



Quarterly magazine of the National Council of Priests of Australia

The Swag

theswag.org.au | Vol. 28 No. 4 | Summer 2020



REGULARS

From the NCP Chairman	3
Editorial	4
Letters to the Editor	38-39
News	39-41
Reviews	42-45
Returned to God	46-50

FEATURES

New encyclical on human fraternity: the Pope's cri de coeur	5-6
Reforming the Church and the Plenary Council ..	6-7
Sing a new song	8-10
A letter to divorced Catholics	10-11
The Catholic Church: who needs reform?	12
A voice for the child	13-14
Where to now with the Seal of Confession? ..	14-15
Lifting the Seal of Confession for child sexual abuse	16-18
The mysteriousness of the divine reality	18-19
It shall be overgrown with thorns and thistles	19-21
Holy See response to Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission	21-22
Clericalism and the hands of the priest	23
Can Catholicism be a place of inclusion and mercy?	24-25
Don't create more clericalised laity	25-26
Catholic ethics and the problem of an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine ..	27-28
Augustine: a letter to a saint!	29-30
Care of the soul – search for the sacred in a time of Coronavirus 2020	30-31
A story of rainforests and tall trees	31-32
Science and religion seeking truth together ...	32-33
Take the blinkers off – characteristics of love.	33-34
The wounded: a national day of sorrow	34-35
Was Jesus a wimp?	36
Grieving for the lost parish	37

NCP CONTACTS



Chairman

Rev Patrick Sykes
103 Fernleigh Road
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
P: (02) 6925 2111
chairman@ncp.catholic.org.au



Treasurer

Rev Brian Mathews
14 Cockburn Road
Jamestown SA 5491
P: (08) 8664 1056
treasurer@ncp.catholic.org.au



Committee

Rev Jamie Collins
3 Memory Street
Harristown QLD 4350
P: (07) 4636 1737
committee1@ncp.catholic.org.au



Committee

Rev Lenin Thenamirtham MGL
204 Grimshaw Street
Greensborough VIC 3088
P: (03) 9435 1543
committee2@ncp.catholic.org.au



Committee

Rev James Clarke
150 Yarra St
Geelong VIC 3220
P: (03) 5222 1977



Editor

Rev Peter Maher
Unit 30, 63-69 Bonar Street
Arncliffe NSW 2205
P: 0439 460 779
editor@theswag.org.au



Executive Officer

Ms Sally Heath
sally.heath@ncp.catholic.org.au



Administrative Officer

Mrs Christine Moore
christine.moore@ncp.catholic.org.au



Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples are respectfully advised that this publication may contain the words, names, images and/or descriptions of people who have passed away.

NCP NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 295, Belmont VIC 3216
74 Fryers Rd, Belmont VIC 3216
P: (03) 5244 3680
national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au
www.nationalcouncilofpriests.com.au
www.theswag.org.au
www.catholicdirectory.com.au

ALL SUBMISSIONS TO:

E: editor@theswag.org.au

ALL ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:

E: national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au

DESIGN

Privaro Design www.privaro.com.au

ABOUT THE NCP

The National Council of Priests (NCP) is an Australia-wide organisation of Catholic Clergy (Bishops, Priests & Deacons) and Associate Members (Lay, Religious & Seminarians) who join together to support each other in their ministry in the Church. Founded in 1970 in the Spirit of Vatican II, the NCP is committed to the fraternity and further education of clergy and to representing clergy in the public forum.

The Swag is published quarterly (March, June, September & December) by the National Council of Priests of Australia as a service to Catholic clergy of Australia, and through them to the Church and the wider community.

Non-members and interested lay people are most welcome to subscribe.

Annual print subscription

\$42.00 per calendar year (four editions).

Annual online subscription

\$42.00 (four editions).

Pro-rata subscription for the print edition

\$10.50 (inc GST) per edition.

Please contact the NCP National Office for all subscriptions.

The views expressed in *The Swag* are not necessarily those of the NCP executive, the editors or NCP staff.

Copyright ©

National Council of Priests of Australia.

This magazine is copyright. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Paddy Sykes



As I write my last report to you for 2020, it is hard to believe that another year is nearly over. And what a year it has been! The impact of COVID-19 has touched the lives of all of us including our brothers and sisters all around the world. COVID-19 is an insidious virus which appears to be adapting to the changing world in which we are required to live. All of us have been saddened by the loss of life from the virus both here in Australia (where it has been managed reasonably well) and in many other countries around the world. The highest mortality rates have been mainly (but not exclusively) among the older members of our communities. Together with the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in Australia, a spotlight has been shed on how Australians treat our elders and the need for reform of the aged care system including increased funding. The first reading for 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time from the Book of Exodus, directs us to look after widows and orphans. Nursing home residents and our older Australians are the widows and orphans of our time and we need to be a voice for them and their needs.

Every state and territory in Australia is dealing with the pandemic in their own way but we have been particularly conscious of the lockdown that has been exercised in Victoria and the impact on everyone there – including the restrictions on public worship. The impact of this 2020 phenomenon will be felt for many years to come.

Golden Jubilee of First NCP Convention – change of date

We planned to hold the next NCP Convention in Melbourne in September 2021 to coincide with the Golden Jubilee

of the first NCP Convention – a date that was set before the true impact of COVID-19 was realised. As this year has progressed and we have seen the way this pandemic has forced so many public events to be cancelled, the NCP Committee agreed we couldn't risk having to cancel the convention and losing our significant deposit.

Your Committee agreed that gathering in person, rather than virtually, is such an important aspect of the Convention and so valued by members, that we should make every effort to facilitate a face to face gathering. The content of the material our presenters share at our conventions is important, but perhaps what is more important, is the meeting up with fellow priests from all over Australia to renew acquaintances and meet new friends.

A major concern was the possibility that air travel, both national and international, would still be restricted. This of course would impact delegates and presenters alike.

Our next convention will now be held 12-16 September, 2022 at the Pullman Albert Park, Melbourne.

I hope you understand we did not make this decision lightly. Please ensure you change the date in your diary when you read this.

Other Matters

Pope Francis, now in the eighth year of his Pontificate and fast approaching his 84th birthday, is continuing to challenge us all – those inside and those outside the church. Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, the third of his pontificate, is perhaps Francis' most mature and comprehensive writing about how he sees the world and the church interacting together. It may not have been his original intention, but he also deals with the COVID-19 pandemic and how that has impacted us from his perspective. In recent days he has tackled head on the issue of state sanctioned recognition of same sex partnerships with his usual pastoral sensitivity. The editorial of my local daily paper, *The Daily Advertiser*, last weekend proclaimed his leadership in this and many areas to be refreshing and relevant...and this is a secular publication! By not allowing Cardinal Pell to kiss his pontifical ring at a recent meeting at the Vatican, an event that was widely reported, Pope Francis is slowly bringing about a new reality in our church. Let us hope his successors keep up the good work!

The Australian Catholic Church rejoices

with the Diocese of Port Pirie that they now have a new shepherd, Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS. Some of our members have questioned why a priest who was born in another country should be made a bishop in ours. It is important to remember that the history of the Catholic Church in Australia is littered with religious men and women, priests and bishops who were born overseas and who came to minister on our shores. Bishop Karol continues a fine tradition of missionary work in our midst.

Our celebration of Christmas in 2020 will be a vastly different one from previous years. How we allow the usual swelling of parishioners to celebrate the birth of Christ will be a pastoral challenge to us all. COVID-19 has born many fruits of creativity as parishes have had to navigate the task of providing sacraments and pastoral care in the COVID-19 environment.

I wish you all every blessing as you continue to provide the presence of God to the men and women of Australia in these challenging times.

Let us continue to support one another and remember one another in prayer.

Shalom,
Paddy. ☺

FAREWELL GREG

Due to extra work commitments, **Greg Barker** resigned from the NCP Executive on 27 October 2020.

Greg began his time on the Executive in January 2019 and over the past two years has been a valued member of the team.

We thank Greg for the gifts he brought to the role and we wish him every success in whatever the the future.

9(7) of our Constitution states the Committee may appoint a member of the Association to fill a casual vacancy and such a Committee member shall hold office until the next election of the Committee and shall, subject to these Rules be eligible for re-election.

We are delighted to report that **Jim Clarke**, former NCP Chairman, has accepted the invitation to be part of the Executive until 31/12/2021. Thankyou Jim!

What can we learn for the Plenary Council from the American Presidential race?



By the time you read this the US presidential election will have been held. A key factor in the presidential campaign was the role of the Catholic vote.

Many bishops, priests, particularly the younger clergy, and influential Catholics rallied behind the Trump campaign as Massimo Faggioli points out in his *La Croix* International article, *Pro-Trump Catholicism and the political consequences of a theological crisis*, on 3 September. Faggioli suggests conservative Catholics aligning with Trump under the banner of better funding for Catholic schools and the 'pro-life' agenda, will not go away no matter who wins the presidency.

Faggioli goes on to explore what is behind this phenomenon theologically. There is a coalescence between anti-democratic individualism and 'law and order' Trumpism that privileges some religions and some ideologies, including that of conservative Catholics and the media they control. The move away from the Vatican II's declaration on religious liberty, seen in *Dignitatis Humanae*, which was about respecting all religions and none, has been overtaken in majority Catholic circles by a similarly anti-democratic, pro 'law and order' agenda that favours the exceptionalism of a kind of Catholicism that opposes the dignity of all. This document was born of the hard-earned lessons of European Fascism and two world wars. The church, by and large, made pacts with Hitler and Mussolini who mouthed support for the church to gain political favour. The similarities in recent presidential politics is clear.

This dangerous move is not just in the outcome of elections, as problematic as that is. It can be seen in the way the dignity of certain groups in the church is being eroded. The demeaning approach to women, divorced and remarried Catholics and LGBTI Catholics, just to name a few, are pedalled in ideological and discriminatory terms in precisely the manner of the polarised society. They will have none of the religious liberty, dignity of the human person and freedom of conscience proclaimed

in the teachings of Vatican II. These are now replaced in the imaginary of the Catholic conservatives, including many bishops and priests, by 'law and order' ideology sidelining much of Vatican II and more recent church teachings.

A recent shocking example is a document by the Polish Bishops' Conference, *Position of the Polish Bishops' Conference on LGBT+ Issues* (28 August 2020) that proclaimed official Roman Catholic teaching condemning same-sex relationships as 'infallible', and calls for 'conversion therapy' centres to be made available. When bishops' conferences start making infallible statements contra to church teaching, such as, there is to be no discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, and recommending conversion therapy, a practice now universally accepted as contributing significantly to self-harm and dehumanisation of LGBT people, we have come to a new place and a dangerous one.

What can we learn from this to assist us with the Australian Plenary Council in its preparation and execution? The bishop controlled Catholic media, aided by conservative media shock jocks and the self-serving political alliances, are being rallied to push ideology and 'law and order' outcomes. They cast the many theological and pastoral submissions to the Council process as submissions by those who need to be corrected and catechised. The church is not a democracy, but it is a community of faith and in Vatican II terms the people of God is comprised of all the baptised. When asked to engage in a discernment process, Catholics who have done so in good faith and at considerable cost in time and money, could at least be taken seriously and not dismissed as ignorant and in need of learning the catechism.

This trend can be seen not just in conservative Catholic media but by the bishops themselves when they posit lines suggesting they know the outcome of the discernment process before it's completed. The Spirit seems to reside with them alone and those with other views, even ones encouraged by the pope's preference for the process of synodality, are deemed 'out of order' a full 12 months before the Council has begun.

In whose interests is this undermining taking place? It's very much the same as the American presidential race. It's the interests

of the status quo. Sadly, that is fed by fear and mistruths about the real situation of discrimination in the church and the aims and goals of the alternative view. There is no evidence to support that inclusion damages the chances of a more gospel missionary church and there is plenty of evidence that a more inclusive church based on justice for the silenced and a respect for the priestly, prophetic and caring (regal) voice of all the baptised would be a more authentic church.

To fulfil the stated hopes of the Plenary Council we need more than the destructive tactics of American presidential politics. If it is to be a respectful discernment about what God is saying to the Australia church, then it must be inclusive of all the baptised, be more than just bishops' voices, be more than just a majority vote and most importantly be based on Vatican II ecclesiology, christology, missiology and teaching on personal dignity, conscience and Catholic social teaching. ☪



Be inspired!
Visit us for faith and educational resources...
books & media including
music, audio books,
CDs, DVDs.

SYDNEY
150 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Ph: (02) 9264 8630
orders@paulinebooks.com.au

MELBOURNE
7 Denmark Hill Road
East Hawthorn VIC 3123
Ph: (03) 9882 3424
orders.melbourne@paulinebooks.com.au
www.paulinebooks.com.au

New encyclical on human fraternity: the Pope's cri de coeur

JOSEPH SINASAC

Joseph Sinasac, publishing director of Novalis Publishing in Toronto, Canada, looks at the new encyclical. *Fratelli tutti*, he says, is not naïve, but a remedy against self-destruction and despair. Reprinted with permission *La Croix International* October 6, 2020.

It was not hard to imagine the new papal encyclical on fraternity and social friendship would provoke criticism in certain quarters.

Pope Francis released *Fratelli tutti* on 4 October and some have begun to accuse him of interfering in politics and the economic sphere, being naïve about human nature and overreaching his authority as a religious figure.

Such critics are correct if one defines religious authority narrowly. In fact, the pope is guilty on all counts.

And yet, and yet...

Appealing to our better selves.

It can be all of these things, yet be absolutely necessary at this moment in the history of our planet.

Francis has issued a *cri de Coeur* to all people of good will. It is a call to our better selves, an astute reading of the 'signs of the times', and a reminder that simple virtues like love, compassion, kindness and openness to the stranger are essential ingredients to the healing of our common woes.

One thing *Fratelli tutti* is not: a religious tract. Its theology is simple and universal, certainly not unique to Catholicism.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Matthew 25) and the Golden Rule are the staples of basic Christian moral teaching form the foundation for his appeal.

Francis also finds common cause with other faith traditions – with references to Mahatma Gandhi, Rabbi Hillel and Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb – to underline the universal reach of his message.

The 83-year-old pope is ideally suited to issue this call to conscience. A religious leader? Yes. But even more than that, he remains one of the world's leading moral figures in a world sorely in need of them.

He is acutely aware of his own failings and those of the Catholic Church, but willing

to accept the mantle of what Henri Nouwen called the 'wounded healer'. This humility permeates the text, giving it a much-needed authenticity and compassion for the brokenness of others.

The encyclical's prose is simple, yet profound. It is accessible to believers of all traditions, as well as to non-believers. It is also rich. For every observation that touched me, there are probably ten others I don't have room to mention.

A troubled world hit by pandemic

Like many encyclicals, *Fratelli tutti* begins with a critique of current events.

Global conflict, natural disasters flowing from climate change, the growing fear and loathing of immigrants, and the rise of right-wing populism.

