

# arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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## *'We are not the power in the land which we once were'*

This humble statement by Archbishop Coleridge, a member of the hierarchy, may come as a surprise to many older Catholics, entrenched as we all were in such pontifications as: 'We are the One True Church'; '... divinely inspired by God'; '... infallible!' It is to Archbishop Coleridge's credit that he has the humility to make such a statement – and it is a measure of the maturity of most thinking Catholics (in which we include ARC members) that we cannot but agree with him. It is indeed welcome news that he has unveiled plans to hold an historic plenary council of the entire Catholic Church in 2020. Australian Reforming Catholics welcome this initiative and look forward in due course to canvassing all members for input into the preparation of submissions.

Arrogance is the opposite to humility – and what an arrogant institution we were. Not only did the Church secure the best real estate, but even today the 'Boys Only' lifestyle, lavish vestments and liturgies to represent Christ make a mockery of His humble message: *Love one another as I have loved you.*

However, Archbishop Coleridge also said: *'I think we have to accept the fact that Christendom is over – by which I mean mass, civic Christianity. It's over. Now, how do we deal with that fact?'* I find this harder to agree with – especially in these times when we are beleaguered with real and threats of violence in the name of another religion – Islam. This is not to say that there are not many non-violent Islamists who, like us, deplore the awful deeds done in the name of their god. But are they any different to the Crusaders whose mission was to kill all the infidels – all in the name of Christianity. It is just that today the weapons are more destructive.

At our recent Conference, without reference to any Catholic teachings, Dr Carmen Lawrence's reflections on the morality of Public Policy as it related to Climate Change and Asylum Seekers could not have been more 'Christian' in its content. We were certainly not disappointed. In reality, most people I know – whatever their faith – seem to live good lives.

Unencumbered by Church doctrine and practices, my 'atheist' daughters have a far more compassionate and less judgmental view of their fellow human beings than our generation. Remember when it was a mortal sin to send your child to a state school! Remember when there was an 'Index' of books Catholics were forbidden to read! Remember when we believed in a Catholics-Only Heaven!

To quote the Archbishop again: *How are we going to deal with that fact?*

**Margaret Knowlden**  
*Editor*

PS: We are sending you two copies of *ARCvoice*. Please give one to a friend to encourage more Members.

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# Archbishop announces plans for Synod of Catholic Church in Australia

*The Catholic Leader, 17 August 2016*

**B**RISBANE Archbishop Mark Coleridge has unveiled plans to hold an historic plenary council of the entire Catholic Church in Australia. It is to be held in 2020, only the fifth time in Australia's history, and 79 years after the previous plenary council meeting.

Archbishop Coleridge said bishops had agreed a plenary council or synod was needed because 'we are at a time of profound cultural change. Not only in the wider community, but in the Church.' 'I think we have to accept the fact that Christendom is over – by which I mean mass, civic Christianity. It's over. Now, how do we deal with that fact?' Archbishop Coleridge said. 'We are not the power in the land which we once were.'

The last plenary council of the Church in Australia was held in 1937. That event, and earlier ones in 1885, 1895 and 1905, were exclusively male gatherings, with only bishops, theologians and superiors of male religious orders attending. Women, religious or lay people, took no part. Archbishop Coleridge said women in the Church would play a role in 2020.

A plenary council can discuss and legislate on a wide range of issues, including matters of faith, morals and discipline. It can also address the critical issues of the times. This is no time for the Church to be putting up signs that say 'business as usual,' Archbishop Coleridge said. 'If we needed any proof, then the Royal Commission has shown that. 'We need to face the facts, and in the light of the facts, which aren't always friendly, we have to make big decisions about the future.'

Beyond a Church response to the Royal Commission into sexual abuse of children, Archbishop Coleridge said he expected there would be consideration of other issues in the public gaze such as homosexual marriage. 'I would be very surprised if those issues were not an important part of the plenary council's work,' he said.

'Everything is potentially on the radar screen, anything that does not infringe on the Church's faith, teachings or morals.' The plenary council could also expect to engage with contemporary issues of justice, peace, development and the environment.

Archbishop Coleridge said the idea of a Plenary Council or synod, which means 'on the road

together', had been discussed by Australian bishops for the past 10 years. Agreement to proceed in 2020 gained momentum in the past 12 months. 'When I went to the synod last October, listening to the very important speech the Pope gave on the morning of October 17 where he spoke about the 'synodality' of the Church – that it's not just some of the bishops some of the time, but all of the Church all of the time,' he said.

'Now it was listening to that speech by the Pope that led me to think very clearly and powerfully that the moment had come for a plenary council.' Back in Australia, Archbishop Coleridge put the idea to a plenary meeting of bishops in November last year. He was made chair of a steering committee and put together a motion on moving towards a plenary council in 2020.

The motion received a majority vote of support by bishops meeting in May this year. Archbishop Coleridge said he expected the Pope would soon give approval for the plenary council to go ahead, consisting of three phases – preparation, celebration and implementation.

'I hope the agenda will be generated by genuine consultation of the whole Church between now and 2020,' he said. 'Everyone will want to have their say, as they did in the synods in Rome – which is fine. What we have to guard against is the politicisation of the process.'

'There are politics involved, but it is primarily an ecclesial event. We are trying to discern what God wants and we are invoking the Holy Spirit. 'So it's a much more mysterious event than a political assembly.' Archbishop Coleridge has outlined what he considers some of the key issues that the whole Church should consider in 2020 to stop the drift, revive hope and set a vision. 'I think we have to ask questions about how we become a more missionary Church, and not a Church that is just retiring behind defensive walls,' he said.

'I think we have to ask questions about ordained ministry. 'The Church's response to the diminishment of our apostolic orders, the relationship between the newer communities and our older communities, by which I mean our parishes, the whole future of the parish is a major question. Do we need a new paradigm? 'I hope the agenda will be generated by

genuine consultation of the whole Church between now and 2020.’

Archbishop Coleridge said he expected significant and international interest in Australia’s plenary council. ‘Certainly in the Asia Pacific region there will be enormous interest,’ he said. ‘Other places will be watching with interest because a lot of the issues we’ll be addressing would be issues common to all western churches that are culturally similar to Australia.’

