December, 2002***

# A JUST WAR?

Alan Clague

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: ‘Governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed.’ Since the time of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the attitude to warfare has been refined and there are modern guidelines setting down criteria for a just war. These guidelines include criteria defining the right to go to war (*ius ad bellum*) and criteria for proper behaviour in war (*ius in bello*).

Contemporary Catholic just war doctrine gives four criteria for a war to be just: Damage inflicted by the aggressor must be lasting, grave and certain. All other means of addressing the problem must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective. There must be serious prospects of success. The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders greater than the evil to be eliminated.

The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*, states: ‘Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation.’

Recent Popes have been quite explicit in their condemnation of war. St John XXIII wrote: ‘In this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice.’ *Pacem in Terris* 127 1963. Pope Francis was even more explicit: ‘We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to involve the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war’. Never again war!’ (*Fratelli tutti* 258 2020)

In recent times, Australia has engaged in three wars, now usually accepted as unjust. The involvement of foreign forces in the Vietnam war has been almost universally assessed as being unjust, not only in its justification (*ius ad bellum*) (which included lies about the Gulf of Tonkin episode), but also in the tactics employed (*ius in bello*), including the use of Agent Orange. Australia has the additional problem that South Vietnam only asked for our help after we requested that they do so.

The Second Iraq war was justified by US claims that Saddam Hussein had ‘weapons of mass destruction’. These false claims were later shown to be manufactured by the USA, who made the unlikely claim that the secular state of Iraq would shelter the Salafist group, Islamic State. The conduct of the war was also in breach of *ius in bello*, as exemplified by the well-documented use of horrific torture at Abu Ghraib prison. Australia’s Catholic Bishops issued a statement opposing the war. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops produced ‘Living with Faith and Hope after September 11’ in which they opposed use of force against Iraq.

The USA justified invading Afghanistan in order to capture Osama bin Laden. The US president George W Bush referred to it as a ‘crusade’. However, Pope John Paul II declined to call it a ‘just war’. Australia joined the USA in the invasion. As with the second Iraq war, prisoners were tortured at the Bagram Air Base prison. Australia is investigating illegal behaviour by its own troops. Once again Australia was engaged in an unjust war.

In 2021, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, expressed concern over the AUKUS nuclear submarine deal. Although much of the deal is shrouded in secrecy, there is general consensus that the primary purpose of AUKUS is to support the USA if it goes to war against China in the event of the People’s Republic of China attempting to reclaim by force the Province of Taiwan.

The legality of such a war has been investigated by Professor Ben Saul, who holds the Challis Chair of International Law at the University of Sydney. He stated that Taiwan has never been admitted to the United Nations as a sovereign state. USA and Australia acknowledge China’s claim that Taiwan is its territory – a ‘one China’ policy. Only a state has the right to use military force in self-defence against an armed attack by another state, and Taiwan itself has never. USA and Australia both have a ‘one China’ policy categorically declared statehood. The defence against these arguments could be that Taiwan is a stabilised ‘de facto’ state with a ‘people’ of a distinct identity. Even if this is accepted, it does not necessarily entitle Taiwan to become an independent state, as opposed to an autonomous region within China.

The Australian government has now engaged Australia in three unjust wars without the prior approval of the Australian parliament. We are now involving ourselves with a scenario that is likely to



lead to yet another unjust war. Both major political parties are involved. No Christian would want their country to be engaged in an unjust war. It would be a great show of Christian courage for the bishops of Australia to issue a statement warning of the dangers of pursuing a path that is likely to lead to Australia's involvement in a fourth unjust war.