Francis sees the COVID-19 pandemic as a crucible that

has accelerated these existing trends, bringing out both the worst and, in some cases, the best in our nature.

The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations, brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of our

societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence, he writes.

The current economy, with its foundation in liberal individualism, comes in for scathing criticism as the source of many of the above crises. With radical self-interest at its core, global liberal economics strives to homogenize differences between peoples and countries, while concentrating economic power into fewer and fewer hands.

Reclaiming the true sense of populism.

Followers of papal encyclicals will be familiar with this critique. It was a strong theme in the writings of St. Pope John Paul II and has been a common characteristic of Francis' many statements. In *Fratelli tutti*, he reassembles many of his past concerns into a tightly woven diagnosis of our current struggles.

But it would be a mistake to dismiss this encyclical as familiar territory. The pope makes some crucial distinctions that require attention.

The term 'populism' has been hijacked, he says, to refer mainly to rising grassroots movements against immigrants, those with other skin colours or the ill-defined 'elites'.

But true populism has, throughout history, often been the source of improvements in society such as human rights gains or the battle against poverty.

But Francis notes that too often today demagogues exploit popular fear for their own purposes. He does not name names, but it is not difficult to come up with a short list.

It's not enough to merely invoke God

And the pope does not ignore the potential for evil to be done in the name of religion. He reminds us that in the story of the Good Samaritan, the first two people to pass by the wounded victim of robbery and assault were religious leaders.

It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God, he says.

Francis's foray into politics is a broad-brush approach. He isn't talking about partisan fighting or the cut and thrust of

Continued page 6



electoral campaigns. But he is not afraid to use the word.

Neither is he afraid to apply Catholic social teaching to how societies work together for the common good. In place of competitive politics, with its winners and losers, he offers a 'politics of love.'

At first, this sounds incredibly naïve. But he argues there really is no other choice if we, as brothers and sisters together on this planet, are not to descend into despair and self-destruction.

Forgiving, remembering and breaking the circle of violence

He refers in passing to the many ways people have been oppressed and victimised, arguing that there needs to be true justice, yet also through a process that leads to reconciliation and forgiveness.

'This does not mean impunity' for the perpetrators or simply 'forgiving and forgetting', he notes.

Those who truly forgive do not forget. Instead, they choose not to yield to the same destructive forces that cause them so much suffering. They break the vicious circle; they halt the advance of the forces of destruction, Francis writes.

In everything, he finds his reflection on God's infinite love for humanity. In doing so, he makes a profound case for the good that organized religion has done and can continue to do in society.

We are convinced that 'when, in the name of an ideology, there is an attempt to remove God from a society, that society ends up adoring idols, and very soon men and women lose their way, their dignity is trampled and their rights violated', he says, quoting his own words to religious leaders gathered in Albania in 2014.

In a nod to the desert mystic Blessed Charles de Foucauld, Francis reminds us that true surrender to God comes in identifying fully with the poor and abandoned ... *only by identifying with the least did he come at last to be the brother of all. May God inspire that dream in each one of us.* ☪

"We are priests best when we are priests together."

Reforming the Church and the Plenary Council

TERRY KEAN

Terry Kean, priest, Montmorency and Eltham Parishes, Victoria, reflects upon the key issues for the Plenary Council.

What are the issues for consideration at the Plenary Council for Australian Catholics? The Plenary Council has been delayed because of Covid 19, but the issues have probably only become more urgent. As to how we will regather as a Church, not only in Australia, but across the world, is a question that all of us will find very challenging.

A priest friend, Gerry McKernan, encouraged me to share my comments to the committee preparing the Instrumentum Laboris for the Plenary Council with the readers of *The Swag*. Hopefully you will find it helpful, even if you see the future of our Church differently.

By way of context, I am a diocesan priest nearing retirement after 50 years of parish Ministry in Parishes of the Melbourne Archdiocese. I have loved the journey and I am very grateful for the Catholic Church of Melbourne. However, a deep sadness has grown within me as I see the diminishment of the Church and the increasing numbers of parishioners who do not come to Eucharist. Or if they come, it is more for special occasions. I have lamented the terrible actions of priests and religious who have abused young people. And I have also lamented what I see as a growing clericalism with our Church. So many of my priest colleagues lead with power and authority, rather than with empowering and authorising.

In thinking about the Plenary Council, I have to say that I am not confident of the much change that I think is necessary for the Church of the future. I fear that our Bishops will look to manage rather than imagine a Church of the future. It seems to me that we will not change much and for that reason I think the Catholic Church not only here in Australia, but around the world, will shatter and from the pieces a new story will begin. Who knows what that will look like, but I am confident that the Spirit of God will lead the new story wherever it takes us. And I imagine it will be a very different story from what we have experienced in our life-time.

Will the Catholic Church have a major schism? In some ways this is already happening as more and more people

find other ways of expressing their spirituality. If the institutional Church seeks to control, legislate and manage a difficult situation as it tries to negotiate the views of conservative and, so called, liberal Catholics, then I believe the Plenary Council will not achieve much, if anything. As it stands, the vote rests primarily in the hands of the Bishops and there is a serious question as to a governance that so limits the voice of the faithful.

If the institutional Church however, seeks more to empower the voice of the faithful and encourage small communities of people to come together and largely making their own way, then out of these communities may come the reforms necessary to empower priesthood of the people and a more creative and compassionate Church might then be born. Such a vision would allow for a vision of seminary training focussed on personal and pastoral development and within an apprentice style context. Somehow it seems to me, that the new story of Church will grow out of the ashes of the old Church and begin like it once began, with the coming together of small communities.

I do not advocate the end of the institution, for we need a Church that leads, enables and authorises the way to be Church today. And we have Pope Francis who is such an inspiration in leading our Church. But we are being called by the Spirit, in my view to step into an even more uncertain time and allow the creativity and energy of the faithful to lead us into the future, even if there is schism and shattering.

Let me put forward some of the issues that I think our Plenary Council must address if we can find a way to renew and enliven the Australian Church. There are four areas I would particularly like to address: Outreach to the Poor and Marginalised, Clericalism and Governance, Climate Change and Eucharist.

Outreach to the poor & marginalised

First and foremost for the Catholic Church to be credible, we have to look outwards and we have a resource that is often regarded as the best kept secret of the Church, in its Catholic Social Teaching.

The first principle of this insists on the 'dignity of every single person, created in the image and likeness of God'. Pope Francis in his recent encyclical Fratelli Tutti has very clearly insisted on this principle, in writing A Universal Love that Promotes Persons (paras 106 – 11).

With the Gospel as our mandate and with Catholic Social Teaching as our guide, our reaching out to the poor and marginalised of our world must be at the heart of our purpose. The more I pray the Gospel, the more I see Jesus as engaged with the poor, the sick, the broken, the marginalised. If we as a Church proclaim to be the story of Jesus in our world today, this is where we must be. Unfortunately, I see our institutional Church as far too uninvolved and silent in speaking up for the poorest in our world and I especially think of asylum seekers in this regard. I do acknowledge that there are wonderful Catholic organisations, and communities who really make a difference to the poorest among us, but as a Church collective, we have so much more to do.

There will be some critics who say, yes but everyone must do this whether you are a Church person or not and there are many other organisations and charities who do this as well, if not better than us. True enough, but if we take our inspiration and energy from our belief in the Risen Jesus among us, I think we will have something to offer in partnership with these organisations and charities. We are not separate people from our world but called to engage with it.

Clericalism and governance

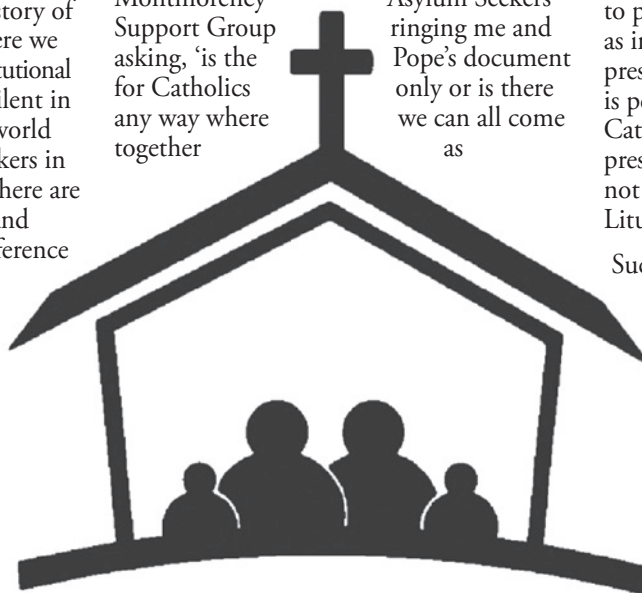
My second point focuses on what I perceive as the growing clericalism in a Church where the separation between priests and lay people seems only to widen. There are far too many horror stories of priest 'ruling the roost' so to speak and of leading parishes without consulting with people.

In addition, it is very obvious that priesthood, as we know it in Australia, is dying. More and more parishes are partnering and or amalgamating because of shortage and ageing of priests, and less and less people are coming to Eucharist. Why are people not coming? Because it seems to me, the Catholic Church has an abuse story that has scandalised its members and because it is so 'top heavy male' with a leadership that does not give women their rightful place in governance and in presiding over liturgy. We must find ways of healing, of inclusion and relevance or else we will become fewer and fewer and older and older. And we will find ourselves more and more irrelevant.

Climate change

My third point concerns climate change and the care of the earth. There are still so many people, including Catholics, who have their head in the sand and cannot see the diminishment of the earth's resources and our part as a human race in contributing to this situation.

Pope Francis has given us a wonderful document, Laudato Si, that calls us to reflection and engagement. In the parish where I still work full time as priest, I remember a woman from the Montmorency Support Group asking, 'is the Pope's document for Catholics any way where we can all come together as



Montmorency communities? Without detailing what happened, let me just say that for two years we gathered as various communities and organisations around Montmorency to discuss Laudato Si and as a result some excellent initiatives have evolved.

If we don't take climate change to heart and do something that is substantial in response, we will continue to lose credibility, especially with young people and we will be contributing to the destruction of our planet.

If, on the other hand we partner with others, especially the young, no matter their religious affiliation, we may well find a new engagement with our faith communities.

Eucharist

My fourth point concerns the celebration of Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council stated that Eucharist is the 'source and summit of our Liturgy'. And I believe this and for all my 50 years, the Eucharist has always been the centre of my Catholic expression of prayer and action.

However, Eucharist is not the source and summit for many, even most Catholics.

There may well be occasions when these people come to Eucharist but it is no longer an obligation for them and so many of them find it irrelevant and uninspiring.


I don't want to wish a return to insisting on obligation, but seems to me, we have to think differently and offer a variety of prayer experiences that allow increased participation for those who come.

I cannot see the ordination of women and their presiding over Eucharist as a likely scenario for some time to come.

Maybe a step is for the presence of women to preside over non-Eucharist gatherings, as indeed for men other than priests to preside over such gatherings. This of course is permissible now, but our insistence as Catholic Church on Eucharist and the presence of the priest, has meant we have not encouraged other expressions of Liturgy as well as we could have.

Such other liturgies can be more creative and less tied to rules and regulations as in our Eucharists and thank goodness we will be able to avoid the awful 'new texts' that in my opinion have distanced the Eucharist from the lives of people

There are many other issues of importance, but let conclude by saying that, in my view, it will not be the institution that reforms the Catholic Church but the Spirit of God leading all Church members to a new story. ☺



Make sure your details are correct. Contact the NCP National Office with any changes.

- Postal address
- Street address
- Email address
- Phone and Fax numbers

Sing a new song

PETER JOHNSTONE

A reflection by Peter Johnstone, Convener, Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, based on the readings of October 18, 2020, the 29th Sunday of the Year.

Today's Responsorial psalm begins (Ps 96:1,3): O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples.

The psalmist speaks to the Church of today, a Church that is failing to declare God's glory among the nations, God's marvellous works among all the peoples. Our Church must model, indeed celebrate, what we claim to believe – the song sung by Jesus.

Catholics committed to renewal of our Church could take the psalm as our mantra (perhaps with more inclusive language). We, the Church, certainly need to 'sing a new song'. We need to do things differently: individually, as small communities and parishes, in our dioceses, nationally, and universally. That's what renewal is about!

The song sung by the Church today is too often not the song sung by Jesus. We need to make Jesus' song new again in our Church. As Christians our responsibility as Church, and the responsibility of our pastoral leaders, is to model and to proclaim the teachings of Jesus. Much guidance for our true song was in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

What does Jesus expect?

In today's Gospel, Matthew puts into the mouths of Pharisees the very essence of Jesus' teachings: Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of God in accordance with truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion.

The way of God in accordance with truth – not concerned with the opinions of others. That is surely a central tenet for the Church, for all of us who claim to be Christian: Are we sincere? Do we tell truth in our words and the behaviour we model? Are we unduly concerned with the opinions of others?

But what about the leadership of the Church? Does the Church model behaviour in accordance with truth? Is it influenced improperly by the opinions of others, more concerned with spin and appearances than truth?

The demand for renewal

The demand for renewal has grown in the Catholic Church over past decades as many Catholics have realised that their

Church is failing the teachings of Jesus. Many of us with adolescent-to-adult children have seen our children rejecting a Church failing to meet the standards and values that it proclaims – values that we have tried to teach and model as parents.

Our children's values enable them to perceive hypocrisy. In thinking about the need for reform of our Church, I often think of the fable of the child exclaiming what others wouldn't say: The emperor has no clothes! The fact that so many younger people are alienated from the Church is not because they reject the values of Jesus – they reject the institutional Church for not modelling the values it claims, the values which they in fact respect and seek to live by, and they are prepared to say so.

My generation has experienced a patriarchal and indoctrinating approach in our official Catholic formation – encouraged to accept that we should learn some basic doctrines and then simply follow our priests and bishops: do as we're told.

However, the real Church is us, the People of God, and we are all responsible for the communion that is the Church. Insofar as the Church has failed, we have failed. Questioning the Church's leaders is not easy for Catholics who have been taught to be deferential – indeed, to be submissive to the authority of our Church's leaders, leaders selected on a basis that ensures many are not up to the task. Respect for leadership is appropriate but that does not justify deferential submission. We need to grow up.

But we the laity have been taught not to accept responsibility, to simply follow the authority of the Church's leaders. We have been taught the opposite of Matthew's perceived qualities of teach(ing) the way of God in accordance with truth ... not concerned with anyone's opinion. We have rather been expected simply to 'pay, pray and obey', even contrary to our consciences: do as you're told – that is, told by celibate males, 'ontologically changed', who have been denied many of the real-life experiences of the lay faithful: the experiences of God's world, intended to enrich and inform our lives.