By the end of this year, Archbishop Coleridge said his steering committee – which consists of archbishops from Adelaide and Perth, bishops from Parramatta and Armidale and the Maronite Bishop

for Australia – would aim to appoint a secretary general for the plenary council before the end of this year. ‘He or she will be a key figure in moving the whole thing forward,’ he said.

‘It has to be an assembly of the whole Church and not just the bishops.’ Archbishop Coleridge said it was not yet decided if the ‘celebration’ of the plenary council might be conducted in a single session, or in two sessions.

He suggested Sydney host one session, with a second session in ‘one other city’.



## Shortages and burnouts: The future for priests who can’t retire

*Gisele Galoustian*

A researcher at the Florida Atlantic University, Michael N. Kane, says that U.S. Catholic priests are facing burnout owing to the lack of opportunities to retire, and there are facts which support this view:

- There are 66.6 million parish-connected Catholics in the U.S.
- While the number of Catholic parishes has remained rather steady over the past 50 years (17,637 in 1965 vs 17,483 in 2014), there has been a steady decline in the number of priests and men seeking ordination.
- In 1965, there were 58,632 priests in the U.S. with 94 percent of them in active ministry; in 2014, there were 38,275 priests with only 68 percent in active ministry.
- In 2009, the average age of a priest was 63, whereas the average age in 1970 was 35. By 2019, half of all active priests will be at the minimum retirement age of 70.

‘There is little research about priests and retirement, and there is the impression that priesthood is a vocation from which there can be no retirement,’ said Dr Kane, a professor in the School of Social Work in FAU’s College for Design and Social Inquiry, and author of *The Taboo of Retirement for Diocesan Catholic Priests*, published in the *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*.

‘The expectation is that the priest will continue to be of service throughout his life until he is physically or cognitively unable to serve. To do otherwise may be perceived as self-indulgent or selfish. But, after decades of service, is it reasonable for a priest to say ‘enough!’?’

Dr Kane found that priest-respondents were not only concerned with the financial possibilities of retirement (a national survey of diocesan financial plans for retirement found more than half of the retirement plans for priests in the U.S. were substantially underfunded), but were equally concerned that they would not have the option to retire because of the shortage of priests in the U.S.

‘There appears to be an unspoken organisational need that priests should continue in ministry, especially smaller dioceses where there are serious shortages of priests,’ said Dr Kane. ‘Even larger dioceses will begin to feel this pressure as more priests reach the minimum age requirement in the next five years.’

The choice to retire for workers in secular organisations is based on health, finances and other factors. While most individuals over the age of 65 remain employed by need rather than by choice for economic reasons, retirement for priests is rather complex.

‘In many areas, bishops have the power to strictly or loosely apply rules, protocols and other criteria. Retirement is one such area,’ said Dr Kane. ‘There is great diversity and disparity in diocesan benefit plans as there is no consistent standard applied for priests’ retirement.’

Source: *Cathnews* 10 July 2016  
Gisele Galoustian is a researcher at  
Florida Atlantic University

# The Challenge to be an Inclusive Church

Bishop Vincent Long

Source: *Catholica* 22.8.16

For me, one of the greatest challenges the church faces today is to be inclusive, to be a big tent church. Pope Francis urges us to be a church where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the Gospel. You heard me say in my Installation Homily that there can be no future for the living church without this vital sense of ecclesial inclusiveness. By that I mean there must be space for everyone, especially those who have been hurt, excluded or alienated, be they abuse victims, survivors, divorcees, gays, lesbians, women, disaffected members. The church will be less than what Christ intends it to be when issues of inclusion and equality are not fully addressed. That is why you heard me say that I am guided by the radical vision of Christ. I am committed to make the church in Parramatta the house for all peoples, a church where there is less an experience of exclusion but more an encounter of radical love, inclusiveness and solidarity.

The teachings of Jesus like the parable of the Good Samaritan challenge us to think outside the square, outside the established patterns, norms and conventions. Jesus teaches us some home truths that are truly confronting and incisive. Samaritans were considered outsiders and outcasts by ordinary Jews. Yet in the parable, it was the Samaritan who was the unlikely hero. For he showed love and compassion to the person in need. On the contrary, the priest and the Levite who were considered the respected class of society and the custodians of tradition were found wanting. They put tradition and law in the way of basic human love. Thus, in crafting the characters in their cultural and religious context, Jesus really upset the tulip cart. He questioned the prevailing assumptions and stereotyped attitudes. He turned the presumed order of moral goodness upside down. The holders of tradition failed the test of good neighbour while the outcast proved himself an unlikely champion of basic human decency, mercy and compassion.

We can no longer understand the parable just in terms of being kind to those in need. It is an incisive lesson that cuts our prejudice to the quick. The lawyer who posed the question to Jesus ‘Who is my

neighbour’ went away with much more than what he had bargained for. He was challenged to be the neighbour and to be one like the Samaritan. It would have been a profound and indeed humbling revelation: The villain had become a hero and vice versa. The meaning of goodness, humanity, moral uprightness had been redefined. The boundaries of acceptance, inclusion and love had been annulled. Jesus had presented to him a radical new way of seeing, acting and relating.

That is what Jesus consistently does. He has a habit of challenging ingrained stereotyped attitudes, subverting the tyranny of the majority, breaking social taboos, pushing the boundaries of love and redefining its meaning. ‘You heard it said love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you...’ His interactions with women, with tax collectors and other types of social outcast are nothing short of being revolutionary and boundary breaking. It is his radical vision of love, inclusion and human flourishing that ought to guide our pastoral response.

As the Gospel illustrates, it is the holders of the tradition who are often guilty of prejudice, discrimination and oppressive stereotype. The Church today needs to examine its own attitudes and actions towards the victims of injustice and adopt what I would call a seamless garment approach. We cannot be a strong moral force and an effective prophetic voice in society if we are simply defensive, inconsistent and divisive with regards to certain social issues. We cannot talk about the integrity of creation, the universal and inclusive love of God, while at the same time colluding with the forces of oppression in the ill-treatment of racial minorities, women and homosexual persons. It won't wash with young people especially when we purport to treat gay people with love and compassion and yet define their sexuality as ‘intrinsically disordered’. This is particularly true when the Church has not been a shining beacon and a trail-blazer in the fight against inequality and intolerance. Rather, it has been driven involuntarily into a new world where many of the old stereotypes have been put to rest and the identities and rights of the marginalised are accorded justice, acceptance, affirmation and protection in our secular and egalitarian society.