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

Recommended Reading:

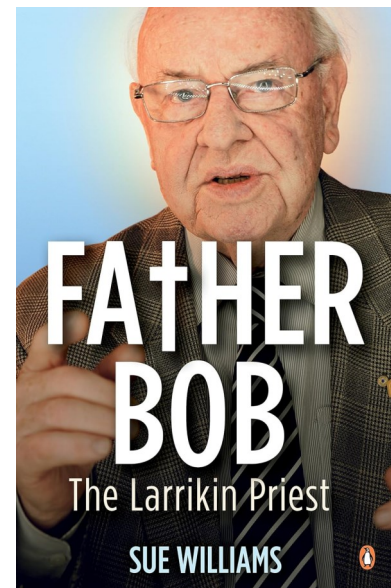
## The life story of 'the people's priest' – outspoken Catholic priest,

### Father Bob Maguire

(died 19 April 2023)

**T**his is the life story of Father Bob Maguire – a rare behind-the-scenes look at the much-loved 'people's priest'. The enigmatic champion of the down-and-out was shaped by a lonely childhood in poor circumstances, an early priesthood that collided with the upheaval of Vatican II and working with the army during the Vietnam War. It is a lively portrait of the man behind the resilient social activist and popular media performer who refuses to be defeated by enforced retirement from the parish over which he presided for nearly forty years.

Bob Maguire: 'Some people have called me a maverick or a larrikin or a renegade, or they say I'm plain mad. People will have to decide for themselves. But just one thing: Don't ever make me a saint. Because that is something I'm most definitely not.'



Les Twentyman: *'People love him and hate him with a passion. But you don't become a leader unless you've got that.'*

Carrie Bickmore: *'He's one of the most genuine souls I know.'*

Chief Justice Terry Higgins: *'His knowledge of street kids and his understanding of them is phenomenal.'*

Neil Mitchell: *'He is a treasure, magnificent, unpredictable, passionate, entertaining and a little dangerous.'*

Eddie McGuire: *'Bob is a real doer. He always looks on the bright side of a tough world and gets stuck into the action and makes things happen.'*

## The wisdom of Fr Bob Maguire

Whatever happens... men, women and children have to be prepared to put other people first and thereby create the miracle of the species which is people living together in harmony and putting other people first, before themselves.

The persistent appetite for human beings for community is what we should all be dedicated to.

You need a civil society... Bushfires can achieve the change from society to community. Bushfires can. Floods can. Ghastly crimes and disasters can. Places can change... but it takes blood, sweat and tears.



# Journalist aims to spread story of religion's contribution to Australia

Dr Rachael Kohn (ACU)

**A**ward-winning journalist, Rachael Kohn, says true democracy needs all Australians, regardless of religious belief, to 'work together in common cause'. Source: ACU.

Dr Kohn made her comments at the annual Federal Parliamentary Interfaith Breakfast co-hosted by Australian Catholic University and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Milton Dick, on 24th November 2024.

Addressing 40 parliamentarians and more than 80 faith and community leaders, Dr Kohn said Australian democracy relied on acknowledging the contributions of religion and history, not 'distorting the past and pouring contempt on our faith traditions'.

'Yet, today's 'Vanguard of the New' is eager to paint the recorded past in the darkest of terms, for how else to elevate new schemes and make them look full of promise?' Dr Kohn said.

'The Vanguard of the New' presents our history as a litany of failure, denies every virtue that our forebears upheld, and rubbishes every step of progress that they laboured to achieve in the most adverse circumstances.

Dr Kohn explained how she saw the 'nobler purpose and mission' of religion and how it could contribute positively to Australian society, firstly as an academic and then a journalist with the ABC, establishing herself as a household name for 26 years.

'And it was that story of religion's contribution to Australia that I wanted to share with the public in my books, my talks and my programs on ABC Radio National,' she said.

Across 1700 programs that she produced and presented, Dr Kohn interviewed thousands of highly respected religious leaders – from archbishops, chief rabbis, the Dalai Lama, local clerics, imams and lay people, professionals and scholars, to 'unsung heroes' who found a greater purpose through faith.

These interviews, according to Dr Kohn, demonstrated the ways in which religion could encourage community and, therefore, strengthen Australian democracy.

'Democracy needs us all to work together in common cause,' she said.

'Religion has aided that effort by reminding us of our moral purpose and sharing the means by which we choose our 'better selves' and by which trust can be established and reinforced among disparate people.'

ACU Vice-Chancellor and President, Zlatko Skrbis, said Dr Kohn's message echoed the vision of the Parliamentary Interfaith Breakfast, which ACU has hosted across 10 years. He thanked the many leaders, both political and faith-based, for their support since the first Interfaith Breakfast in 2014.