Hypocrisy in our Church

There is hypocrisy in our Church. Few Catholics are aware that even the Church's

own canon law rejects this submissive role for the faithful. Canon 212 §3 says: The Christian faithful have the right and even at time the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful.

That canon and a number of other supporting canons on 'The Christian Faithful' come from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, the 'Dogmatic Constitution of the Church'. Canon 208 (from LG n.32) sets the scene: Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ. (my emphasis)

While there are provisions in canon law that are inadequate to the teachings of Jesus, it is regrettable fact that some important provisions of canon law flowing from Vatican II are often ignored by the hierarchy of the Church.

Calls for renewal

In the words of an Open Letter to the Australian bishops and Pope Benedict auspiced by Catholics for Renewal in 2011: The Church... does not yet embody the vision of Vatican II for a truly collegial Church in which decisions respect local cultures, communities and circumstances. Rather, it appears as an institution focussed on centralism, legalism and control, with few effective structures for listening and dialogue, and often more concerned with its institutional image and interests than the spirit of Christ. (my emphasis)

That letter in 2011 was signed by some 8,000 Australian Catholics and presented to the Holy See by the then President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; no response was received from the Holy See despite follow-ups.

The letter also stated that our Church was 'tainted by injustice and blemished by bad decisions', and identified the 'manifestly inadequate' response to the child sexual abuse scandal where bishops exposed children to grave harm just to protect the institution's reputation.

Those cynical attempts to protect the institution were of course, contrary to Jesus' commitment to truth, and reflected a craven fear of condemnation by the world. The Church of Jesus actually sacrificed children for its reputation! The Jesus who

said: If anyone causes one of these little ones ... to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

That was Jesus' song, ignored by Jesus' Church.

The Open Letter continued, expressing shock at Bishop Morris being removed from his Toowoomba diocese without due process; dismay at the failure to consult properly on the new English translations of our liturgy. The letter rejected the Church's patriarchal attitude towards women; and dismissed exaggerated claims to infallibility stifling discussion on matters of human sexuality and ministry for women and married men.

In April 2012, Catholics for Renewal wrote to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference suggesting a Plenary Council be held in 2015 to address the grave issues facing the Church. A reply was eventually received from the President of the Conference saying tersely the time was 'not opportune'. The Prime Minister then announced the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; so Catholics for Renewal wrote again to the bishops suggesting that perhaps the time was now particularly 'opportune' – no reply was received.

Child sexual abuse

The Royal Commission, established in 2012, reported in 2017. That 2017 report exposed not only the shocking extent of clerical sexual abuse of children and the Church's deliberate concealment, but also the dysfunctional governance of the Church that actually accepted paedophiles' continued abuse of children. Our Church was exposed not only as immoral but also hypocritical – an institution, whose sole purpose is to model and promote the teachings of Jesus, was found to have facilitated the sexual abuse of children. Many of those precious lives were effectively destroyed, with further destructive impact on families and friends.

Specific findings about a senior cardinal were delayed until May 2020, having been redacted to avoid prejudice to his criminal trial. We now know that the Royal Commission also found that Cardinal George Pell, the most senior Australian

Catholic prelate, had been 'conscious of child sexual abuse by clergy' as early as 1973 and had failed to act on complaints about priests. These grave findings have been publicly ignored by the Church. And Pope Francis has last week welcomed Pell back to the Vatican.

Is Francis, a pope who has done much good, repeating in the case of Pell the blindness he demonstrated in his initial response to the Chilean cover-up that eventually ended the episcopates of many bishops? Such wilful blindness seems to be inherent in the Church's clericalist culture.

A Plenary Council of the Australian Church

Clearly, the terrible sexual abuse of children and its concealment were the worst imaginable consequence of a Church



that has lost its very sense of purpose and mission. However, following the Royal Commission's exposures, the Bishops Conference at last supported in 2015 a Plenary Council of the Australian Church to be held in 2020, now deferred to 2021 due to COVID-19.

The official question for the Plenary Council is: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? But the ultimate question is: Will the Plenary Council 'sing a new song to the Lord'?

Many of us are hopeful but few are optimistic. I pray that the Holy Spirit's involvement, claimed by the President of the Bishops Conference, Archbishop Coleridge, will prevail. Archbishop Coleridge has stated: Given that the Council is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will have the final say (my emphasis). Let's pray that statement does not prove to have been presumptuous.

I draw some comfort from Vaclav Havel, the great Czech playwright, dissident and

President, who described hope as: not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. Our hope is solidly based on faith. We hope that the Holy Spirit will indeed have the final say.

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, comprising 19 (and growing) independent renewal organisations across Australia and New Zealand, wrote to Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, the President of the Plenary Council, on 4 August 2020 proposing critical preliminary actions to enable an effective Plenary Council:

The early appointment of a woman, committed to the renewal of our Church, as co-chair or deputy chair of the Plenary Council.

Gender balance and transparency in the preparation of the Instrumentum Laboris, the document that will determine the nature of the Plenary Council agenda.

The urgent establishment by all diocesan bishops of diocesan pastoral councils, and diocesan synods or assemblies, both with gender balance (and properly representative of the faithful), as essential preparation for the Plenary Council in every diocese.

Some 2½ months after that initial request, the slow and discouraging exchange of correspondence with Archbishop Costelloe's office indicates that he may want to avoid our questions. Yet he recently assured the

Australian faithful: The sincerity, the deep yearning and, yes, the pain and distress evident in so many of the contributions to the Council so far should not and must not be disregarded or minimised. The Spirit of God is undoubtedly speaking in and through these voices (my emphasis). We trust that Archbishop Costelloe is 'sincere and teach(ing) the way of God in accordance with truth', as Matthew recorded of Jesus.

Inclusion of all the faithful

I should note that the Coalition's proposals for the Plenary Council are consistent with Church teachings. Specifically, canon 511 provides: In each diocese, in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest, a pastoral council is to be established ... to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions (my emphasis).

Strangely, most diocesan bishops in Australia have not established pastoral

Continued page 10

FEATURES

councils and have not explained the “pastoral circumstances” that preclude a council. So much for following canon law.

The Coalition’s proposals are essential steps for pastoral leaders to hear the People of God. They are also consistent with *The Light from The Southern Cross*, the recent governance report to the Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia.

That poor response to the Coalition’s proposals at this stage is regrettably typical of difficulties routinely experienced by the faithful in seeking responses from their bishops, reflecting the dysfunctional governance that must be reformed.

The new song

The Church must sing a new song, and it seems clear to most seeking renewal of the Church that the new song will require a Church with much more respect for the faithful; and with appropriate structures requiring accountability, transparency and inclusion, particularly ensuring the equality of women.

Let’s be very clear: the Church’s exclusion of women from governance of the Church (and from ordination) is simply discrimination and a denial of the equality of women.

Should that inclusion of the People of God

not occur, it seems to me that the patience of the laity has been stretched to the limit. One way or another, the People of God must be heard.

I should observe that ‘Inclusive Catholics’ is aptly named!

Let our Church sing a new song to the Lord! – the way of God in accordance with truth – not concerned with the opinions of others. A song that reflects the teachings of Jesus, to be sung; as individuals, as small communities and parishes, in our dioceses, nationally, and universally.

That’s what renewal is about! Let’s sing a new song to the Lord! ☺



A letter to divorced Catholics

ANNA DEMETRIOU

Anna is the proud mum of six beautiful adults and a pastoral worker in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Western Region. In this article Anna reflects on the experience of being a divorced Catholic.

Come back to me, with all your heart

Don't let fear keep us apart

Trees do bend, though straight and tall

So must we to others call

*Long have I waited for your coming
home to me*

And living deeply our new life.

Hosea

Gregory Norbet OSB

Come back to me

This is a very personal reflection for me today, so excuse me if what I say offends. I am not speaking as a representative of the Church, but rather as a participant in the Church. Understand that those of us among the ranks of divorced Catholics have a hard time coming to terms with where we fit in to our own faith tradition. When you are a practicing Catholic, and divorced, you start to wonder how you can be a witness to what’s good and holy in life, when you have failed to live the example of it in your own marriage.

When I was going through my separation, I was working in a Catholic parish and was involved in liturgical ministry. As a person in a leadership role, I felt like a complete fraud. I considered leaving my job and even the Church. I just wanted to run. I spoke to my councillor about it not really knowing quite how to express the inner

conflict. He was a senior Priest, and I was a little embarrassed to say it out loud. I needn’t have worried. He told me quite earnestly, that there should be more divorced Catholic women in leadership positions, as I represented a large number of Catholics in the pews. Nowadays, I agree completely.

While this response gave me some solace at the time, I felt self-conscious at work all the same. It has taken many years for me to let go of that feeling. Although, I still am not able to attend the ‘Feast of the Holy Family’ Mass even to this day.

Invariably there is a homily on the sanctity and permanency of marriage, the virtues of married life and the importance of the family unit. While I don’t disagree with any of the promulgations, it is still too hard for me to hear as it doesn’t apply to my situation, and frankly it just reinforces my own deep sense of failure and guilt. So it’s easier not to attend.

Trees do bend

Often, when couples break up, the fallout affects the children just as much as the couple involved and sometimes even more so. While the parents eventually heal and move to a new way of living, often our children are left with scars that take a long time to heal. I think as a parent this has been the deepest wound for me. It doesn’t take very much for the wound to re-open and the guilt to resurface. Anytime my children are hurting my first thought



is always ‘Is this a consequence of our actions?’ Of course, it is not always the case. Life happens to our children and they must face their own hardships, and learn to grow from them as we had to. My former husband and I have tried very hard to rebuild relationships with each other so that when we have family gatherings, we are all welcomed and included. This is not always an easy thing to do. When we second-guess how each other are feeling, it’s easy to make a mistake, or misread a passing comment. Forgiveness, requires work, it’s a choice that has to be made again and again until it becomes natural.

Though straight and tall

As a person of faith I have wondered many times, how might I live an authentic life as a divorced woman? I remember a young Priest telling me that he would ‘pray for me that I might be able to live out my life

as a single woman' (as clearly now I was divorced, I would have to live a life of chastity and service). I remember feeling really angry at the time. It was on the tip of my tongue to remind him that I hadn't chosen a life of celibacy, in fact, that was his life choice! But I thought better of it. I knew his prayer was coming from a kind place, but I wanted to punch him nonetheless. I think perhaps it reinforced my own failed ideal that once you're married, you're married for life, no exceptions, that's the rule!

Don't let fear keep us apart

All these years later I am more comfortable as a single woman, but I find it difficult to agree with the golden rule as it stands in our Church. Marriage is not always for life, and there are so many things that can go wrong.

Divorced Catholics shouldn't have to feel that their lives are a failure, or that a second marriage is a sinful thing to desire. I know Catholic people who have had very successful second marriages, who were unable to marry in the Church. They simply could not face the Marriage Tribunal as the process was too daunting. The fact that so often these good, faithful, Catholic people feel they can't receive communion because of it, just feels so very wrong to me. If it's about being in "sin" then who will be the first to cast a stone? In the past, annulment of marriage was an invasive and difficult process, but today the process is much easier.

My own experience was a very positive one. I was lucky, but not everyone has a cooperative ex-partner. Their unwillingness to cooperate can make it so much harder. However, when the annulment finally arrived, I felt a profound sense of sadness and loss all over again, like the burial of two lovely young people who started out with such hope and optimism.

There was also at the same time, a sense of surrender to the new reality of my life, and a chance to start a new chapter. It takes a year to get an annulment, about the same amount of time that it takes to apply for a divorce.

There is a cost involved in the annulment process, but it's a similar amount to getting a divorce. So contrary to some people's belief, it doesn't really take that long at all. Like a civil divorce, there is good reason for waiting and working through the process. As painful as it may be, the decisions we make need careful thought, reflection and honest contemplation. That is something that takes time. For me it was a ten-year journey.

Long have I waited for your coming home to me

As for the question of living an authentic Christian life as a divorced woman; I have tried to stay in the Church, and deal with my own sense of failure, rather than dismiss the Church as no longer relevant to my life. I can see where that kind of decision comes from. It comes from a place of fear. I am not good enough, I no longer belong, I am not worthy enough. I don't measure up. I can't face all the other Catholics at Mass. Or else it comes from a place of perceived rejection. These are lies that we sometimes tell ourselves. All of us have an inherent dignity in spite of our failures. All of us belong and need to be validated. All of us are loved by God no matter what has gone before. There is always room for Christ's healing touch, always calling us to wholeness and inviting us home. My brokenness is not unique to me, I am one of many. Acknowledgement and acceptance of my failures is what makes me more empathetic and present to others around me.

In truth, I could not live outside of the faith. It means far too much to me. Once a Catholic, always a Catholic, even if I don't agree with everything the Church says or does. My marital status, or lack thereof, does not define me. I am a pastoral worker, always striving to meet and listen to people where they are, and giving them my time, a little kindness, and care. I choose, regularly, to forgive rather than to hold on to grudges. It is not ever easy but I have learnt that to hold onto resentments and petty disagreements is a waste of precious time. I want to choose life to the fullest, and good (or at least workable) relationships over the alternative of hate and loathing, which is only ever a fast track to an inner death.

And living deeply our new life

Grief of the loss of relationship is a powerful thing. A 'roller-coaster' ride of emotion and turmoil. You will find yourself in a place of fear, uncertainty, abandonment, guilt and shame. I would not wish it on anyone, but it is a part of the journey for many of us. If you are feeling like you don't belong because you are divorced or separated, I am here to tell you the direct opposite. Your pain is a pathway to growth. Trust in the process of grief and believe there is light at the end of the tunnel. You are worth so much more than you realise. You do belong, you are important, and you have something worthwhile to contribute to the life of the Church. There is life beyond the broken relationship. You are not alone nor are you abandoned. Do not be afraid. ☺



**TARRAWARRA
Eucharistic
Breads**



The Cistercian monks have been supplying eucharistic breads to parishes and communities in Australia since 2000.

We now offer baptismal stoles and sacramental certificates.



To view our range of products:
www.eucharisticbreads.com.au

Contact:
03 9730 2362 or
0408 447 345
sales@eucharisticbreads.com.au

The Catholic Church: who needs reform?

GIDEON GOOSEN

Gideon Goosen is a Sydney-based theologian and author. Reprinted with permission from Pearls and Irritations October 11, 2020. Web: <https://johnmenadue.com/>

There are many aspects to reform in the church. Different people and different reform groups, have their own take on what, or who, needs reform the most urgently. I must admit the recent article by Antonio Spadaro on Pope Francis has prompted me to think more about it (Francis' Government: What is the driving force of his pontificate?, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Sept. 20. laciviltacattolica.com. Accessed 16.9.2020). I would like to share some of those thoughts with you.

On the personal level, reform in the church touches both the mind and the heart. On the institutional level it concerns a very wide range of aspects like doctrinal, moral, spiritual, liturgical, structural and attitudinal.