In one of his interviews on a rather thorny issue of homosexuality, Pope Francis says that we must always consider the person, because – I quote ‘when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?’ It seems to me that the Pope has more than moved away from the approach of

condemnation and judgement. He has refocused on the proclamation of God's love for the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised; he has firmly placed the pastoral emphasis on the dignity of every person; he has committed the Church to the way of engagement, affirmation and compassion which is at the heart of the Gospel. The Church can only be the conduit of compassion and speak the language of hope to a broken humanity when it truly personifies powerlessness and stands where Christ once stood, that is, firmly on the side of the outcast and the most vulnerable.

The Synod on the Family was essentially an exercise in administering the medicine of mercy to the wounded. In the past, the results of synods were sometimes seen to be foregone conclusions. This synod, however, has seen the unleashing of the energy long locked up beneath the ice of institutional security. Pope Francis has really lived up to his vision of the Church daring to break loose from its comfort zone and self-referential mentality. It is a church attentive to the signs of the times and incarnate grace at work in the world, even among the unorthodox and the marginalized. Much emphasis has been placed on the question of communion to the divorced and remarried. Yet, through the lens of mercy, the real question is how the missionary Church can accommodate and accompany those struggling to live and still falling short of the Christian ideal. This ecclesial inclusiveness which was instrumental to the doubting Thomas' journey to faith is characteristic of a Church that walks the walk with the weak.

Catholic schools are premised on the fundamental dignity of each and every person. Attention to the most vulnerable and needy is written into our DNA, our Catholic ethos. How can we be places where this sense of ecclesial inclusiveness is fully expressed? In what ways can we advance Jesus' radical vision of love, inclusion and human flourishing in our communities?

## CONCLUSION

In summary, I believe we are living a time of grace and hope precisely because this fallow time allows us to rid ourselves of what is unworthy of Christ and to grow more deeply in our identity and mission as his disciples. Hence, it is the time to reclaim for the Church:

- ◆ Less a role of power, dominance and privilege but more a position of vulnerability and powerlessness;

- ◆ Less an enclosure for the virtuous but more an oasis for the weary and downtrodden;
- ◆ Less an experience of exclusion and elitism but more an encounter of radical love, inclusiveness and solidarity;
- ◆ Less of an attitude of 'we are right and you are wrong' and more of an attitude of openness to truth wherever and however it is to be found;
- ◆ Less a leadership of control and clericalism but more a *diakonia* of a humble servant exemplified by Christ at the Last Supper;
- ◆ Less a language of condemnation but more a language of affirmation and compassion; and
- ◆ Less a preoccupation for its own maintenance but more a concern for the kingdom of God.

In the end, though, I firmly believe that we're on the threshold of renewal and transformation. The Second Vatican Council set in motion a new paradigm that cannot be thwarted by fear and paralysis. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it cannot be put back. That new paradigm is one that is based on mutuality not exclusion, love not fear, service not clericalism, engagement with the world not flight from or hostility against it, incarnate grace not dualism. The Holy Spirit is at work even at a time of great anguish. He accompanies us as we move in the direction of the Kingdom.

Pope Francis has unleashed a new energy, he has poured a new wine which cannot be contained in old wineskins. He has challenged us to move in concert with him and bring about the rebirth of the church. I am endeavouring to follow the Pope's lead. I have forfeited my Qantas Club Membership which is not a big deal these days. I fly with Tiger regularly – on a wing and a prayer. But that's the easy part. The harder part is to do what most of you do, which is to labour at the coalface of the church. It is to have the smell of the sheep, to walk with people, identifying with them in their struggles, their questions and their uncertainties. It is to discern and live out the vision of hope in the midst of life's disappointments.

May we be like the prophets for our people during this our contemporary exile. May we be strengthened to walk the journey of faith with them, proclaim the message of hope, the signs of the new *Kairos* and lead them in the direction of the Kingdom. May all of us enact the rhythm of the paschal mystery of dying and rising in the pattern of our Lord who is the Alpha and the Omega.

Amen.



# The Many Faces of Power

Alan Clague

**T**he Pope! How many divisions has he got? We laugh now at the hubris of Stalin, particularly in light of our knowledge of Pope St John-Paul's role in the defeat of European communism. The issue of power within the Church is exceedingly complex. It can be exerted upwards politically towards secular rulers, and through them to their citizens, or downwards from hierarchy to less senior hierarchy and laity. In both situations there is immense potential for corruption.

As soon as the Church received political endorsement from Roman Emperor Constantine, an immense, personally vindictive fight centred on the nature of the trinity erupted between Church leaders striving for ascendancy. In North Africa the Church was split into two feuding camps differing on readmission of lapsed Christians. This new nexus between Christian leaders and secular rulers, and a developing competition for secular power between them, fundamentally changed Church dynamics. A whole community could be evangelised by converting its leader. Wealth and prestige for Church leaders replaced poverty and persecution. Church leaders strived for ascendancy over secular leaders. The time of the Holy Roman Empire had arrived. It ultimately gave rise to the Crusades, state-endorsed persecution of heretics and Jews, and the Papal states. The corruption of power became a constant companion of the Church of God.

Vatican II had the goal of returning to the Church's sources, and one of its less publicised but, in my opinion, one of its most important decisions, was the highly contentious Declaration on Human Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*. The more conservative Council members insisted on the need for the Church to maintain Concordats with governments of predominantly Catholic countries to suppress other religions. However the Declaration, which supported universal religious freedom and primacy of conscience, was passed with an 85% majority. The Church had retreated from this aspect of exerting political power.

The earliest example of the downward exertion of power is found in the Epistles, and relates to the suppression of women. Paul espoused gender equality. His community leaders were both women and men. In Galatians, an Epistle largely devoted to establishing freedom from Jewish law, he states '...there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). Yet about forty years later, the author of the pastoral epistles states *I permit no woman to teach*

*or have authority over a man'* (1 Tim 2:12). Even more revealing in the imposition of a non-Christian patriarchy is the general acceptance that the verse in the authentically Pauline 1 Corinthians, *'...women should be silent in the churches...'* (1 Cor 14 33-35) is an interpolation inserted at about the time of writing of the pastoral epistles. Yet knowledgeable Church leaders, including Pope Francis, cling to the lie that women should not receive Holy Orders. Patriarchy still thrives in the Church.