Source: ACU <https://cathnews.com/~documents/media-releases/media-releases-2024/241122-acu-dr-rachael-kohn-ao-talks-religion-democracy-and-the-individual-at-acus-interfaith-breakfast/?layout=default>



# Opus Dei—A Threat

Cecile Yasbek

**A**s a child in South Africa, I distinctly remember in the 1960s the special collection at Sunday mass, a few times a year, for Opus Dei. My father explained to me that it was for the work of the Church. What did I know, and what could I expect by way of explanation when he bellowed at the top of his voice the hymn, ‘*God bless our Pope*’?

The Catholic Church in South Africa, unlike the Anglican Church, was not well represented in the anti-Apartheid movement, raising questions about how much power Opus Dei had in the South African Church.

The publication of *Opus* in 2024 is an ominous sign that, with the resurgence of political conservatism around the world, this extreme sect within the Catholic Church may also be having a resurgence.

We know that Opus Dei was supported by Franco in Spain; Opus Dei supported Marcos in the Philippines; and, according to the author, was involved in the coup that dispatched Allende, and helped to install and prop up human rights criminal, Pinochet, in Chile.

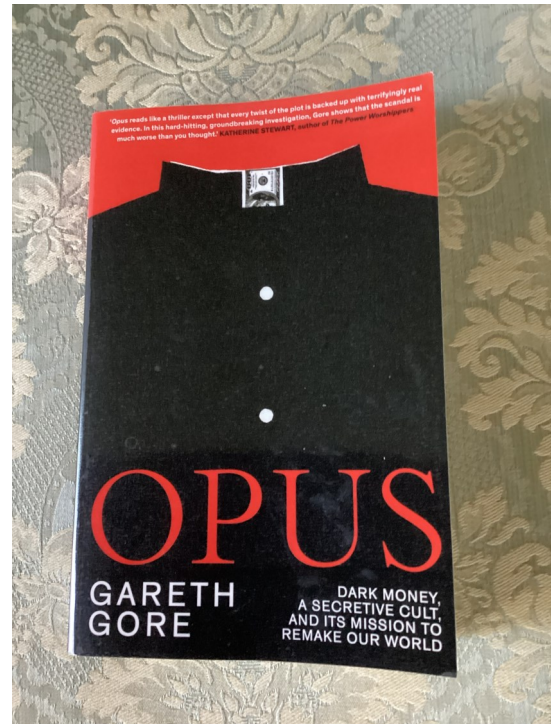
Polish Pope John Paul II, was an Opus Dei Prelate who hired several Opus Dei priests and nuns to staff his administration.

Within the Church, Opus Dei clergy tried to conceal paedophilia, as uncovered by reporters on the Boston Globe. The case eventually went to court and Cardinal Law went to jail for his role in concealment.

Pope Francis is ageing and apparently ailing. We could see yet another conservative lead the Vatican, steering it to the far right with all the sinister machinations we have seen in the past.

On page 308: ‘If Pope Francis dies before real reform happens, Opus Dei will emerge stronger with plans to re-Christianise the planet, whether that’s what people want or not. Gay marriage, secular education, scientific research [ie. IVF] and the Arts will fast become its next targets.’

CECILE YAZBEK is a published author. Although raised a Catholic, she no longer goes to Mass



**Opus: dark money, a secretive cult, and its mission to remake our world Paperback – 8 October 2024**

by [Gareth Gore](#) (Author)

**A** thrilling expose recounting how members of Opus Dei – a secretive, ultra-conservative Catholic sect – pushed its radical agenda within the Church and around the globe, using billions of dollars siphoned from one of the world’s largest banks.

For over half a century, Banco Popular was one of the most profitable banks in the world – until one day in 2017, when the Spanish bank suddenly collapsed overnight. When investigative journalist Gareth Gore was dispatched to report on the story, he expected to find yet another case of unbridled capitalist ambition gone wrong. Instead, he uncovered decades of deception that hid one of the most brazen cases of corporate pillaging in history, perpetrated by a group of men sworn to celibacy and self-flagellation who had secretly controlled Banc Popular and abused their positions there to help spread Opus Dei to every corner of the world.