Much of the effort of reform groups worldwide in recent times has been directed at the pope, bishops, and 'the Vatican' since they are the decision-makers. That is the politics of the issue. And we can now, after the sexual abuse scandals, include priests in that list.

Let us stand back for a moment, and take a look at the demographics underlying the whole question of church and reform. I have to speak to my own experience, conscious that others from different age groups, different cultures and different countries will have their own specific take on it. The percentage of those involved in reform groups in Australia (and NZ?) is, at a guess, about 5% or less. In the church the hierarchy is less than 1%. That leaves about 90% of the church to think about. An unspecified percentage of these are older pre-Vatican thinking and acting people who have no interest in changing themselves and no interest in the topic of changes in the church. And in their case, change might be impossible, so they will probably go to their graves with their current beliefs and practices.

The rest, perhaps 40-45% might change how they think and what they do, if they were given good reasons to do so. There are many influences that have brought this about. One obvious one is that they have been neglected since Vatican II, because of the lacuna of adult 'growth in faith' programs, and perhaps too, neglected in our current focus of reform.

Antonio Spadaro's illuminating essay on the pontificate of Pope Francis is helpful in

many ways. It is a great help in understanding Francis' approach to change or conversion. Francis sees conversion applying to everyone in the church. He is reluctant to move forward in synodality until there has been time for discernment. This explains why when he became pope he did not call for the resignation of those who opposed him but wanted to give all a time to discern.

The analogy that Francis used referring to his method, which caught my eye, was that of litmus paper in a liquid. When the liquid is acid/alkaline throughout, the colour of the litmus paper will change either red or blue depending on its acidity or alkalinity. To artificially change the litmus paper is pointless. One has to wait for the whole liquid to change. To change to married pastors, to ordain women, to welcome LGBTIQ persons into the church, of itself, will not bring reform to the church. Change has to permeate the whole church.

So it is with the Church. Francis wants the church to change. He rejects cutting off heads and making dictatorial changes because this will be superficial. Simply ordaining married men and women or making other structural changes will not, of itself, bring conversion. So with synodality we have to be patient. But as the church is a human organization it will always fall short of the ideal. History shows that sometimes those who cannot change or who disagree with authority, will form their own church. Two classic historical examples are: The Old Catholic Church, formed after Vatican I and the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) founded by Marcel Lebevre in 1970, after Vatican II.

Yet the ideal that we wait until all are aboard remains attractive, even if humanly unattainable.

My point is that any reform group should turn some significant attention to the 40-45% of parishioners who might change if things were explained to them. Perhaps reform groups have focused too narrowly on the hierarchy and neglected the laity. I have always felt that changing the hierarchy is going to be a huge challenge, but an even greater challenge might well be changing the passivity of the laity. The image of trying to quickly turn an aircraft carrier around comes to mind. The laity,

after all have been told for centuries that their job is to 'pray, pay and obey'.

Or, as someone else has expressed it: the laity have been 'parked' for centuries.

My gut feeling is that we have neglected them. By our words and actions we could try to re-orient the parish to what is essential. This would be conversion from the ground up. There is little to stop us doing this now, not waiting for the Plenary Council or other events.

Francis has given us all the information on that score: Return to the gospels and modify structures that block a return to the gospels (*Evangelii Gaudium*).

Take time to prepare liturgies, introduce bible studies, form book clubs on spiritual reading, form meditation groups, form groups that visit the sick, and imprisoned, invite people to discussion groups on burning issues and current church issues, take action regarding refugees and other social justice issues. Let qualified lay people look after the financial aspect of a parish. Reject clericalism in what we say and do, and call no one 'Father'. These are all things that could be done locally with or without the pastor. This will turn the litmus paper.

The problem is that today we tend to sit back and wait for others (bishops) to take actions because that is the clerical way we have been brought up.

While certainly not giving up on approaching our bishops we must become proactive in things we can do at parish or diocesan levels.

Having said that, we are impatient beings. We live in a world where change is happening more quickly than in other eras. We are reluctant to wait endlessly for bishops to act. There is an episcopal inertia that infuriates all. We all know examples of this.

We can appreciate that a synod is not a political parliament and that discernment is necessary. For each person to make a speech promoting his/her point of view can mean that neither side is listening to the other. I think this is what Francis meant when he said there was no discernment at the synod on the Amazon regarding the ordination of married men.

In short, we must keep pressure on the hierarchy but simultaneously attend to our own conversion and that of the laity around us. Reform is more than politics, it is inclusive conversion. ☪

A voice for the child

KEVIN LISTON

Kevin Liston retired from priestly ministry in 1973 and is now committed to working for a mutually enriching conversation between Christianity and 21st century Australia. In this article he looks at recent moves by state governments to introduce legislation requiring priests to report sexual abuse revealed in confession which have uncovered some narrow perspectives.



To explore the issue, I invite you to come on a thought experiment. Consider this scenario.

You are a parent, grandparent, uncle or granduncle of a little boy, aged 8 or 10 or 12. He is a wee darling, cute and enchanting, loves his football and cricket but he is also capable of being cheeky or downright naughty. When he gets into trouble, he puts on his cute face and you just have to love him. Over a six-month period, his behaviour and demeanour change for the worse – he becomes withdrawn and sullen with unexplained bouts of apparent depression. You are at your wits' end trying to work out what is going on. Then you discover that a friend whom you have trusted for many years is sexually abusing your child – and has been doing so for some time. Your priorities would be clear and responses immediate – get the 'friend' out of the way and look for every means you could to help your child deal with what has been happening. And as quickly as possible – no delay. Then you would want to see about getting the predator reported to the police and the child protection department to ensure no other children are being harmed by him.

At this point you need to know everything that is in any way relevant to what has been going on. You ask your friends and

neighbours if they know anything. Openness, honesty and straight talking are absolutely essential here. No secrets. Help for the child is the priority.

The instinct to protect our children is in our DNA. We teach them to be open and communicative about their feelings and experiences. As a community that prioritises the best interests of children, we support one another, not only in fostering the healthy development of young people but also in being aware of predatory or abusive behaviour. We expect our friends to alert us to any potential problems. As a society, we demand processes be in place to safeguard children and eliminate opportunities for abuse where possible.

In Catholicism, this imperative for protecting our children is grounded in Baptism. At Baptism parents, supported by godparents and the community promise to lead the child into the Kingdom, to bring him/her up in the faith and to keep the divine life in them safe and nurtured. When we baptise our children, we commit to not only protecting them but to giving them the best upbringing and opportunities we can offer.

Baptism is the beginning of a process of introducing a person to our catholic faith, values, traditions and moral standards. It is the start of a commitment to doing what is

best for the child, to protecting and nurturing them through all the exigencies of life. Any stepping back from that is a renegeing on our Baptism promises to be there for them.

Let's return to our scenario and take it a step further. You learn that the man who has been doing so much harm to your child went to confession two months before, claiming to be remorseful, to have changed his ways and promising never to abuse another young person again. So, the priest, whom you regarded as a friend and a man who had the best interests of your child and family at heart, had known for some time what was going on but had done nothing to help you or your child. Being close to you and your family, he would have been aware of the predator's ongoing contact with the boy. But there was no warning, not even a suggestion that you might look closer at one of your 'friends'. As you now know, the abuse did not stop with the confession. That was a moment of conscience for the paedophile that did not last. I can't imagine how a priest would cope with his conscience in such a situation.

If your little son or grandson, nephew or grandnephew is going through a secret hell and you are beside yourself with worry, totally confused about what is going on, don't you think you have a right to know that he is being abused? Don't you think the child has a right to be protected by the adults around him? This is the nub of the problem for Catholics. In this matter, the current institutional structures are not responsive to the circumstances. I know what canon law says but, Dear Reader, 'What do you think?' Is this one of those occasions when the rules of the institution must be recognised as inadequate or 'not fit for purpose'?

Debate on the sacrament focusses mainly on the seal of confession. It considers the issues from the viewpoint of the priest, the penitent and the rules of the institutional Church. It assumes a position where the penitent is 'alone before God'. It does not fully acknowledge the social effects or consequences for others of the actions of the abuser, which are all too clear in our scenario. In that narrative, the sacrament of reconciliation or confession is not primarily about child protection; it is about rehabilitation of the perpetrator. The rule about the seal seems to conflict with the obligations and responsibilities taken on at Baptism – unless the priest is exempted through not having been party to the Baptism promises?

Continued page 14

Reconciliation/confession as we have it at present is a broken system – a conclusion strongly supported by the great majority of Catholics who have ceased using it as a sacrament. In June 2019, the Apostolic Penitentiary affirmed the absolute secrecy of everything said in confession, adding that the Church should not bow to the judgment of public opinion or conform its own juridical system to civil laws. There is something more important than public opinion or civil law or the Church's juridical system here – the protection of children and their families. The Church

needs to get on the front foot in relation to assuring people, Catholics and others, that there is no potential loophole here, that the commitment to safeguarding children is absolute.

Suggestions that the seal needs to be retained on the off-chance that a paedophile who may seek reconciliation will be deterred if there is any possibility that his actions may be made public are a distraction. Priests everywhere say that paedophiles do not come to confession or if they do their revelations are so vague and general as to be meaningless. Heroic

declarations of willingness to go to prison proclaim a position but explain nothing.

As evil actions cause damage and destruction to others in the community, reconciliation and healing should also include those others. The seal of confession needs to be considered in its real context, which is both personal and social, relational and communitarian. Most Catholics agree with general community standards in this regard. We look forward to the day when Church rules recognise this sense of the faith of the faithful. ☪



Where to now with the Seal of Confession?

FRANK BRENNAN SJ

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, Rector of Newman College at The University of Melbourne, reflects on how he intends to respond to civil and canon law when a penitent reveals child sexual abuse in Confession.



Three years ago, I was called before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse because I had published an article stating that in all my years as a priest, I had never heard the confession of a paedophile and never expected to. I said that any information I gleaned in confession about child sexual abuse was unlikely to be of any forensic value to police, as a penitent behind a screen was unlikely to identify himself, his victim, or the time and place of any offence. I said that any state abolition of the seal of confession would render it even more unlikely that a paedophile would ever present for confession, and would simply take away one very remote possibility that a paedophile might come seeking help which could result in the

paedophile being convinced to turn himself in to the authorities.

I appeared at the royal commission alongside the respected canon lawyer Fr Ian Waters who explained that the seal of confession covered the sins of the penitent, but not other matters. I agreed with Fr Waters. I gave the example of a little girl Sally who comes to confession and tells me that she stole the jelly beans and that her stepfather did something nasty to her. I said that I could never reveal or act upon Sally's confession of having stolen the jelly beans, but I could act on Sally's assertion about her stepfather in the same way as I could if the assertion were made outside confession. It would be a matter of pastoral prudence and care for Sally and her family. There was a difference of opinion on the panel, with the one bishop in attendance, Bishop Terence Curtin who was chair of the Bishops' Commission for Doctrine and Morals, varying his testimony to agree more with the position put by Fr Waters. I put a suggestion:

Fr Brennan: *Could I suggest the appropriate course would be to have Bishop Terry's committee of the Bishops Conference put in a particular submission to you articulating what is the received theological view of the Catholic Church in Australia on the seal of the confessional?*

Bishop Curtin: *Yes.*

The Chair: *Will we get one view?*

Bishop Curtin: *Yes, you would.*

Fr Brennan: *That's the advantage of a hierarchy, your Honour.*

A panel of the most senior archbishops then appeared before the commission a fortnight later.

Like many, I expected that by then the bishops would have worked out a clear united position on the limits of the seal of confession.

They did not; they publicly disagreed.

The royal commission recommended new laws which would abolish the seal of confession.

Those laws have now been enacted. The royal commission recommended that the Australian bishops consult with the Holy See to clarify whether 'information received from a child during the sacrament of reconciliation that they have been sexually abused is covered by the seal of the confessional'.

On 4 September 2020, the bishops finally published the Holy See's response that the seal includes 'all the sins of both the penitent and others known from the penitent's confession, both mortal and venial, both occult and public, as manifested with regard to absolution and therefore known to the confessor by virtue of sacramental knowledge.'

They would say that the seal covers Sally's disclosure that she was abused by her stepfather.

We Australian Catholic priests now need to consider three possible scenarios.

1. What happens if a penitent, now an adult, discloses in confession that he or she when a child was sexually abused by an adult? In confession, I would simply urge the adult penitent to report the past offence to the relevant civil authorities. I would not take any further action. I would not foresee any problem with my

complying with the state law while at the same time honouring the seal of confession.

2. What happens if a child penitent discloses in confession that he or she has been sexually abused by a named or identifiable adult? I would treat that information in the same way as if it were disclosed to me outside confession. I would take appropriate action to set in train any mandatory reporting requirements of the state. This would not be a breach of the seal of the confession as I understood the seal to be when I was ordained a priest 35 years ago. It would not be a breach of the seal of confession as I have understood it to be, on receipt of competent canonical advice which I had sought a number of times in the lead up to the royal commission. If my action were now deemed by the Holy See to be a breach of the seal, resulting in my excommunication, I would take heart that Australia's one canonised saint Mary MacKillop was excommunicated for a time. In good conscience I could take no other path.

3. What happens if a penitent confesses child sexual abuse? I would honour the seal of confession. I would not disclose the abuse to anyone. I would be prepared conscientiously to refuse to comply with the new civil law on the basis that: it works an unwarranted interference with freedom of religion; it is a law which, if anything, will render children less safe; and it is a law which is unenforceable as a prosecution could occur only if the child abuser disclosed to authorities their confession. As Justice Kennedy of the US Supreme Court would say, this law 'seems inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class it affects'. In my 35 years as a priest when the civil law honoured the seal of the confession, I never had a paedophile confess his sin to me in confession. Now that the legal privilege over the seal has been withdrawn, I think it all but inconceivable that any abuse will be confessed. Criminal lawyers, family lawyers and investigative journalists, all of whom continue to enjoy a privilege of non-disclosure, are far more likely than a priest in the confessional to hear the details of such abuse. The only detailed human rights assessment made of the withdrawal of the privilege from priests was by retired Justice Dodds-Streton who conducted an inquiry for the ACT Government investigating compliance with the ACT Human Rights Act 2004 which is supposed to guarantee 'the freedom to demonstrate (one's) religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and

teaching, either individually or as part of a community and whether in public or private'. She concluded, 'In our opinion, the imposition of an obligation to report child sexual abuse based on information obtained in or in connection with a religious confession is unlikely to result in many detections of, or successful prosecutions for, either child sexual abuse or breaches of the reporting obligation itself. Where sexual abusers of children are Roman Catholics who would otherwise attend confession, they will probably avoid confession altogether; or alternatively, they may exploit the potential under the rite of confession prevalent in Australia to confess anonymously and non-specifically, in order to avoid disclosures that will lead to their detection or oblige the priest to report.' If she had any experience of the Catholic rite of confession, she could have added that any penitent is likely to confess in such generic terms as to leave the confessor completely ignorant of all key details of any offence.