Paul VI chose to ignore the report of a rather conservative Pontifical Commission on Population, Family and Birth, and to listen instead to an ultraconservative minority of advisors, and issued his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which forbade artificial contraception. The 'sense of the faithful' in this matter is obvious: the Encyclical is ignored wherever couples have the ability to do so. Nonetheless, this attempted exertion of power by hierarchy onto laity remains.

In past times, the body of Christians elected their local bishop – the first century Epistle of Clement describes them as being appointed by 'eminent men'. St Augustine of Hippo and St Martin of Tours are two well-known examples of bishops installed by their communities. There is a growing movement to have this power restored to the dioceses, rather than imposed on their communities by Rome. Would Cardinal Pell have been appointed to the Sydney archdiocese by Sydney's 'eminent men'? Pope Benedict XVI and others have also spoken against the 'promotion' of bishops from smaller to larger dioceses, yet this practice continues.

The most destructive imposition of clerical power onto laity in modern times has been the scandal of sexual violation of minors by clergy and religious. Although the damage to victims and the culpable suppression of exposure by Church authorities has rightly been emphasised, it is also a clear example of the corruption of Church power that is inflicted on the powerless.

We who love our Church must endeavour to remove these obstacles to its holiness and wholeness. The Church espouses humility, but endorses damaging internal power structures. Most of the issues of concern to reforming Catholics revolve around inappropriate use of power. Jesus was unambiguous: 'The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves' (Luke 22:26). Let us strive to properly adapt the enthusiasm of Paul and the simplicity of Jesus' message to our beloved Church today.

*Alan Clague*

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# Seminaries such as Maynooth\* perpetuate unjust rule of church men over women

‘Churchmen claim to have divine knowledge as to what God can’t be and do in women and through women. It’s called DMA: Divine Male Authority’

August 15, 2016

Soline Humbert

**T**he poisonous thing about Maynooth seminary is that, like all Roman Catholic seminaries, it is a patriarchal, hierarchical institution.

Seminaries perpetuate the unjust rule of men over women in the church. They are an integral part of a culture of institutional violence, of spiritual abuse, blind to women’s dignity, spiritual gifts and callings.

Seminaries are where the clerical leaders of the church have been formed and where future leaders are trained. They are exclusively male. This is based on the belief that, while both women and men are in the image of God, men are more fully so. So they can represent Christ the head, while women can only represent Christ the body.

Men can exercise authority in the church, women can only obey. Men decide what limited roles can be given to women. Men know the mind of God, who after all, can only be addressed officially as ‘He’.

Churchmen claim to have divine knowledge as to what God can’t be and do in women and through women. It’s called DMA: Divine Male Authority. It’s more important than our common humanity and the one Baptism, the one Spirit we all share, women and men.

The gospels show us quite clearly that Jesus didn’t live, die and rise from the dead to divinise oppressive patriarchal structures. However, the liberating power of his love was too radical, and still is. Life-giving authority quickly got replaced by abusive power. Patriarchy and hierarchy became defining characteristics of the community of disciples, the church, undermining the equality of all the baptised.

After centuries of being considered inferior and subordinate to men, women are now considered ‘equal’, but not so equal that churchmen would forgo

their DMA. Women are equal but different. That difference apparently renders women unfit to minister in a myriad of ways. So, only men can have a divine mandate to govern and to teach; no women had a vote at the recent synod on the family.

Somebody who knows a lot about the toxicity of ‘equal, but different and therefore separate’ is Patricia Fresen.

Fresen was a Dominican sister in South Africa at the time of the apartheid struggle. She fought against it, and broke some of its unjust laws, allowing black children in school with white children.

Later, when she taught in a seminary, her eyes were opened to the church’s gender apartheid. While she taught homiletics (preaching) to the male seminarians, she could not preach at their community



‘The poisonous thing about Maynooth seminary is that, like all Roman Catholic seminaries, it is a patriarchal, hierarchical institution.’ Photograph: Cyril Byrne

Mass. Discovering a call to minister, she was ordained: unjust laws sometimes need to be broken before changed.

Another woman who was led to break these unjust, oppressive rules was Australian Sr Irene McCormack, who was executed 25 years ago by the Shining Path in a small village in Peru, and is remembered as a martyr. There were no priests left in that village: she was the one who had chosen to stay with the people God had entrusted to her.

She was baptising and praying with them, but there was no Eucharist. They came to her and said 'give us Eucharist'. She did not want to, but her eyes were opened and she wrote: 'They freed me to exercise Eucharistic ministry among them . . . It seems to me, therefore, that the preoccupation of our church leaders with power and control over who can celebrate the Eucharist, who can and who can't receive the Eucharist, is right up the creek.

'Not only is it a contradiction to the proclamation of Jesus that there is no distinction between male and female, but it shows a lack of appreciation of the plight of villagers like ours all over the world that our church continues denying its official ministry, that it is by nature communion.