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‘Opus is a genuine exposé, a fluid, authoritative account backed up by more than 100 pages of footnotes. It seeks to lift the veil on an organisation whose ‘secrecy – and outward image of piety and impecuniousness’ – masks, according to Gore, a litany of exploitative practices, opaque money and clandestine political influence operations that has, so far, culminated in the Trumpist takeover of the US Supreme Court ... Gareth Gore has done a great service in putting all this material in the public domain in such a digestible format.’

**Peter Geoghegan, *The Times Literary Supplement***

## Catholic Womenpriests

### Kate McElwee

A WOC board member likes to ask me: ‘Kate, what’s it going to take?’ And more often than not, my response is: **‘Everything we’ve got’**.

I certainly felt like the Women’s Ordination Conference gave everything we’ve got during the multi-year process of the Synod on Synodality, and especially during its culmination in Rome during October 2024. But during these challenging times, I want to share the honest depths of what we are able to do in **one month**, and ask if you can imagine what we might be capable of with more resources.

Consider just two months ago, in October 2024: We hosted an inclusive prayer service at the Basilica of St. Praxedes, featuring testimonies of women from around the world. We created a space for ordained women to preach in a Roman basilica, and young Catholic women to articulate the frustration they feel within the institutional church.

We dreamed up and created the Don’t Kick the Can, Women Can Be Priests’ witness during the opening session of the synod: a creative, visible, and media-catching event that claimed our space on the prophetic edge of the Vatican. Photos, videos, and interviews from that vigil were featured everywhere from the New York Times, Le Figaro, Religion News Service, CNN, AP, and Reuters.

We spearheaded a march to the Vatican with the message ‘Why Not Me?’, bringing together women from Argentina to South Africa, India to Indiana. We hand-crafted paper fans to ‘fan the flames of justice,’ and negotiated with Roman police to make sure this demonstration was seen, heard and effective.

We saturated the media with our uncompromising message. Our deep connections with members of the media ensured the voices of those calling for the full rights of women in the church were centered. Women in ordained ministry was the predominant topic of the synod, one that journalists, delegates, and even Vatican representatives were forced to face regularly.

We also painted the town purple with 180 posters of original art and photographs of women priests lining the streets surrounding the Vatican. Social media-savvy synod watchers shared these images far and wide. The message could not be missed: Women can be priests!

Every evening during the synod, we held a baptismal candle vigil in St. Peter’s Square, a gathering place for friends and allies coming through Rome to pray together. This persistent witness, a glow of hope, made space at the synod for women’s ordination advocates,

especially needed on days when it felt like there was ‘no room.’

We deepened our connections with international partners, Holy See ambassadors, bishops and synod delegates through one-on-one conversations. These meetings don’t make our newsletters, but we work tirelessly to build bridges, seek and offer advice, and position WOC as not ‘niche’ but necessary. These relationships are a significant shift in our work and show just how much our movement is growing.

But for many, the outcome of the synod felt disappointing and insufficient. While the question of women deacons ‘remains open’, it is ‘entrusted’ to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. While delegates of the synod expressed their ‘outrage’ at the lack of transparency around this working group, the question of women in ministry ended up in the hands of ordained men, who claim it is not yet ‘ripe’.

Are we surprised? Ordained men decide the parameters and pace of synodality, and when the time is ‘ripe’. And they do so at an incalculable cost. The church has lost generations of women who endured the pain and humiliation of having to prove the validity of their calling, their humanity and their equal place in the church.

We at WOC believe the time is ‘ripe’ to launch Catholic Women Strike, a global effort to disrupt the status quo. This Lent we will lead a worldwide boycott, calling on the women of the church to strike from sexism by withholding time, labor and financial resources from the church.

*What will it take, you’d be right to ask:* **Everything we’ve got.**

Members like you are our greatest strength, and your financial support during this truly crucial time in the life of the church and our country is what will make the difference. As you know, we punch well above our weight and are able to move mountains on a shoe-string budget. But the moment demands more.

Please, as you consider your end-of-year giving, I kindly ask you to make a solidarity gift to the Women’s Ordination Conference. I am so proud of our small and mighty organisation (and all that we are able to do with just a staff of two)! But I’m ready, and I know you are too, for us to do even more. The time is oh-so-ripe.