In future, I will do all I can to avoid excommunication or breach of the civil law. But I will not put children at risk. I urge our bishops and the participants at the forthcoming plenary council to consider changes to church law in Australia so as to enhance the protection of children and to make the sacrament of reconciliation more fit for purpose in a society which decries the scourge of child sexual abuse and which denies the prospect of rehabilitation of child sex offenders. Our bishops and the plenary council delegates should take as their starting point the Holy See's expressed desire to 'spare no effort in collaborating with civil authorities to pursue every avenue to end the scourge of sexual abuse.'

Contrary to the received wisdom of our recent royal commission, I should add that I agree completely with the pastoral and prudential observation of the Holy See:

'It should be recalled also that the confessional provides an opportunity—perhaps the only one—for those who have committed sexual abuse to admit to the fact. In that moment the possibility is created for the confessor to counsel and indeed to admonish the penitent, urging him to contrition, amendment of life and the restoration of justice. Were it to become the practice, however, for confessors to denounce those who confessed to child sexual abuse, no such penitent would ever approach the sacrament and a precious opportunity for repentance and reform would be lost.'

THE TABLET

SPECIAL NCP MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION OFFER



Subscribe for only \$139

The Tablet is the Catholic weekly publication where faith and modern culture meet. Its wide-ranging, always challenging content includes features on religion, politics, society and ethics, together with reviews of books and the arts.

Telephone the NCP
National Office (03) 5244 3680

Subscribe to our App or
digital edition at:
www.thetablet.co.uk

Lifting the Seal of Confession for child sexual abuse

MICHAEL LEAHY

Michael Leahy, a former Catholic priest, teacher and lecturer in religious education, explores a theology of the Sacrament of Penance for post Royal Commission times.

The current theology of ministry and sacrament. The sacrament of Penance is a place where people meet their priest at their most vulnerable. For this reason the priest may never be more aware of the efficacy of the word of forgiveness he utters to them. Correspondingly, the people may never have a more heartfelt 'recognition of the sacrament for what it is' (Presbyterorum Ordinis N. 4). Confidentiality—the Seal of confession—is crucial to this encounter and so deserves high respect. But how much respect in the light of evidence from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that the Seal has been used to shield offenders, and to facilitate their continued offending (Final Report, Bk. 16, Vol. 2, pp. 853-4)?

Community outrage at such abuse, particularly by clerics, has prompted mandatory reporting laws even of confessional knowledge of such abuse in many jurisdictions. In this article I argue that the Seal's binding power is not so absolute that an exception cannot be made to protect children from such indisputably grotesque abuse in future.

The chief pastoral objection to mandatory reporting of knowledge gained in confession is that victims may be deterred from disclosing their abuse in confession if they know the confessor is legally bound to report it to the secular authorities. Evidence from victims advancing this argument was presented to the recent Inquiry of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia. (See: <https://tinyurl.com/y3u32q53> and <https://tinyurl.com/yyltpe86>)

This argument deserves respect. If all or most victims of abuse felt this way, mandatory reporting laws would fail in their purpose of protecting children from such abuse, and thus be idle. However, the Royal Commission (ibid. p. 853) found that there are other victims who bitterly resent the fact that those who knew of the abuse did not report it either to the ecclesiastical or civil authorities (p. 853), thus enabling their abuse to continue sometimes to the point of wrecking their lives. Prudence would demand that the wishes of the victim be ascertained by the relevant confessor before he acted on such disclosures. He might need time to



persuade the victim of the merits of reporting before actually carrying it out. If the victim continued to oppose such reporting, and the likely consequences of doing so were the infliction of great harm on him/her, the priest might well have a lawful excuse for not obeying the law in the relevant case.

The problem of victims in such cases can, it seems, be managed. However, the catastrophic consequences of failure to report such abuse in many cases have been exposed for all to see by the Royal Commission. Mandatory reporting of disclosures of such abuse within confession would avert such consequences in the future. Without mandatory reporting, it is hard to see how such consequences could be averted.

Is it divine law?

Fundamental to the doctrinal objection is the Tridentine claim that 'sacramental confession was instituted ... by divine law' (canon 6), and 'that the manner of confessing to a priest alone ... has always been observed from the beginning ...' (Vorgrimler, H 1992 (1st German edn. 1987), *Sacramental Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, p. 215). These two things combined give the doctrine on this sacrament the appearance of unchangeability: what authority is competent to change a practice laid down from the beginning by divine law? But Vorgrimler points out that the historical claim is in fact mistaken, and besides adds nothing to what is actually being taught: 'The fact that a confession of sins is required by 'divine law' follows from the existence of sacramental confession: human beings must acknowledge their sins before

God' (Vorgrimler p. 217). But this doctrine can be readily accepted as 'divine law' without accepting that this law imposes a Seal on sins disclosed in the private form of confession introduced from the sixth century.

Indeed, one might be forgiven for wondering whether the pastoral appeal of the Seal in private confession consisted in protection of penitents from the shame of the public confession required in the sacrament's earlier form. Has the importance of the Seal, in other words, been exaggerated over time for prudential rather than doctrinal reasons? The sacredness claimed for the Seal in this doctrinal argument is matched by the sacredness claimed for the sacramental transaction itself and for its minister.

Priest as minister of God

The nature of the sacrament of Penance, according to one of the theological manuals, is such that communication within it 'is with the priest not as a man but as a minister of God, so that this knowledge [acquired in confession] transcends every human juridical order, and pertains solely to the forum of God and conscience' (Aertnys, I & Damen, C 1965, *Theologia Moralis*, vol. 2, 2 vols., Marietti, Rome, pp. 411-2 my translation). That this transformation of the status of the minister is not just a piece of theological hyperbole is clear from the moral consequences this manual derives from the transformation: 'Thus a Confessor can affirm, even with an oath, that he has no knowledge of a sin heard in Confession, intending by that affirmation that he has no such knowledge as a man, because he has the knowledge rather as a minister of Christ' (Aertnys & Damen vol. 2., p. 820).

Thus, a confessor having knowledge of child sexual abuse by a penitent, and even being aware of the high risk of the abuse continuing, may nonetheless swear to a court trying this penitent that he has no knowledge of this abuse. The court, victim and his/her supporters and the society at large are asked by holders of this theology of the sacrament to believe that its effect is to so annul the humanity of the minister as to morally justify—and even require—him to deny that he heard what he heard, even when the denial is likely to free an abuser to continue abusing.

The sacredness claimed for this sacrament depends upon a similar sacredness of the priesthood. Because the sacraments are signs of God's saving work among human

beings, their priestly ministers, according to this theology, act not in their own right as human beings but in the person of Christ i.e it is no longer the human being who acts in the relevant sacraments but Christ who acts in his place. The problem with this theology is that, in order to ensure divine agency in the conferral of the sacrament, it has to annul the humanity of the priestly agent. But the law of the incarnation surely requires rather that the divine action be seen to take place through the human action, not in its place. Theologies presenting God as stepping into history to act in place of human agents are God-of-the-gaps theologies the problems with which are now notorious. To avoid these and their consequences for understanding the sacrament of Penance and the Seal, we must seek an alternative theology.

An alternative theology of ministry and sacrament

As its title suggests, the theology of the priest as 'presbyter' received official sanction in Vatican II's document *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. Briefly stated, a presbyter is one authorised by the church to exercise the diakonia of preaching the word: thus a very particular ministry not capable of exercise by just any member but requiring a proven capacity and a mandate. A leading researcher on the theology of diakonia, John N. Collins, summarises his findings thus: Any man or woman who can be recognised by the Christian community – through its leaders or in the very body of its membership – as being faithful to the word and as having the potential to deliver it to others – in its many forms – is a candidate for ministry. The minister may not thereby be constituted on the model of the ancient 'priest'/sacerdos. But in proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (1Corinthians 11:26), he or she will be making the statement that underpins all other activities of believing Christians (Collins, JN 2016, *Gateway to Renewal: reclaiming ministries for women and men*, Morning Star Publishing, Melbourne, Vic., p. 139).

The minister, on this view, is above all a servant of the church, authorised to specialise in the ministry of the word. The power exercised in that ministry is the power conferred on the whole church, and thus is best expressed liturgically in a prayer led by the presbyter in which the whole community joins. On the role of prayer in the sacraments, Herbert Vorgrimler insists: That is not some extra, spiritual, but basically superfluous desideratum. We are dealing here with the basic form of the sacraments:

they are prayers, and more precisely, they are prayers 'in the name of Jesus', spoken by the community of believers, from 'minister' and recipient' ... (Vorgrimler, H 1992 (1st German edn. 1987), *Sacramental Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, p. 79).

Contrary then to the impression conveyed by the juridical/sacerdotal conception, sacramental power is not the personal power of the minister but the power of the word conferred on the church, spoken by the authorised minister joined in prayer with the community. Though essential (pp. 268-9), the sacramental role of the minister should not be misconceived: 'expressions that state, or imply, that ordination causes an 'ontological assimilation' to Jesus Christ can only create confusion' ((Vorgrimler 1992 (1st German edn. 1987), p. 277).

Priest as spokesperson for healing

On this theology the presbyter in confession does not cease to be human, and is not replaced by Christ, but is the community's authorised speaker of Christ's word of absolution to the penitent: in keeping with the doctrine of the Incarnation, Christ speaks through the word of the human minister, not in the minister's place. The source of the Seal of confession then is not the supposed communication of the penitent with God rather than the priest, nor in a particular sacredness of the priesthood which in the ministry of the sacraments annuls the humanity of the priest and replaces him with God himself. The source of the binding power of the Seal has therefore to be sought in some other aspect of the sacrament.

In my view the quest for that source should take due account of the contingency of the form of the sacrament itself. Private confession became the ordinary form of the sacrament only in the sixth century. It became so for pastoral reasons. Pastoral reasons could prompt a change in that form by mere papal fiat at any time. There is a considerable lack of proportion therefore in the doctrinal absoluteness claimed for the Seal of private confession and the pastoral contingency of private confession itself. Could it be that the absoluteness claimed for the Seal is the result of historical accident rather than doctrinal soundness? Pastoral mercy led the Church to substitute private for public confession, thus limiting knowledge of a penitent's sins to one person – the confessor.

But over time confinement of such knowledge to this class of persons – confessors – contributed to further

sacralisation of this role and the sacrament itself. No doubt other factors contributed to the sacralisation of the role of the cleric in western society in particular. However, the historical contingency of the private confession and its accompanying Seal gives us ground for raising these possibilities and calling into question the absoluteness of the binding power of the Seal.

Making sense of the confessional seal

If the source of the binding power of the Seal does not lie in any binding doctrine, it must be located in some contingent aspect of the form of the sacrament. The faithful, I suggest, would have been discouraged from seeking sacramental forgiveness for their sins if there had not been some assurance that sins disclosed to a priest would not be divulged or in other ways used against them. These reasons for imposing a Seal on the content of confessions are obviously good ones, but they are also prudential, and therefore contingent, not absolute.

Indeed, the extent of the binding power of the Seal was a matter of debate over a long period of the Church's history, even if the majority regarded it as absolute (Cahill, D & Wilkinson, P 2017, *Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: An interpretative review of the literature and public inquiry reports*, RMIT University Melbourne, appendix 2). According to Cahill and Wilkinson, the so called 'Gallican doctrine' allowed for the breaking of the Seal in cases of 'conspiratorial and seditious plots' against the state or the king (p. 348). The important consideration here is not so much where majority opinion fell on the Seal as the fact that both sides were engaging in a process of weighing the relevant goods.

If the good of protecting the penitents from harm through divulgence of their sins was considered to be outweighed by the good of protecting the king and his regime, it follows that the good of protecting penitents from harm could be outweighed by competing goods in other cases. The good of protecting children from sexual abuse by adults is surely one such good, which must prevail if the binding force of the Seal is merely prudential, and not doctrinal.

Our bishops, backed by Rome, have been loud in their protests that, since the doctrine of the Seal attaches to a sacrament that is of divine institution, state legislation making mandatory the reporting of child abuse disclosed in confession would constitute a violation of Catholics' religious freedom. These protests must be

Continued page 18

considered against the anguished cries of the victims of child sexual abuse echoing around Australia and the world, and of cover-ups of their sufferings by those who knew about them, whether through confessions or through other channels.

It is hard to imagine a clearer example of a sign of the times to which, according to Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4), it is the Church's duty to respond and according to which its doctrines must be reviewed. To persist in the argument that the doctrines are unchangeable is, I submit, to refuse to allow the signs of the times to have the impact they are meant to have on the development of the Church's understanding

of its doctrines. The Church fails the world it is called to serve if it clings to the ahistorical understanding of itself and its mission expressed in this sheltering behind the illusory absolutes of the past.

I believe that the evolution of human consciousness of the rights of the child, manifested in moves by secular institutions including governments around Australia and the world to remove legal privilege from confessional knowledge of child abuse, has outpaced the development of church doctrine on this matter. A theologically warranted development of this doctrine would be an acknowledgement by the Magisterium that the child abuse

crisis is a genuine sign of the times, and that this sign of the times shows that an exception should be made to the binding authority of the Seal in such cases.

It is an inescapable responsibility of the bishops individually and as a college to scrutinise and discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church through this painful and widespread experience of its faithful. Far from undermining the confidentiality of the confessional, this concession would make it more credible by removing the current exaggeration from the doctrine of the binding power of the Seal. ☞



The mysteriousness of the divine reality

RICHARD FRANCIS

Richard Francis invites us into the cosmological world of the deep mystery which is the divine presence.

Thirteen years ago Paul Coutinho SJ wrote a book titled *How Big Is Your God*, and recently I saw this quote from Sally McFague, an American Theologian & author of *Models of God*: To feel in the depth of our being that we are part and parcel of the evolutionary ecosystem of our cosmos is a pre-requisite for contemporary Christian theology.

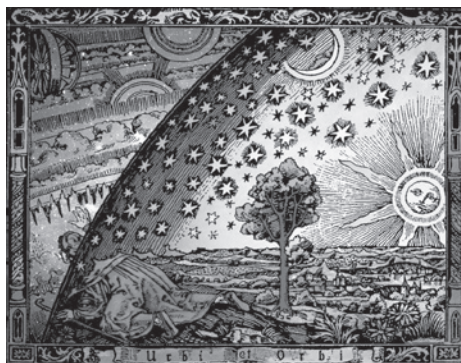
Both authors challenged me to expand how I 'saw' God, and my relationship with that God and with creation. While I am not theologian, I dare to hope that my scratchings might cause my readers to have minds open to catching a fresh glimpse of the awesome Divine Reality 'in whom we live and have our being'.

I believe this is a worthy task because we must take a 'new' God to our brothers and sisters of this age of dramatic change if we want to evangelize them.