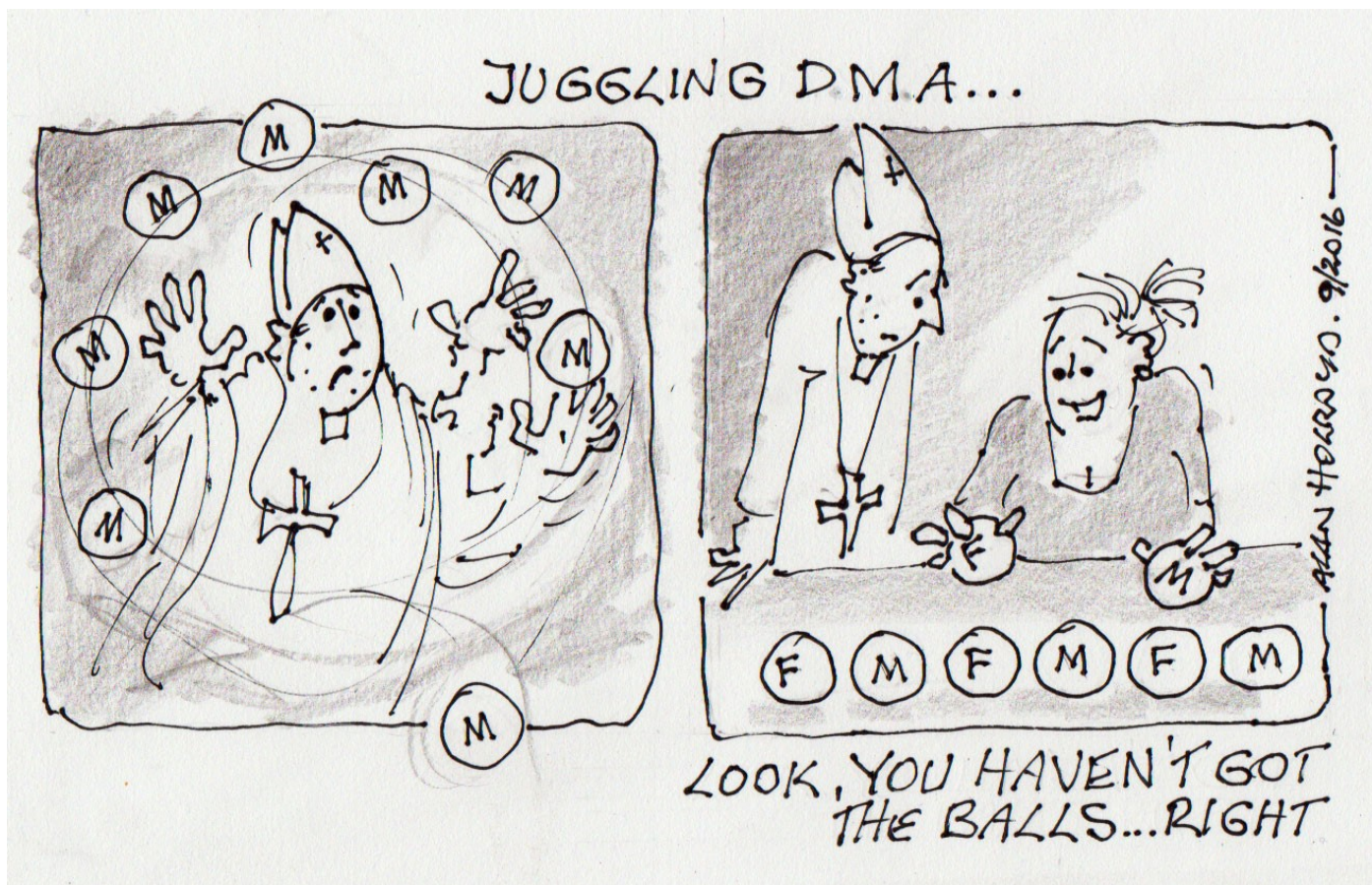
'As we in our little Christian communities high up in the Andes gather in memory of Jesus, there is no power or authority on Earth that can convince me that Jesus is not personally present. I feel grateful that these months on end without the official Mass and in a culture where I'm experiencing new symbols have gifted me with a new appreciation of Eucharist.'

In Ireland and throughout the world, communities gather regularly in memory of Jesus and celebrate Eucharist on the fringes of the official clerical church, daring to 'obey God, and not men'. The Spirit blows where s/he wills. S/he is not limited by gender, sexual orientation or marital status.

As patriarchal hierarchical structures die, new communities and ministries are born, witnesses that, in the risen Christ, there is no longer male and female. We are one.

Soline Humbert ministers as a spiritual guide with a special interest in gender, sexuality and church reform.

\* St. Patrick's College Maynooth, Ireland



# Is it time to re-think the sacraments?

Tom McMahon

The weeks of my life fold into months, then into years that fast approach nine decades. The relentless winds of change have swirled since the day of my ordination, June 11, 1954. My life as child, seminarian, and young priest revolved around the then changeless seven sacraments and the rules by which they were administered. Eight years before the opening of Vatican Two we were the first St. Patrick's Seminary class to be allowed a 7 a.m. breakfast in anticipation of a bus ride to San Francisco for the 11 o'clock ceremony at old St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco.

Yet in 1954 a trivial human foot was prying open the heavy 'laws' of the church, most of which were originally monastic customs wrongfully applied to the laity. The new changes were trivial yet a finger was being pulled out of the dyke and the flood gates opened in 1965 when John XXIII began to return the Catholic experience to the laity. Pope Francis has made his contribution in calling the church a triage hospital.

In 1954, ordained a few weeks, on a hot summer day this then 25-year-old ('forever-14') priest was approached outside Assumption Church, San Leandro, by a very beautiful and very pregnant woman who asked my permission to have a glass of water before receiving communion. My heart nearly burst with pain as I realised the people had not been informed of the changing fasting laws. I looked her in the eye and carefully put my hands on the sides of her shoulders and I recall to this very day what I said.

'Yes, I will give you permission today because that is what you need to satisfy your early training. Please never ask again. Take it upon your adult self to take care of yourself and your soon-to-be-born child. Never again ask a priest for permission to care for your precious gift of life'.

Perhaps the young priest was taking his first steps away from being 'forever 14'? I realise in 2016 my human experience was something like Buz Aldren walking on the moon. The difference was, I never left the human moonscape of personal freedom put in us by our Creator.

We have the power to forgive ourselves, and others...

Lost in the above trivia was the unchallenged result of a bishop putting his hands on a young man, changing him into someone special, sacred, set apart, and a sacrament himself. It would take 16 years of a tumultuous priestly career before I would begin to question the need for this monastic separation from everyday people and the power the bishop had transferred to me in connecting a Divine forgiveness to the confessional box. Today we have Pope Francis teaching that we humans have the power to forgive ourselves, and others. Mercy and forgiveness is good for human health and how dare we teach that a loving God is offended by human wrongs, as well as an unsound belief that only a sole male has the right to offer gifts to the Almighty at mass. These attitudes are contrary to the spirit of early Christianity.

I know well the WWII picture of a heroic U.S. Navy chaplain, amidst the raging fire on the deck of the kamikazed sinking carrier *Yorktown*, raising his hand in absolution over a dying young sailor. This was viewed by the American people with the highest respect for clergy. That priest brought God to the battlefields of death and we thought no one else could do such. We know better now and it is time to junk the middle-aged theology that Jesus died to appease God's wrath at the sinfulness of humankind. Such nonsense demeans a loving Creator. Forgiveness among humans is a mighty task.