Thank you for believing in WOC and trusting us to carry this important mission forward. We give it our all. And with your help, we can give a little more.

KATE McELWEE is Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference

# A controversial graduation address

Bill Uren, SJ, AO

On March 15, 2022, the Roman journalist, Sandro Magister, published a memorandum that, he alleged, was circulating among the Cardinals of the Catholic Church at that time. This memorandum was intended to inform the Cardinals about the current state of the Church and the papacy and was calculated to influence them when they would gather in conclave to elect the next Pope after the death of Pope Francis. The memorandum was very critical of Pope Francis himself and particularly his interventions in the operations of the Vatican Curia. It deplored the financial transactions in which the Curia had been involved – and where the Holy See had incurred substantial losses. Even more significantly, it was dismissive of the Synod on Synodality and the model of ecclesiastical governance the Synod was proposing to introduce where a much greater participation of the laity in the lead-up to, and review of, episcopal decision-making was envisaged.

The memorandum was circulated anonymously under the name, ‘Demos’, but the author was reliably identified soon after as the Australian Cardinal, George Pell. Cardinal Pell on other occasions had spoken critically on the way in which synodality may dilute the ‘apostolic tradition’, the authority which a bishop, as the successor of the Apostles, may exercise in his own diocese.

When Cardinal Pell died in Rome in January, 2023, it was anticipated that an Australian archbishop would soon be designated to succeed him in the ranks of the Cardinals. He and his immediate predecessors as Cardinal had been the Archbishop of Sydney, and it was confidently predicted that the present incumbent in that diocese, Archbishop Anthony Fisher, would soon be raised to that dignity. Indeed, some of his supporters and colleagues in the diocesan offices and in *The Australian* newspaper had been more than a little forthright in their remonstrances that such a papal designation had not been more immediately forthcoming. Imagine their consternation then, when, instead of Archbishop Fisher or even some other Australian archbishop, Bishop Mykola Bychok, the Ukrainian Eparch of Saints Peter and Paul in Melbourne, was designated

Cardinal-elect by the Pope on October 10, 2024. He was duly installed in Rome on December 7, the youngest member of the College of Cardinals.

It was both a surprising and not-so-surprising appointment. Surprising, because a Ukrainian Eparch has been appointed as Cardinal in an Australian Church and the Archbishop of the traditional See has been overlooked. Not-so-surprising, because Pope Francis has on not a few occasions overlooked the incumbents of traditional sees and gone into the highways and byways to select his Cardinals. Not-so-surprising, too, because Archbishop Fisher is well known to be a former protégé of Cardinal Pell and a subscriber to many of the same conservative views, particularly on Church governance and the value and magisterial authority of the recently concluded Synod. Perhaps Cardinal Pell effectively shot the cardinalial aspirations of Archbishop Fisher in the foot when the memorandum, which he circulated to his colleagues, came (as it inevitably would) to the attention of Pope Francis.

Of course, the successor of Pope Francis might revert to a more traditional schedule of designating Cardinals, and the Archbishop of Sydney might once again be seen as the legitimate aspirant to the Australian red hat. But it would be unusual, if not without precedent, for there to be contemporaneously two Australian Cardinals. And Cardinal Bychok is only 44 years of age. Retirement age is 80.

These two contrasting ecclesiastical ideologies – Pope Francis ‘wide-ranging and inclusive synodality on the one hand, and Cardinal Pell’s hierarchical clericalism on the other’ – are now on full display in a dispute that is currently racking the Australian Church. It is epitomised in an apparently ‘furious’ six-page letter that Archbishop Fisher directed to the Pro-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, Ms. Virginia Bourke. The initial spark that led ultimately to this incendiary missive was an address that was delivered at a medical and nursing graduation at the Melbourne campus of the ACU by a former trade union official and committed Catholic, Mr. Joe de Bruyn, on Monday, October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. de Bruyn has been a long-time forthright and courageous promoter of Catholic social principles in trade union and Labor political circles. Accordingly, he was nominated by Archbishop Fisher as a worthy recipient of an Honorary Doctorate at the ACU. The ACU endorsed this nomination and, as is customary on these occasions, invited Mr. de Bruyn to deliver the graduation address to the students, their parents, friends and

guests and the staff of the University.