The same old God in the same old wineskins doesn't get anybody's attention, not anymore!

Pope Francis talks of 'a change of eras' and 'a paradigm shift'; I suspect he is talking, about and hoping for a new human consciousness, a new way of seeing ourselves in relationship to one another, to our universe, and to our God.

As soon as I use the word 'God' my imagination comes into play and picks up on how I have imagined 'God' in the past. I believe it's time to move beyond those old images than tended to confine God, rather



than release God to be God. I think our many dogmas about the nature and many attributes of God are now tending to constrain and constrict our approach to this Mystery, as though we are able to 'hold' God inside them; they have the danger of making us feel secure and comfortable with that God, and life goes on as usual! Shouldn't that happen at the moment of our death when our quest to 'know' this Mystery may have come to an end. Maybe God's only immutable attribute is Infinite Merciful Love!

Western man's love of dogmas tends to turn God into a concept in his mind, rather than an Alive, Dynamic Mystery to be lived with and in, especially 'in'. I am more immersed in the Divine Reality than a fish is immersed in the sea! So, until we meet God at the moment of death let's continue to be challenged, entranced, astounded by the Mystery that Elijah encountered at the mouth of the cave, and that shook the mountain when Moses went

into the cloud, and made the people tremble in fear. The God to whom Jesus cried out from the Cross.

I believe modern cosmology and the scientific discoveries of our age offer us a way to expand and deepen our relationship with Divine Reality. Remember the awe we used to experience at Benediction – the candles, the incense cloud, the monstrance with the host at its centre.

Is it possible for us to take that awe of the real presence in each other and in the cosmos, and be spellbound by the awefilledness of this unbelievable Universe expanding at breakneck speed into more and more space in which our Creating God is surely present. To contemplate with awe those evolving, transforming expressions of Divine Reality. (See Thomas Berry CP)

In terms of created time, 'suddenly' our universe after 13 billion years of evolution has, for the first time as far as we know, become conscious of itself and we are that consciousness. And, of course, that consciousness wants to know where it came from, where its universe came from, and how it came into existence. It wants to know where 'it' and its universe is going – in other words it wants to know if it has meaning.

I believe I am confronted by two possibilities: to claim the existence of some kind of Divine Reality or to live in despair and meaninglessness – that seems to be the only choice. The Existentialists like Sartre understood this; if there is no Divine Reality there can be no meaning to life or to my heart's deepest searching. It's no wonder they said, 'there is no God', or 'God is dead', the God they refused to

believe in didn't really exist. They were looking at a God that was too small; that was a concept.

The anthropomorphic God most of us have bears little resemblance to the Divine Reality that is 'so far beyond our thoughts and whose ways are so far beyond our ways'.

It's true, for us Christians, that our God has revealed himself in our history as the God of Love, but how does that Love play out in our new cosmology?

The Universe is not God's playground that God visits from time to time!

I well remember showing a Good Shepherd religious sister a diagram of three intersecting circles to represent the Trinity and asking her where she was in relationship to the Trinity: 'There!', she said, without hesitation, confidently stabbing her finger at the very centre of the intersecting circles. What kind of God does she have that she could put herself there? What does it say of her understanding of her relationship with the Divine Life and Love?

Of course, she's right – that's exactly where she is; where I am, where you are, and where the whole created universe, is!!

'The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole earth'. And, if we take on this consciousness, we begin to see the world through God's eyes and have God's concern for the evil social systems that condemns most of God's people to a life of poverty.

Modern cosmology can only go so far; but our theology and our salvation history go

further; to a Divine Mystery in which the whole universe exists? The only Divine Reality that stands up to scrutiny is One that is fully in, immersed in, this wild, heaving, exploding, now conscious, universe. Not a Creator God, but a Creating God, terribly involved in this evolving universe.

This Divine Force, "Energy", is always with us and we are always in this living, breathing Energy. Were it otherwise we would cease to exist, surely. I don't think this makes me a pantheist, but rather a panentheist! I think we have tended to look on God as a bit like the battery in our car.

We needed God to kick start our universe and indeed our own lives; we prayed to God when our car broke down, and we will catch up with God at the end when our 'motor' dies, or worse still for some of us, God will catch up with us!

The Universe must exist in God for if it exists outside of the Divine Reality then God must be 'in heaven looking down on us'.

For God to be outside looking down on our evolving universe, with its spectacular galaxies and powerful black holes, then evolution and our existence, our consciousness, would seem like some kind of 'sick' social experiment on God's part.

I don't think I can believe in that God.

I can believe that, not only is this Divine Creating Energy always existing into our

Universe every moment of time, and that that Creating Energy took 'flesh' and became one of us, a display of loving coherence with us. I can pray to a God who wants to transform my heart with Infinite Compassion so that I too can 'be compassionate as my heavenly Father is compassionate'. Maybe my best way to pray is to breathe in that Compassionate Love with every breath I take, and breathe out all the obstacles in my heart to living that compassion for my sisters and brothers. "I will give them a heart of flesh", that's God's promise. Our part of this awesome universe has a cry of pain, despair, and hope at its deepest heart that searches the paradox of the Crucified so that we can, not just endure the mystery, but grow into it.

Of course, I have barely touched the Reality that is God, and that's how it will always be, even when I see that Reality face to face, I suspect. How can it be otherwise, but if anything I have said causes you to stand in awe at the 'mouth of your cave', and have a sense of awe at the cosmos and the Creating, Evolving, Dynamic, Divine Reality that is everywhere within it, I'm content. You and I are a little part of that Divine Reality – isn't that what John tries to convey in his Last Supper discourse.

In God we have our being, let's pray to glimpse a big enough God!

The earth was once molten rock and now sings operas (Brian Swimme). ☺



It shall be overgrown with thorns and thistles

NOEL BRADY

Noel Brady, Pastor Emeritus, Fitzroy North, Melbourne, reflects on the reading from Isaiah 5:1-7 in the light of US presidential elections.

Since retiring my opportunities to celebrate Eucharist have dwindled, so when asked last week to preside on Sunday, with six priest concelebrants I accepted the invitation with alacrity. Turning my mind to the readings I noted the 1st reading came from the prophet Isaiah (5:1-7).

Isaiah tells a parable that has allegorical interpretation about a person who built a vineyard with love and unstinting care. However, it yielded only wild grapes. The owner of the vineyard then poses a question to the people of Jerusalem and Judah asking them to judge between him

and the vineyard itself as to where the blame should rest and what should be done. Without waiting for them to answer the owner tells them he is going to destroy the vineyard, the hedge will be removed, the wall broken down, it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with thorns and thistles.

Only then does Isaiah reveal the meaning of the parable to his hearers. The owner of the vineyard is Yahweh the vineyard is Israel. The Lord gave them everything and expected 'justice but saw bloodshed', 'righteousness but heard a cry'. The parable was directed at them.

In the Gospel Jesus tells a parable modelled on the Isaiah passage where an owner builds a vineyard but then leased it to tenant farmers who proved to be unworthy. They mistreat the owner's servants on three separate occasions, even killing them, including the owner's only son. The parable also has an allegorical interpretation with the owner God, the servants the prophets, the son Jesus. Only at the conclusion do Jesus' hearers, the chief priests and Pharisees realise that the parable is directed at them.

Isaiah's prophecy is to the Israelites eight centuries before Jesus, and Jesus' own message to the scribes and Pharisees is located in his time, almost 2000 years ago. All good but barren unless it comes alive for us today.

Continued page 20



The quote from Isaiah which is part of the 6th verse held my attention; “it shall be overgrown with thorns and thistles”. It occurred to me that this tumultuous year is the first since 2005 that I haven’t walked a Camino. One of many things I enjoy on a pilgrimage is coming upon the ruins of old houses. Who lived there? What stories might the stones tell? When was the house built? How many generations were raised here? Was it impacted during the Civil War? When was the house last occupied? Many questions and few answers available to an English-only speaking pilgrim.

Sometimes it’s a wall missing or maybe one wall standing, empty spaces where windows provided protection from the elements, light, and an inside out view of the world; but there is something else; nature is reclaiming ownership. Trees, bushes, weeds, creepers they all flourish in the ruins and reclaim authority, filling a gaping hole or a small crevasse and is overgrown with thorns and thistles.

I have followed U.S. politics since 1960 when the junior senator from Massachusetts John F Kennedy launched his successful bid for the White House. He is the first and thus far only Catholic to hold that office.

As a 17 year old, I like millions around the world felt a mixture of hope, excitement, even pride, and looked up JFK as the leader of the free world. Something similar happened 15 months earlier when Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was elected pope taking the name John XXIII. He was genuinely loved and by then known as ‘Good Pope John’. One has to be of a certain age to appreciate the impact of

the two Johns; it was wonderful to behold. I am forever grateful. I won’t spend time on the present occupier of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue or the current election save for one aspect.

I find it jarring that many of the US hierarchy along with their enablers are engaging in partisan politics for and on behalf of Trump and the Republican party. Some of what I have read or heard or seen is beyond the pale. There is an attempt to influence if not direct US Catholics how to vote. You cannot be Catholic and vote Democrat a video offering from a priest in La Crosse Wisconsin (a battleground state that voted for Trump by around 22,000 votes in 2016). In the video the priest made a personal attack on Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington DC. The Archbishop refused to be part of a setup by the Knights of Columbus so that Trump could collect another trophy photo prior to the fiasco in Lafayette Square where the infamous bible shoot took place. This misfeasance was compounded by the bishop of Tyler, Texas who offered his endorsement of the Wisconsin priest’s video in retweeting it.

Or the nun, secure in habit covering all save for hands and face (but no ears), who had the temerity to appear on national television at the Republican Convention to endorse Trump stating that he was ‘the most pro-life president that this country has ever had’. Lest her point was missed she went on to describe Biden and Harris as the ‘most anti-life ticket ever’.

Or Cardinal Dolan’s opening prayer at the convention. This followed his effusive zoom hook up with Trump and others

weeks earlier, the following Sunday telling the NY folk at the St Patrick’s cathedral TV Mass that the president had promised to tune in.

This overt Republican endorsement will have consequences. At the very least it is just crazy to so brazenly support one side of politics. The Catholic Church to be credible must be able to talk to everyone and not be seen as partisan. Catholics are Democrats as well as Republicans.

It is here that Australian history offers a cautionary tale. The ALP split of 1955 which was about politics, unions, communism, and religion caused bitter divisions culminating in the formation of the DLP.

One shameful legacy was the support (particularly in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania) enthusiastically offered by the Catholic Church to the DLP which divided the catholic community even families, individual bishops, priests and parishes. Many fine ALP Politicians lost their seats in parliament and catholic voices were lost to the ALP. It was an absolute tragedy.

In the US some bishops have gained notoriety (and promotion?) by issuing decrees that exclude certain politicians from receiving communion. A priest is reported as having denied Eucharist to Biden just a few months ago, similar thing happened to the last Catholic to run for the presidency, John Kerry in 2004. On what basis? They are perceived as supporting abortion. In a pluralistic society the remit of an elected politician is to cast her/his vote in good conscience. Hopefully a politician who happens to be Catholic is assisted by their faith in arriving at a decision. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, said: ‘We are called on to form consciences not to replace them’. Decisions are sometimes excruciatingly difficult. Everything I have read about Biden makes me think he has not easily come to his decision that abortion is the woman’s choice.

Herein lies the problem. Does an elected Catholic politician follow her/his conscience or be directed by a bishop as how to vote? It seems a slippery slope to me, eventually a politician directed by a bishop will become unelectable. Taking Biden as an example, surely he is entitled to the presumption goodwill. In his over four-decades of public service he has never walked away from his faith. In fact, through thick and thin he hasn’t been shy talking about his faith or how much it means to him. I have a priest-friend in the States who told me Biden is a frequent

weekday Mass goer at the Washington Cathedral including his eight years as Vice President.

Women have occasionally spoken to me about an abortion they once had and recalled the traumatic experience. I have sometimes been moved to tears. Recalling that time they could see no other way. They were often alone. They had no support. The decision still haunted them. Hearing their stories, I have never been able to preach about abortion. I imagine such a woman in the congregation.

Dr Edmunds was a Coburg Councillor during my time at the Coburg Football Club. He was known as an abortionist. Two things I remember about him: 1) he was talked about in hushed tones 2) he was regarded as very wealthy. This was a time when an abortion was illegal, I wonder now who had access to an abortion and who didn't. Presumably if the US Supreme Court overturn the 1973 Roe v Wade decision, they will return jurisdiction to the states. Some states will allow abortion some will not. There will still be abortions but some people will have to travel; never a problem for those with money.

The problem with the US Bishops' decision, making abortion the 'pre-eminent' (adj. surpassing all others) priority in this election (as in 2016) is it becomes too easily weaponized. Something Pope Francis warned about in about in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (101). Are those same bishops who made this decision committed to accompanying the pregnant teenager during pregnancy, post-partum and in the early years of childhood, along with real money and resources? I am reliably informed that adoption within Australia is extremely difficult, should it be the same in the US are the bishops advocating for change? Are they open to sex-education in catholic schools? Where were the bishops when children were being sexually abused by priests and bishops? If only all the billions spent in legal fees and settlements over the last 30 plus years had been available to support persons considering an abortion.

Then there are other pressing issues global warming, refugees, euthanasia, racism, the death penalty, egregious disparities in wealth and health, starvation, homelessness, people-trafficking, wars, manufacturing and selling weapons. Alas these and other life and death issues are starved of oxygen.

Towards the end of the week, I had another vision of the Catholic Church in the United States of America in ruins; overgrown with thorns and thistles. ↻

Holy See response to Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission: another example of clericalist obstinance

DES CAHILL & PETER WILKINSON

Des Cahill and Peter Wilkinson, co-authors of the RMIT report on child sexual abuse, look at the Vatican response to the Royal Commission recommendations to bishops requesting Vatican support. This article was published on Pearls and Irritations website on September 10, 2020 and reprinted with permission: <https://johnmenadue.com/>



It is almost three years since the Royal Commission inquiring into child sexual abuse recommended that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) request from the Holy See responses on 14 matters. The Holy See responded in February 2020 with 'observations'. Seven months later the ACBC has forwarded them to the Commonwealth Attorney-General and made them public.

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is widely regarded as the most thorough and most credible assessment of clerical sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church. Its 17 volumes of evidence and recommendations, set out in 7,400+ pages, is the most detailed and comprehensive of any inquiry – church-sponsored or state-sponsored – anywhere in the world.

Among its many recommendations on the Catholic Church in its December 2017 Final Report were 14 specifically addressed to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), urging them to engage with the Holy See on a range of matters relating to the universal law and practice of the Catholic Church. The ACBC referred the recommendations to the Holy See in August 2018, but only now, two years later, has the ACBC made the Holy See's response public.