In seminary I wanted to be that man who brought God to human chaos – a notion that as I matured I would exchange a far-off-God for a Jesus' presence called Abba/Father – a loving mystery already living among worldwide peoples. Whereas the priest was made sacred/special by the human hands of a bishop, I would begin to see the hand of our Creator ever so evident in all creation. All human life was sacred; all creation was sacred.

After Vatican II, I would spend my life alerting people to a consciousness of our Creator's Presence in all nature, especially human beings. I would offer today the example of the pregnant young woman mentioned above. I long for the day that my Mother and Father are seen as sacraments of life, outward signs that give grace (life). I have had enough pie-in-

the-sky, what we used to call ‘nun's theology’. Today, along with Teilhard, I have come down to searching for the mystery of the Creator hiding in the wondrous beauty of all creation. I am a well-educated person who no longer needs a shaman – a mediator between God and myself.

Note that in the gospel stories Jesus uses his very presence as a healing tool. Jesus never used a single one of the seven sacraments, as they were ‘created’ by human beings 1500 years after his life on earth.

Tom McMahon is a regular contributor to *Catholica*.  
This was written on 2 Apr 2016. It has been slightly edited.

## Bible Matters

Peter and Charlotte Vardy

Review by

Henry Wansbrough OSB

**T**HIS well-known husband-and-wife team of educationists has conspired to write a series of books on religious studies, including *God Matters* and *Ethics Matters*. The number of topics covered is striking.

In Part One, the story-telling in the Bible is assessed. There follow an introduction to textual criticism and the varied translations of the Bible into English, and a brilliant and witty potted history of the Hebrews-Israelites-Jews. This is both balanced and neutral, though it does concentrate on the ‘bubbling cauldron of unrest and political intrigue’ which was Palestine at the time of the ‘explosive’ teaching of Jesus.

Gems in Part Two (the Bible and historical truth) are a philosophical approach to truth since the Enlightenment, followed by a succinct survey of the archaeological contribution to biblical knowledge and a list of biblical archaeologists and their achievements. These are combined into a survey of historical criticism, and especially revisionist views of Old Testament history and the Quest for the Historical Jesus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Particular attention is paid to the effect of Nazism on German scholarship in the mid-century.

Part Three, on the use and interpretation of the Bible, surveys the subject from Jesus’ use of and attitude to the Bible (Rabbi Hillel comes later in the book), through the Fathers of the Church, medieval persecutions for misunderstandings, and Luther’s interpretation of *sola scriptura*, right down to the modern position of Radical Orthodoxy, as well as a variety of Anglican approaches. The contribution of Jewish biblical scholarship (both ancient and modern) is given unusually serious consideration. Study of the use of the Bible in ethics is understandably curtailed – with references to the authors’ own work elsewhere. This gives way to the varied use of the Bible in both feminist and political theology.

Perhaps the most exciting chapters are those at the end: ‘Another Perspective’ and ‘Why does it really matter?’ They discuss the attitude that the whole Bible is a parable or myth of the relationship of human beings and creation to God: it is true if it enables us better to understand our position in the world. ‘The truth of the Bible does not depend on the extent to which details in it are true but on the extent to which the story as a whole speaks to readers today.’ Throughout the book, the explanations are clear, informative, and objective. It might be possible to discern that both authors are Christians in the Catholic tradition, but, in the mode of religious studies, their presentation is acceptable also to atheists, Jews, and any reflective reader – topped up by an informative glossary and a generous index.

Fr Henry Wansbrough OSB is a monk of Ampleforth, emeritus Master of St Benet’s Hall, Oxford, and a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

## A confronting new book 'The Damage Done'?

**T**o quote from the publicity for this book on the Go Gentle Australia website:

*As she was dying of cancer in 2015, 90-year-old Eileen Dawe kept a diary. Despite her clearly stated wish to die she was forced to endure 17 painful weeks until the disease finally took her. Hoping to hasten nature's course, she began to starve herself to death. In her diary she wrote: 'My country's laws decree Death by a thousand cuts for me.'*

*Eileen's is one of 72 testimonies in this book that describe with horrifying clarity the damage being done across Australia in the absence of a law for assisted dying. Written by sons, daughters, husbands, wives, partners, and friends, as well as the dying themselves, they detail trauma and suffering on a staggering scale.*

*The Damage Done* is a collection of testimonies that describe the suffering across Australia caused by the absence of a law for assisted dying.

This is a confronting book, published by Go Gentle Australia, at the instigation of Andrew Denton, TV presenter and investigative journalist, who spent 12 months investigating assisted dying/voluntary euthanasia in Australia and overseas.

**Copies of 'The Damage Done' are available as a free e-book. It can be downloaded from this link: [http://www.gogentleaustralia.org.au/the\\_damage\\_done](http://www.gogentleaustralia.org.au/the_damage_done)**

You may not be aware of recent developments relating to assisted dying law reform. In 2014 Quebec, Canada and now **in 2016 the Canadian Parliament has passed assisted dying legislation for the whole of Canada**, after a significant **Supreme Court decision**. This year a Victorian Government Cross Party Committee report into End of Life Choices, made 49 recommendations including legislation for assisted dying.

Some prominent theologians are also voicing their support. They include: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the most revered religious leaders, speaking in support of the Falconer Bill Assisted Dying Bill in the UK, said:

*'I have been fortunate to spend my life working for dignity for the living. Now I wish to apply my mind to the issue of dignity for the dying. I revere the sanctity of life – but not at any cost.'*

Also Catholic theologian, Prof. Hans Kung, states:

*'As a Christian and a theologian I am convinced that the all-merciful God, who has given men and women freedom and responsibility for their lives, has also left to dying people the responsibility for making a conscientious decision about the manner and time of their deaths. This is a responsibility which neither the state or the church, neither a theologian or a doctor, can take away.'*

On Monday 5 October 2015, Governor Jerry Brown signed voluntary assisted dying legislation that had previously been passed in both Californian legislatures. What I find very significant, and I feel sure you will too, is that Governor Brown is a committed Catholic, who had formerly trained as a Jesuit and, as Governor, he actually had the right to veto this Bill. Instead, in a very rational and compassionate letter, he concluded:

*'In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death. I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others.'*

It is my hope that you will read and review this book positively and encourage readers to ponder on whether their thoughts reflect those of Governor Brown. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. (Confession – I am not Catholic, although many members of our Group are.)