After briefly congratulating the graduates, Mr. de Bruyn spent virtually the remainder of his address in recounting his own personal history in promoting and defending Catholic values in the trade union and political arenas. He spoke specifically of abortion, of access to IVF, and of same-sex marriage. Even though in each instance he confessed that his efforts to promote Catholic values were ultimately unsuccessful, nonetheless, in concluding, he urged the graduates not to be deterred from being as outspoken as he had been in defending and promoting Catholic values in their subsequent professional and personal lives.

‘I have come to appreciate that one cannot profitably explore with students (and, indeed, with their elders) the topics of Mr. de Bruyn’s address except in the context where there is a right of reply and where there is an opportunity to put an alternative point of view. To pontificate from the pulpit or lectern is a recipe for disaster.’

Apparently, his advocacy of these Catholic values in a graduation address antagonised many of his audience, both students, parents, guests and staff, and they showed their disapproval by leaving the auditorium even as he was speaking. The University was embarrassed by the walkout and attempted subsequently to alleviate the distress by returning graduation fees to the students and offering counselling both to them and to the other attendees. The University had been aware of the content of Mr. de Bruyn’s address prior to its delivery and had suggested that he edit and moderate some of his more challenging remarks, but all to no avail. Neither the Chancellor nor the Vice-Chancellor of ACU attended the graduation.

In the aftermath there has been a strong defence of Mr. de Bruyn’s right to speak on these matters in a graduation address. There has been strong criticism of the University’s reactions, mainly from the commentators of *The Australian* newspaper and the officers of the Sydney Catholic archdiocese, many of whom are still in thrall to the legacy of Cardinal Pell, who had also at times been a strong critic of the ACU and its alleged failure to be more upfront in promoting Catholic values. Both the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Comensoli, and the new Cardinal-designate, Mykola Bychok, weighed in subsequently in defending Mr. de Bruyn’s right to address these matters even in the context of a graduation address.

It has been an unfortunate incident, driving a (further) wedge between the lay-led University and

official Catholic authorities. Mr. de Bruyn and his supporters have continued to defend his right to speak on these matters in a graduation address, and the University has not resiled from its belief that, at least in the context of a graduation address at a public university, it was inappropriate to address these topics which continue to be controverted not only generally but even in some Catholic circles. It regretted that, if one disagreed with Mr. de Bruyn, there was no alternative to express one’s disagreement except by leaving the auditorium. But this also meant foregoing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate one’s graduation or that of one’s offspring or friend.

I have lectured and tutored in moral philosophy and bioethics at three different universities. I have been a member of over twenty clinical and human research ethics committees in universities, hospitals and research centres, and for most of the past fifty years I have lived as a priest cheek by jowl with university students in four different residential university colleges, and I must admit that as a result of these experiences I was not surprised by the audience’s reactions to Mr. de Bruyn’s address. I have come to appreciate that one cannot profitably explore with students (and, indeed, with their elders) the topics of Mr. de Bruyn’s address except in the context where there is a right of reply and where there is an opportunity to put an alternative point of view. To pontificate from the pulpit or lectern is a recipe for disaster.

And, unfortunately, there are five further dimensions to the specific topics that Mr. de Bruyn addressed which would have made that address even less attractive and credible and more likely to antagonise many of his audience, especially, I suspect, the students.

The first of these dimensions is that Mr. de Bruyn is male. It is increasingly difficult for a man to speak credibly on abortion. Abortion is ineluctably women’s business. I suspect that in this day and age it is only a woman who has undergone an abortion or a woman who has resisted the temptation to abort that can speak credibly on abortion.

The second dimension is that Mr. de Bruyn spoke as a committed member of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, for many students, even Catholics – and more than a few of their elders – the Catholic Church is viewed as an insensitive and authoritarian institution. Edicts from on high, especially on matters sexual, are given scant respect, particularly if they are issued from the pulpit and the lectern without the opportunity for debate and discussion.