In February 2020 the Holy See issued an undated, unsigned, sans letterhead document with a set of 'observations' on all matters in the 14 recommendations. In theological terms 'observations' would have to rank very low in the order of church teaching or

papal magisterium. In fact, it could be argued that they lack the level of gravitas and authoritative response that the recommendations from a Royal Commission Report deserve and warrant.

But what should be made of these observations that the ACBC has been sitting on for the past 7 months and discussing in secret? Are they so astonishing or controversial that the ACBC has felt compelled to keep them secret from the Commonwealth Government who funded the Royal Commission to the tune of around \$500 million, and from the Australian public whose taxes paid for the inquiry? Or has the ACBC just been engaging in yet another of its 'delay and straight-bat' plays?

Essentially, with these 'observations' the Holy See has rejected all but two of the Royal Commission's proposals passed on to it by the ACBC. It is yet another example of a distressing and appalling exercise in clericalist intransigence and power entrenchment.

At no stage does the Holy See seriously engage with the weight of evidence meticulously set out in Volume 16 (Book Two) of the Royal Commission's reports, and focussed specifically on the Catholic Church in Australia. Whilst there is the ritual generic condemnation of child abuse committed by priests and religious men and women, the Holy See's observations show absolutely no empathy for the victims who have been suffering for decades, nor for their families who have suffered with them. It shows no awareness that many have even taken their own lives as a result of the abuse they suffered as innocent children.

While it is true the Catholic Church has made some changes to its regulatory and canonical processes, especially since Pope Francis haltingly then finally grasped the nettle in February 2019, the overriding truth is that the Holy See, and the Catholic Church generally, has not yet dealt with the underlying culture of 'clericalism' which assumes that clerics are, and meant

Continued page 22

FEATURES

to be, the active dominant elite in the Church, and the laity the passive subservient mass.

Holy See 'observations'

The Holy See's response accepts just two of the fourteen recommendations. Both relate to technical canonical issues that child sexual abuse should be classified as a 'canonical crime', and not just taken as a 'moral failing', and that the acquisition, possession and distribution of child pornography be included as a delict (Rec. 16.9) – this occurred in May 2019. The second concerns the abrogation of the Pontifical Secret (Rec. 16.10) which concerns allegations and disciplinary processes – this occurred in December 2019.

Episcopal appointments (Rec. 16.8)

On the recommendation for a transparent episcopal appointment process, the Holy See insists on maintaining the status quo. It claims that lay men and women are being consulted, but no one knows how many or who they are! It has rejected the solution contained in the agreement the Holy See made in 2018 with the mainland Chinese Communist Government wherein a diocesan body containing clergy and lay people openly discusses and jointly selects a priest candidate to be their next bishop, which must be approved by the Chinese Bishops Conference, and then by the Chinese Government, before the Holy See gives its final approval. The status quo is defended by the Holy See on the grounds that a "certain discretion out of respect for the candidate" has to be maintained.

Statute of Limitations, imputability and other Canonical issues (Recs. 16.12,13, 55, 56, 17)

The Holy See rejects the time limit (or Statute of Limitations in common-law countries) recommendation – which had already been raised by the Holy See from 10 to 20 years in 2010 – on the grounds that "fallibility of memory, with the passage of time and the lack of proofs concerning events from the distant past, make it difficult to reach the level of maturity required in criminal proceedings".

Also rejected is the Royal Commission's imputability recommendation which proposed that a diagnosis of paedophilia be not relevant to or related to the prosecution or penalty. The Holy See's diminished responsibility argument seems driven by the idea that paedophilia is a 'sickness' that uncontrollably drives the offending cleric to groom and abuse his young victim(s).

The Holy See also refuses to accept that diocesan and religious priests, who have

been civilly convicted, or have been subject to a substantiated allegation, should be permanently removed from religious office, on the grounds that it would be a direct questioning of the need for moral certainty in a canonical trial, and that the Church "cannot be indifferent to the sinner's conversion, since it has as a fundamental goal the salvation of souls".

The recommendation to create local tribunals for canonical trials is still 'under examination' by the Holy See, but it is claimed that different conditions in countries across the world make this very difficult.

It also refuses to accept that documents be archived for 45 years, even though the clear evidence from across the world is that victims, on average, take about three decades to disclose their sexual abuse by clerics.

While the Holy See cites Canon 489 – which states that document destruction must occur after ten years except for a very brief summary – there is no evidence that such brief summaries were given by diocesan offices to the Australian Royal Commission.

Mandatory celibacy (Rec. 16.18)

The Holy See firmly rejects the recommendation to introduce voluntary celibacy for Latin-rite clergy. This is despite the fact that there are married priests in the Eastern Catholic Churches, and that married Protestant clergy who convert to the Catholic Church can be ordained as Catholic priests and remain married. It defends mandatory celibacy on the grounds that its origins are based on the life choice of Jesus himself.

It also refers to the right to religious freedom to allow this practice even though the State could rightfully not grant the present exemption under the Equal Opportunity Act. The right to religious freedom is a relative, not an absolute, freedom.

It also claims that there is no evidence of a direct link between celibacy and child abuse, pointing out that child sexual abuse exists across all sectors and all types of society. While this is true, it is not on the scale found by the Royal Commission: namely, one in thirteen diocesan priests and one in eighteen religious order priests were found to have sexually abused a child under eighteen between 1950 and 2012. It should be noted that since the departure of celibate religious brothers from their teaching roles in Australian Catholic schools, there have been virtually nil convictions of male lay teachers for child

sexual abuse, though several have been charged with viewing child pornography. Catholic schools in Australia are now extremely safe places for children. Also to be noted is that the Holy See does not accept the evidence that there have been virtually no child sexual abuse cases amongst married priests in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The Confessional Seal (Rec.16.26)

While it was predictable that the Holy See would maintain its ultra-hard line on the total maintenance of the confessional 'seal', which it holds to be among the "most sacred treasures of the Church's life", surprisingly it makes no reference to the status of a child disclosing his or her abuse in the confessional setting. This was a significant issue of disagreement among the five Australian archbishops giving evidence before the Royal Commissioners at the February 2017 public hearing. While it refers to the recent document issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary on the inviolability of the seal, it does not address the central and ever contemporary theological question: how can the obligation of the seal be reconciled with the precept of charity, which mandates that we should shield our neighbour against physical and spiritual injury to the best of our ability?

Conclusion

Since the Holy See's observations make no comment, positive or otherwise, on the breadth or depth of the Royal Commission's analysis and conclusions, it has to be asked, therefore, whether there is any Australian bishop who has concerns with any of the Holy See's 'observations'? And if there is such a bishop, will he have the courage and leadership quality to speak publicly about his concern? Or are all the bishops simply engaging in a straight-bat play in the hope and expectation that, given time, the fallout from this Royal Commission will gradually fade away, and then, as a group, they can get back to 'business as usual'.

That the Holy See still doesn't get it, is sad. But that the Catholic bishops of Australia don't get it is inexcusable. ☹️

**NCP exists for you
and because of you!**

Clericalism and the hands of the priest

REX HACKETT

Rex Hackett, retired priest, Yamba, NSW, discusses clericalism and its origins.

I was celebrating Mass recently in my unit as I am now retired from parish responsibilities. While praying the Eucharistic Prayer, I noticed the words on one of the ordination cards there from my ordination in July 1966: the beautiful hands of a priest.

Some of the words of this card include the idea that each day at the altar we behold the hands of the priest holding the King on his throne. Nothing is equal to them, their dignity stands all alone.

Then referring to the then 'Confession', the person receiving absolution is misled by the words of this card saying that it is the hands of the priest that will absolve us.

Then again those praying the prayer are encouraged to pray that God will keep them all holy for the Host which their fingers caress.

Then the idea that at the hour of death our courage will be more when we see raised over us the 'beautiful hands of a priest'.

It occurred to me that my hands are no more beautiful than the beautiful hands of those men who used to collect the black 'dunny can', with no gloves, from our next-door neighbour's house when I was a kid in the 40's. Unlike us, the next-door neighbours didn't have the sewer connected.

I have never forgotten that sight of those men with the contents of the can often spilling over their hands and their shoulders while carrying the cans on their shoulders. Sorry for the vivid description. What makes my hands as an ordained priest more beautiful than those of the 'dunny man'?

My contribution to this question has been growing for some time but especially during the time of COVID-19 never experienced before by any of us living today.

What would you think if I said that I believe that our past tradition of the consecration of the bread and wine was that it was 'Father' who changed the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ by repeating the words of Jesus at the Last Supper?

Could I quote the words of Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children 1: To show our thanks to you, God our Father,



we bring this bread and wine. Send down your Holy Spirit to make them into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, the Son you love so much.

Who changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? Father? No – the Holy Spirit. In those days only Father could touch the Host or even the Chalice.

Why are my hands as priest more beautiful than those of the 'dunny man'?

Do you think that prayers and practices like those referred to above may have led to, or contributed to, 'putting Father on a pedestal'? This is the very basis of clericalism which is what I felt the good Catholics and many others did to me in the towns in which I was priest after 1966.

During these days of finding our way through COVID-19 and the lockdown, when bishops and priests are trying to bring the Mass to the people, sometimes using streaming the Mass has meant we actually returned to the pre Vatican II Mass when Father did his thing and we watched without any community participation. I then recalled the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20 – where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Could an alternative to the streamed Mass be that the baptised, sharing as priest, prophet and king through Baptism, gather in their own homes around bread and wine and pray the liturgy, including the Eucharistic Prayer, and share the bread and wine? Just exclude the greetings and the other parts said by the priest during the Mass as I do when celebrating Mass in my unit without a congregation.

Jesus is already present. Let the theologians debate the real presence. Can you imagine the fear that such a suggestion would cause?

What do the words of consecration which have been handed down to us tell us? He took bread and gave you thanks; then when he took the Chalice. He gave you thanks. Why was he giving thanks to The Father?

I suggest that Jesus gave thanks, as is often recorded in the Gospels before His miracles, because he had such faith and trust in the Father. In his humanness he had no more power than we have to work miracles.

He knew, without any shadow of doubt, that the Father, of whom he was the only Son who was also fully human, would be faithful to his trust and faith and would not let him down and would not let him make a fool of himself.

Can you imagine if the son of the widow stayed dead? No, he had to trust in his God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that what he was about to do would actually be done by God. Jesus of Nazareth knew, like us, that only God could work miracles. It was not him, Jesus, 'a man (sic) like us in all things except sin'.

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth was God who chose in humbleness to become human and to share our humanness. As human he shared in all the limitations of being human including not being able to work miracles or forgiving sins.

Could dismissing thoughts such as these as 'not what I was taught' lead to clericalism?

I would like to conclude these thoughts about clericalism by referring to a contribution by Sean Hall in La Croix International (August 11, 2020), referring to a mindset that separates the people from the clergy: The fact is, of course, that in Lumen Gentium, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council very carefully and deliberately placed the chapter on The People of God – which includes all the baptised – before moving on in subsequent chapters to deal separately with the clergy, laity and religious.

Hall continues: the People of God clearly consists in all those who are Baptised, not just one section of them.

I was ordained in 1966 and, as did others, we used to refer to the people as a very separate group. Clericalism runs deep indeed. In those past days this understanding expressed a certain attitude of clericalism.

These thoughts have emerged from years of silence and solitude living as priest retired from parish responsibilities since 2012.

Can Catholicism be a place of inclusion and mercy?

ERIC HORNE

Eric Horne is 90 years of age and a parishioner at St Leonard's Parish, Glen Waverley, Victoria. He reflects on becoming a Catholic as an adult and where the Church is going at this time.



Creator of all things, true source of light and wisdom, lofty origin of all being. Graciously let a ray of your brilliance penetrate into the darkness of my understanding and take me from the double darkness in which I have been born. An obscurity of both sin and ignorance (St. Thomas Aquinas, OP).

It is with some trepidation that at my ninety years of age and my fifty ninth year since I entered the Catholic Church that I dare as a novice to offer my view of our church and its contemporary situation. A view which must be coloured by my first seventeen years as a member of the Plymouth Brethren—a sect which has been described as a purely spiritual fellowship of true believers and is quite distinct from the empirical ecclesiastical bodies known as churches.

On Sunday in the 1930s our family in the morning went to the breaking of the bread. In the afternoon it was Sunday School until the teens then Bible Class. In the evenings we attended the preaching of The Gospel. Some Sundays in summer after the Gospel we would take a portable organ and speakers stand into one of the narrow streets nearby to give our testimony, people often listened from their front doors or upper windows. A chorus which we often sang was 'Jesus died for all the people, all the people in the world, red and yellow black and white, all are precious

in his sight'. A concept indelibly printed in my mind in my life as a policeman, soldier and tutor of anthropology and history.

At seventeen years of age I left the Plymouth Brethren to attend the Chapel of the Open Book in the City of London on Sunday mornings with a friend. Afterwards, both of us being members of the St Johns Ambulance Brigade we attended at a medical centre for street people under the Charing Cross railway station.

In the evening we went to an Anglican service. In 1948, although almost a conscientious objector, I began two years army service in Germany which was a life changing experience and became a non-denominational christian until I entered the Catholic Church in 1961. Marrying a Catholic woman was an incentive as were a number of catholic friends at my work, army reserve and priests that I had met.

For most of my fifty nine years I was your average parishioner regularly attending Sunday morning mass, social events, work, army reserve and the occasional holiday. I knew nothing of Church history or its contemporary affairs but like most people mildly interested in the changes of Vatican II. But as evidence of a growing list of priests charged with sexual crimes against children and the exposure of considerable efforts by cardinals and bishops to protect the offenders from police investigation,

concerned members of the laity including myself began to take a keen interest.

I remembered some years past on a country police patrol I had stopped a car in a country lane driven by a 14 year old boy with a youngish priest in the passenger seat giving him a driving lesson, he said. My respect for priests was such that I would never have doubted that explanation. A friendly word of caution sufficed. As the scandals progressed many Catholics began to discuss and ponder on what the laity should and could do to help restore the respect long enjoyed by the church.

At St. Leonard's Church group of parishioners sent a well-reasoned request to the Australian Bishops Conference for suggested improvements to our religious life including the ordination of women. After considerable delay a telephone message was received at our parish office to the effect that the bishops were not competent to deal with the parishioners' request. Competency apparently meaning the non-approval of Vatican officials.

The parishioners' disappointment at this response, thought to be unpastoral, resulted in the forming of a parish study/discussion group. I became a member. A program of study was prepared to include Church History and Contemporary Affairs. Our studies, as well as describing glorious periods of christian history revealed years of decadence, corrupt popes, struggles for worldly power and injustice. Our studies suggested to us that our church was going through a dark time in its history.

However regardless of the bad news about the corruption, undercover disloyalty to the pope and a legacy of widespread concealment of crimes supported by the nebulous Vatican, a regular reading of *The Tablet* records an abundance of good news stories and achievements by Catholic Christians. For me the reportage in the journal gives me optimism for the future of our church. It also strengthens my opinion that the strength of the church lies with the priests and the laity, the power of the church lies with the Vatican.