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# Myth, Sex and Original Sin

Alan Clague

The Catholic Church has reluctantly accepted that the Bible is not a reliable scientific or historical document. It no longer demands that we believe we live in a geocentric universe created about 12,000 years ago. It accepts that our putative ‘first parents’, Adam and Eve, were not created *de novo* out of the earth, but by evolution over billions of years. Our DNA shows evidence of interbreeding of *Homo sapiens* with the more primitive hominid, Neandertal man. Thus modern humans’ common ancestors, ‘Adam and Eve’, must have lived over one million years ago. Science also tells us that death is a natural process, not the result of sin. The biblical creation story is a nice myth with many messages relevant for today, but it was written in past times for the people of those times, and for today we need to discern those parts that contain eternal truths and those that were an enveloping myth.

From the myth of Adam and Eve, the Catholic Church has deduced the doctrine of Original Sin. The concept of original sin is one that was discussed by some early Church fathers, particularly St Augustine, and subsequently by St Thomas Aquinas, St Anselm and others. It was reaffirmed and refined in the sixth century by the Council of Orange and in the seventeenth century by the Council of Trent. The effect of Christian baptism to remove original sin puts original sin at the very heart of an organised church. Under a heading entitled ‘The Fall’, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains contemporary Catholic teaching on original sin. It states that ‘Genesis 3 uses figurative language’, but then goes on to base its text on the interaction of Adam and Eve with God. Adam and Eve disobey God and as a consequence they and their descendants are condemned to die, and their descendants receive a sin ‘transmitted by propagation’. The latter statement, identifying sexual intercourse as the means of transmission of original sin, was stated specifically by St Augustine. Original sin caused loss of obedience to the will, and this was particularly manifest in sexual lust, which was lacking in Adam and Eve’s pre-fall condition.

It is accepted that St Augustine was the most important single influence in formulation of the Church’s teaching on original sin. He developed his ideas in association with a controversy with Pelagius on the nature of free will. Pelagius proposed that

humans could in theory lead a sinless life by exercise of their free will without the support of divine grace, and that unbaptised infants who died would not go to hell. Augustine, on the other hand, taught that free will was limited and grace was required to avoid sin. He claimed that Genesis showed that the sin of Adam resulted in the loss of ‘original justice’, and led to the loss of the capacity to ‘pass from mortality to immortality without the medium of death’. This death was a physical death: ‘If Adam had not sinned, he would not have been divested of his body, but would have been clothed with immortality and incorruptible.’ This original sin could only be removed by baptism, through which God forgives all sins. Infants who died without baptism, even though they had not committed any actual sin, were condemned to Hell. This was the rationale for infant baptism. Augustine analysed Paul’s epistles, particularly Romans, but his analysis, based in large part on Romans 5:12, was flawed somewhat because he could not understand Greek and used an erroneous Latin translation: ‘in him (Adam) all have sinned’ instead of: ‘because all have sinned’.

Over the centuries theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas and the Church have softened some of Augustine’s pronouncements, although Aquinas and the Council of Trent still maintained that human immortality was lost because of Adam’s sin, and St Anselm still claimed that unbaptised infants went to hell. Subsequently, some theologians suggested that unbaptised babies were sent to ‘limbo’ not hell, but in recent years limbo has been dropped. Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, accepted that salvation could be achieved without baptism: ‘The Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners in the paschal mystery’ (GS22).

In recent years, sexual intercourse has been accepted as an integral part of marriage bonding, not just the means of producing offspring, and its role as the transmitting agent of original sin has been de-emphasised. What has not been dropped, however, is the attribution of original sin to a sin of Adam and Eve passed on to all humanity. The Catholic Church was not discredited by its dropping of belief in six days of creation or of a 12,000-year-old world or other myths of Genesis. It may be unlikely to drop the entity of original sin (although it is not held by Orthodox Churches). But to associate it with an action of ‘Adam and Eve’ brings the whole concept into disrepute in modern society.

ALAN CLAGUE a retired Chemical Pathologist with a Master of Theology degree. He is a member of the ARC Secretariat



There were four churches and a synagogue in a small town: a Presbyterian church, a Baptist church, a Methodist church, a Catholic church and a Jewish synagogue. Each church and the synagogue had a problem with rats.

The Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about their rats. After much prayer and consideration, they determined the rats were predestined to be there and they shouldn't interfere with God's divine will.

At the Baptist church the rats had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a water slide on the baptistery and let the rats drown themselves. The rats liked the slide and, unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim so twice as many rats showed up the following week.

The Methodist church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their rats and set them free near the Baptist Church. Two weeks later the rats were back when the Baptists took down the water slide.

But the Catholic Church came up with a very creative strategy. They baptised all the rats and consecrated them as members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

Not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue. They caught one rat and circumcised him. They haven't seen one since ...

## Children learn what they live

*Dorothy Law Nolte*

(1924-2005)

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

Donald Trump goes on a fact-finding visit to Israel. While he is on a tour of Jerusalem he suffers a heart attack and dies. The undertaker tells the American diplomats accompanying him, 'You can have him shipped home for \$50,000, or you can bury him here, in the Holy Land for just \$100.'

The American diplomats go into a corner and discuss for a few minutes. They come back to the undertaker and tell him they want Donald shipped home.

The undertaker is puzzled and asks, 'Why would you spend \$50,000 to ship him home, when it would be wonderful to be buried here and you would spend only \$100?'

The American diplomats replied: 'A long time ago a man died here, was buried here, and three days later he rose from the dead. We just can't take the risk.'

# Morality in Public Policy: Climate Change

*Carmen Lawrence*

Earth System scientists are telling us that, like tectonics, volcanism and fluctuations in solar radiation, humans have become a force of nature, so much so that, in the prophetic words of Will Steffen and his colleagues, the ‘human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system’.

So powerful have we become, it appears that we have taken the planet into a new geological epoch, leaving behind that happy 10,000 years of climatic stability known as the Holocene to enter the Anthropocene. Australian geologist Mike Sandiford has estimated that with our energy use doubling every 34 years, we are on course to surpass the energy released by plate tectonics by about 2060.