The third dimension that diluted Mr. de Bruyn’s



credibility is that the matters that he addressed relate, primarily at least, to women. For much too long the official Church has treated women as second-class citizens. Anything the official Church says about women is likely to be taken with a large grain of salt, and that not only by students, of course, but especially by them.

Fourthly, this compromise of its credibility is further compounded by the fact that the matters of which he spoke relate specifically to women's bodies. Despite the fact that the Church is often perceived as either irrelevant or authoritarian, despite, too, its long-term inability to come to terms with 'the feminine mystique' and treat women as equal, a male celibate clergy have never hesitated to pontificate on aspects of women's bodies and women's sexuality – even apart from abortion, there is contraception, reproductive technology, same-sex marriage, gender diversity, etc. It is not surprising if a younger generation in particular find these pontifications unconvincing and those who advocate them unpersuasive and lacking in credibility.

And finally, of course, there is what every Catholic spokesperson has to deal with, especially if he or she is unwise enough to enter the field of sexual ethics. There continues to loom large the spectre of pedophilia, specifically the sexual abuse of children by clergy and the subsequent efforts of the Catholic hierarchy to protect the Church's reputation by covering-up and minimising the incidence of these crimes. Not only Mr. de Bruyn's, but any Catholic spokesperson's, credibility is inevitably diminished by this spectre.

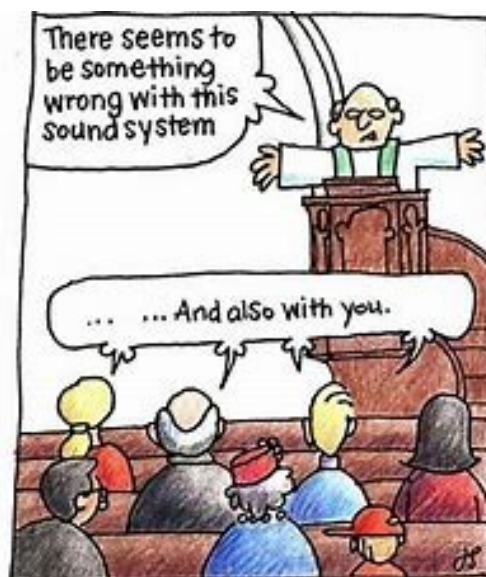
Now, these five limitations of the Church's credibility in these sexually related matters does not mean that there are not contexts where these highly

contentious matters should not be addressed and what is relevant and cogent in the Church's teaching should not be elaborated and defended. Mr. de Bruyn himself, as he reported in his address, has given eloquent witness to these values in trade union and party-political contexts. But I suspect these were contexts where alternative points of view were accessible, and the matters were subject to debate. I cannot but have serious doubts, however, that a graduation address to students, their parents, their friends and the University staff at a public university is such an appropriate context. Perhaps there are still confessional Catholic tertiary institutions where a committed Catholic speaker will not labour under the five credibility compromises that I have outlined – perhaps Campion College in Sydney, where Mr. de Bruyn is a board member, is one of these. But I doubt whether the Australian Catholic University is such an institution. It accepts students of all faiths and none. It is committed to engaging in non-confessional terms with the wider tertiary sector and the staff and students that people it. Granted that, a confessional graduation address must at best appear anomalous, at worst, ill-advised.

I am not surprised there was a walkout.

In conclusion, I note that the ACU Senate, despite the ongoing brouhaha, has recently renewed the Vice-Chancellor's appointment for another five years.

BILL UREN, SJ, AO, is a Scholar-in-residence at Newman College at the University of Melbourne. A former Provincial Superior of the Australian and New Zealand Jesuits, he has lectured in moral philosophy and bioethics in universities in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth and has served on the Australian Health Ethics Committee and many clinical and human research ethics committees in universities, hospitals and research centres.



# 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 than just the Roman Catholic Church.

**Second:** 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.

**Third:** 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.

Moving on.

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 emphasise, 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:

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.

**JOHN A. DICK** is a historical theologian, now retired from the KU Leuven. His areas of research, lecturing and writing are religion and values in the United States, secularisation and religious fundamentalism.



## Have your say

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinions and reflections on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church.

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