It is important to place climate change in the broader context of the state of our environment, since many of the observations about climate change apply equally to other aspects of environmental degradation. The World Bank has highlighted the fact that a third of the world’s population faces water scarcity, that 70% of the world’s fisheries are overexploited, that soil degradation affects a significant proportion of both irrigated and rain fed agricultural lands and that every year at least a million people die prematurely from respiratory illnesses linked to air pollution. And while the destructive *physical and economic effects* of climate change are being anticipated, the human *psychological* consequences of this devastation are not: rising rates of mental & social disorders are likely – e.g. depressive and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, substance abuse, suicides, and outbreaks of violence and social conflict. Examining data from Africa between 1990 and 2009, a recent study was able to demonstrate a robust relationship between environmental shocks and unrest. As one group of researchers put it, ‘Combine water scarcity with political instability, increasing resource demands and climate change, and the ‘perfect storm’ for conflict can be created’.

However, whether the focus is on air, land and water pollution, biodiversity loss, resource depletion – or climate change – the underpinning driver is human consumption. Our levels of consumption are high and rising and, in the West, we are more affluent – and wasteful – than we have ever been. Add to that the rising affluence of the middle classes in India and

China who are beginning to consume like we are, and it is obvious that climate change is not the only momentous problem we’re facing; there are many serious commentators who believe we are already overshooting the earth’s carrying capacity.

That consumption is driven, in part, by a belief that greater affluence is conducive to happiness – if the GDP is rising, we should all be better off. While it is true that increasing income improves health and wellbeing, the gains – whether measured at an individual or a societal level – flatten out very quickly (Bok, 2009). And a recent study has shown that countries with high incomes and high carbon emissions do not achieve higher life expectancies than those with moderate incomes and lower carbon emissions (includes Imported CO<sub>2</sub> – embedded in imported goods).

Obviously, many of the recommendations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to facilitate adaptation to a changed climate depend on people changing their behaviour. From changing our patterns of settlement to modifying our diets, there is no doubt that we need to change - and on a scale that has never before been contemplated.

Yet governments (and many citizens too) seem to be looking for an easy way out. Of course, the easiest way out is to refuse to accept that there is a problem; another is to hope that the problem is not as bad as it seems or that some new technological silver bullet will miraculously appear. These positions are not altogether surprising to people who study human behaviour, but until recently, the scientists who study human behaviour and societies have not played a significant part in the global debate about climate change and how to deal with it.

I will explore why this must be remedied and outline some of what we know – and need to know - about human psychology (including our occasional irrationality) to make any progress in crafting workable solutions to the problem of climate change.

Obviously, reducing our carbon footprints, increasing the support for climate change mitigation policies and enduring the effectiveness of legislation, sanctions, incentives and persuasive communication - traditional bases of public policy – requires at least a rudimentary understanding of the fundamentals of human psychology and behaviour change.

At the very least, this should include an examination of:

- what values people bring to their assessment of the environment and to the consumption of resources;
- how people judge the seriousness of the risks they confront and how they respond to such threats;
- how attitudes toward environmental issues are formed and changed;
- what methods of persuasive communication, including the use of fear, are most likely to facilitate changes to attitudes and behaviour and which could backfire;
- what are the most effective techniques for producing rapid and widespread behaviour change; and
- what barriers and habitual modes of thinking prevent the adoption of climate friendly patterns of behaviour and what incentives and social forces facilitate such behaviours.

Many policy makers assume they know, because they are human and live in society, all that they need to know about human behaviour. Or they assume that economic theory will provide all the critical insights needed for effective policies. A moment's thought should make it clear that success in addressing complex problems like climate change – sometimes called 'wicked' problems – requires, at least, a rudimentary understanding of human behaviour and cognition, not to mention the biological and social forces which shape us. The effectiveness of legislation, sanctions, incentives and persuasive communication which form the traditional basis of public policy in this area often founders on the very limited understanding of the fundamentals of human psychology and behaviour change incorporated in the policies.

Perhaps one of the reasons there has been so little engagement on these questions is that behavioural change is notoriously difficult. There are many factors that can influence behaviour, many so-called 'lifestyle' issues, especially surrounding consumption, are heavily 'value laden' and often contentious and there are more than a few vested interests willing to spend money on reinforcing resistance. Change is made difficult because people are often 'locked into' unsustainable patterns of consumption due to economic constraints and institutional barriers over which they have little control (like the absence of public transport) as well as by habits, routines and social norms and expectations, of which they are largely unaware.

Of course, any sustained reduction in greenhouse gas levels and adaptation to climate change will require action on numerous fronts – legislation and regulation, including financial penalties and incentives; investment in alternative technologies; economic instruments to alter the prices of products and services; the provision of information necessary to inform and persuade the community about the desirability of change, and techniques (both direct and indirect) to effect behaviour change. The relative importance of these courses of action and the policy weight that should be attached to each is not clear, but it *is* clear that the success of any of them requires a thorough understanding of human behaviour and failure to do so may even produce paradoxical effects.

This is part of a longer paper which is available on the ARC Website:  
[www.e-arc.org](http://www.e-arc.org)

## My Religion...

by John Chuchman

I lived through  
 a period of  
 grief and anger  
 at the loss of the religion  
 of my youth.

My youthful religion  
 provided the rites, rituals, and activities  
 which gave me  
 a sense of purpose, meaning,  
 belonging, and identity.

Late in life,  
 when I could honestly and maturely  
 examine my religion,  
 I was full of anger  
 at what I thought its careerist administrators had  
 done to ruin/corrupt it.

I grieved the loss  
 of the religion of my youth.

I then discovered that  
 my anger was misdirected,  
 my grief misunderstood.

No one corrupted,  
 No one destroyed  
 the religion of my youth.  
 It never really existed  
 or if it did,  
 it existed only in my youthful mind.

The failings in it that I now see,  
 the abuse, discrimination, manipulation,  
 exclusiveness, corruption, tyranny, etc.,  
 have always existed.  
 In my immaturity,  
 I saw them not.

I was really grieving  
 the loss of my own innocence,  
 I was angry  
 about the loss of my own misconceptions.

Now,  
 I simply grieve for those adults  
 who still live in a childish religion of their youth,  
 unreal though it is,  
 and I am angry  
 at the clergy  
 who keep them trapped there,  
 for their own benefit.

Source: CATHOLICA 6 September 2015

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