I hope that, in Australia, at least some of that power will devolve to the laity. As a guide to our studies we consulted the apostolic exhortations of Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*).

Another reference for me was Paul Johnson's book, *The Quest for God*.

Johnson, a Catholic historian, wrote: This is how I have come to see the Church as a fallible institution.....but in some ways radiates the divine. I watch it with a wary and critical eye. This view I think reflected the views of our study group. Of interest to me was his observation that I do not believe that there is no salvation outside the church.

This doctrine makes no sense at all. As a non-denominational Christian attending many differing Christian services as a relieving constable in Victorian towns, I never failed to find Christ's message present. This and my later anthropological studies tell me that God has spoken to all the people of his creation in differing ways including The Plymouth Brethren, Eastern Religions and those who are close in

affection, such as the people of Islamic faith.

Does the Australian Church have a future? Peta Credlin, a politically informed astute columnist thinks not. In the Sun Herald she wrote that only about ten per cent of Catholics now attend Mass on Sundays. Despite the New Testament being the foundational document of Western culture more than seventy per cent of Australian students have never read the Bible.

A few years back, I asked a bishop to describe Australian Catholics in one word. With little hesitation he said, indifferentism. My own choice of a word was complacency.

Paul Collins (former priest) in his book *Believers* is optimistic that Catholicism will survive, with less numbers certainly. To achieve this the church will need

genuine local leadership. Church failure, he asserts, lies squarely within its own structure and with its own leadership.

The St. Leonards parishioners' message to the Australian Bishops Conference made a similar assertion. My view is that necessary decisions for the propagation of our faith need to be made by our own elected bishops not Roman religious bureaucrats who are unfamiliar with our culture. The devolution of power from Rome and the ordination of women, the other half of God's human creation, are imperatives. As Chris Geraghty says in *The Forgotten Feminist* (p22), Jesus never founded a church. He was interested in promoting a kingdom, a world of inclusion and equality, of freedom, of love and mercy. ☪



Don't create more clericalised laity

JOHN SCANLON

John Scanlon considers the challenges facing the clericalised church which affects both clergy and laity after the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutionalised Responses to Sexual Abuse and *The Light from the Southern Cross*.



As Pope Francis has pointed out on several occasions, the psychological disease called clericalism is an ever-present danger to the ordained ministry of the Church, and many clergy succumb to it if their formation has not properly protected them from it. Non-clericalised clergy do of course exist, and I hope and trust that they are particularly to be found among the readership of *The Swag*. The lay proportion of the People of God, by and large, does not suffer the inherent weakness for clericalism in the Church context that afflicts the ordained.

However, clericalised laity also exist, and they can cause problems at least as devastating as any caused by clericalised clergy.

Areas of lay clericalism

The worst cases of clericalism among laity have been people in positions of civil power who have abused their position by covering up the crimes of sexually abusive clergy and religious.

It is well known that a number of police officers in Australia obstructed investigation of complaints made to them by abuse victims.

Even if their motivation was to protect the institutional Church from harm or scandal, their actions were at least as criminal and immoral as those of the abusers themselves. At a lesser but still serious level of corrupt behaviour, senior officials of Church charities have covered up thefts from clients or the institution itself committed by staff members, in order to protect the reputation of the Church. The damage caused by clericalised laity can be serious even when it is not actively criminal; for example, think of parents who have been so committed to 'worship' of the priestly state that they refused to listen to their abused children and punished them instead.

Another aspect of lay clericalism is seen when lay people support or collaborate with clericalised power structures in order to obtain professional advancement or financial gain.

This can be a serious area of temptation for lay people who are employed in Church institutions and who become financially dependent on their employment being maintained.

This particular problem is probably less evident in Church-related bodies that deliver professional services to the wider world, such as hospitals and schools. It is more likely to be found in smaller and more inward-looking groups such as diocesan Chancery offices, in which lay employee managers and staff might jockey for power and rewards that flow from clergy superiors.

I am not suggesting that every lay employee of Church offices becomes an exponent of clericalism. The lay membership of the Truth, Justice and Healing Commission (TJHC) and its staff would have been the most thoroughly inoculated against clericalism of all the people in Australia, as they steered the Church through the nightmare of the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission. For years they battled to overcome the dangers posed to the Church by past and continuing clericalist behaviour, particularly among the hierarchy past and present.

They provided a marvellous example of laity speaking truth to clerical power.

Royal Commission findings and the Church response

The report of the Royal Commission included recommendations to the Catholic Church of a number of actions that might reduce the chances of a repeat of the crimes

Continued page 26

FEATURES

revealed by the Commission. These actions mainly had to do with greater transparency, greater personal accountability and changes to the governance of dioceses and parishes to increase the role of lay people in governance. As the TJHC had been wound up at the end of the Royal Commission, the bishops and religious order heads set up an Implementation Advisory Group to oversee the implementation of changes recommended by the Royal Commission and accepted by the Church authorities. This group in turn set up a Governance Review Project Team that produced the report entitled *The Light from the Southern Cross*, which was released in its final form last August.

This report makes many recommendations for an increased lay role in almost every church activity. Some of these call for a more complete implementation of consultative bodies with some lay membership that are already defined by canon law, such as diocesan and parish pastoral councils and finance councils.

Some others encourage the acceleration of lay appointments to senior positions in decision-making bodies and agencies (e.g. diocesan chanceries) and as judges in ecclesiastical marriage and penal cases, all of which have been habitually but not necessarily occupied by clergy. Finally there are recommendations that would very largely break new ground, such as the two following:

18. That women take a critical role in relation to the selection and formation of seminarians and participate in the evaluation team deciding suitability for ordination.

19. That lay persons with appropriate expertise be involved in decisions regarding the placement of priests in parishes.

These involvements could provide a route by which a lay veto would prevent the acceptance of wildly unsuitable seminary candidates and the continued placement

of priests with notorious problems, both of which have caused severe difficulties in a number of dioceses.

Of the positions that would be occupied by lay people for the first time as a result of these recommended reforms, I would see those that involve membership of advisory councils and teams as being part time activities that members would carry out on a volunteer basis, or at least with no payment other than refund of reasonable expenses. On the other hand, full time positions in chanceries, church courts and the like in which lay people are essentially competing with or replacing clergy will require particular professional qualifications and experience, and will attract a salary comparable with that of similar positions in the lay world.

How to avoid more clericalised laity

The key issue for lay people to keep in mind, as they begin to take up these advisory or managerial responsibilities currently exercised by clergy, is this; always remember that the main reason you are doing this job is because some clergy have made a mess of it in the past.

It may be that the mess came about because this job was one of far too many that had been lumped onto overworked and undertrained clergy, or it may be because it was being done by somebody blinded by their clericalised formation. In any case, lay people should approach these jobs with the consciousness that their lay, non-clerical life experience and their independence are their most important qualifications. Hence they should approach their new responsibilities in the way they would do similar jobs in the non-clerical world, bringing to bear their common sense and their experience of making judgments in real life situations.

The main trap to avoid is getting caught up in clerical factions and power struggles, which breed and demand a degree of

groupthink that is the enemy of good decision making.

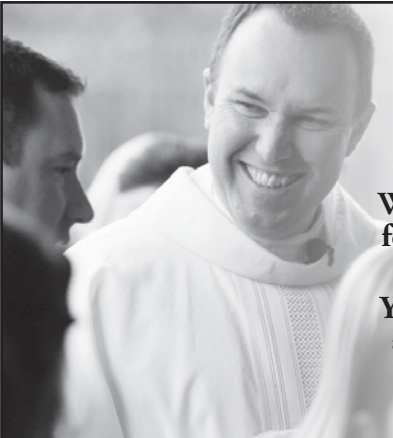
A further recommendation in *The Light from the Southern Cross* causes me a different but related worry. This is the recommendation to set up a new national centre for Catholic leadership and governance. The report suggests the centre could be situated within existing tertiary institutions, and would identify programmes currently available and gaps to be filled.

It would support delivery of existing programmes as well as developing and delivering targeted courses where required.

I would have thought there are already sufficient institutions available for those who want to undertake formal study to increase their knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith, spirituality, history and law. Likewise, there is no shortage of institutions that teach the secular skills that supplement life experience in the development of leadership in the fields of management and administration. I question the need for a new leadership and governance education body that has a specifically Catholic label, and the costs and extra job creation it would incur.

Conclusion

The major expansion of lay roles in church governance, recommended by both the Royal Commission and *The Light from the Southern Cross*, is not about more jobs for the girls and boys. I believe the most important form of increased lay participation is membership on a volunteer basis of advisory and consultative bodies. Bishops with an atom of common sense will come to value the insights of lay members of these bodies, and over time will realise that the involvement of independent-minded lay people enriches the quality of church governance. If the bishops do not accept this, God knows how the Church will be saved; clericalised hierarchs certainly do not. ☩




NCP Memberships 2021

2021 Membership Renewals will be set out during the third week of January.

We recognise that 2020 has been a tough financial year for all Australians and the continued generosity of our members does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

Your prompt renewal (by 17 March) will ensure we are able to continue to meet our financial commitments.

Thankyou one and all!



Catholic ethics and the problem of an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine

KEVIN MCGOVERN

Kevin McGovern, a Melbourne Catholic priest, is a former Director of the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics in Melbourne, Australia. He is an adjunct lecturer at both Australian Catholic University and Catholic Theological College within the University of Divinity. This article originally appeared on the ABC Religion & Ethics website on August 25, 2020. Website: <https://tinyurl.com/y3r2pfpf>



Developing ethically uncompromised cell lines and vaccines is important; in the crisis of this pandemic, developing and using an effective vaccine so as to save lives is even more important.

If a COVID-19 vaccine is developed using a cell line derived from an aborted foetus, the Catholic Church would surely permit the use of this vaccine, and Catholics should not hesitate to use it.

I write this article in part as a response to a briefing paper written by Dr Helen Watt, a senior research fellow with the Anscombe Bioethics Centre in Oxford. This paper was cited by an article from the US Catholic News Service, which has subsequently appeared in a number of publications – including the UK-based Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, *The Boston Pilot*, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia's *CatholicPhilly*. The paper admits that there is “no absolute duty” to boycott a COVID-19 vaccine developed using a cell line derived from an aborted foetus. However, Dr Watt argues that “some will feel, whether rightly or wrongly, called to a boycott [of such a vaccine] even if no alternative vaccine is available to them.” This latter comment merits scrutiny.

The Vatican has issued a number of documents to guide Catholics in their response to ethically compromised vaccines. In 2005, the Pontifical Academy for Life issued *Moral reflections on vaccines prepared from cells derived from aborted human foetuses*. The issue is also considered in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 2008 *Instruction Dignitas Personae* on certain bioethical questions. The Pontifical Academy for Life dealt with this issue again in its 2017 *Note on Italian Vaccine Issue*. All these documents apply a Catholic principle called the principle of cooperation to this particular issue.

The Catholic Church does not dismiss the problem of ethically compromised vaccines. To the contrary, it's clear and consistent position includes three important points:

The ethical question and conscience

When a choice exists between an ethically compromised vaccine and another vaccine which is not ethically compromised, we have a grave responsibility (all other things being equal) to use the latter vaccine.

When only ethically compromised vaccines are available, we should make known our

moral objection to these vaccines, and lobby governments and healthcare systems to prepare and make available vaccines which are not ethically compromised.

Until ethically uncompromised vaccines are developed, we can and should use ethically compromised vaccines so as to prevent serious health risks both for ourselves and for everyone.

The Pontifical Academy for Life stated this third point very clearly in 2017. It said that: “we believe all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience ... the moral responsibility to vaccinate is reiterated in order to avoid serious health risks for children and the general population.”

The 2005 document contained a remarkable footnote. It noted that rubella can cause: grave congenital malformations in the foetus when a pregnant woman enters into contact, even if it is brief, with children who have not been immunised and are carriers of the virus. In this case, the parents who did not accept the vaccination of their children become responsible for the malformations in question, and for the subsequent abortion of foetuses, when they are discovered to be malformed.

Parents in this situation are, of course, only indirectly responsible for these abortions. However, someone who refused an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine could catch the virus, infect others, and perhaps be much more directly responsible for their deaths. If only an ethically compromised vaccine is available, the truly pro-life decision is to receive the vaccine so as to save lives.

Why did Dr Watt write that “some will feel, whether rightly or wrongly, called to a boycott [of an ethically compromised vaccine] even if no alternative vaccine is available to them”? I suspect that her phrase “whether rightly or wrongly” betrays an awareness that Catholic moral theology would assess vaccine refusal in these circumstances as an objectively wrong choice from an overly rigorous conscience. I wonder whether Dr Watt raised this possibility in order to pressure for the development of ethically uncompromised cell lines and vaccines. Develop ethically uncompromised vaccines, I think she is saying, or you will have all these problems.

Continued page 28

I am not sure that I agree with this strategy. The development of ethically uncompromised cell lines and vaccines is surely important. However, I am not convinced that we should pressure for this by in effect encouraging what would be a seriously wrong and harmful choice.

In this pandemic, could Catholic researchers or a Catholic research institution use ethically compromised cell lines for development of a COVID-19 vaccine? There may indeed be proportional reasons for doing so. Some “compromised” vaccines are well-characterised, and some researchers know them well. In this crisis, they may reasonably decide that they do not have either the time or the financial resources to develop and adequately characterise ethically uncompromised cell lines. They may also belong to an international consortium in which they have little influence on the cell line used for vaccine development. They should not forget about the need to develop uncompromised cell lines, but they may reasonably not seek to do so during this time of crisis.

If they do use ethically compromised cell lines, they should recognise the ethical problems with them, and also state their proportional reason for using them during the pandemic. As the Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care Services in Australia states, we minimise the risk of scandal by “explaining clearly ... the reasons for one’s cooperation” — in this case, the remote connection to an historical abortion — “and why the ... cooperation is permissible according to Catholic principles.”

Developing ethically uncompromised cell lines and vaccines is important. In the crisis of this pandemic, developing and using an effective vaccine so as to save lives is even more important.

Responding to the AstraZeneca vaccine

Now Australia’s attention has focussed on a potential COVID-19 vaccine being developed by AstraZeneca in partnership with a team at Oxford University. Called ChAdOx1, this non-replicating viral vector vaccine is currently undergoing a 30,000-person Phase III trial in the United States. What is more, the Australian federal government has signed a letter of intent with AstraZeneca. If this vaccine is proved to be safe and effective, this letter of intent could lead to 25 million doses of this vaccine being produced in Australia.

ChAdOx1 may be an ethically compromised vaccine. It is grown in a cell line called HEK293, which is widely believed to have been developed from cells from a human foetus which was electively aborted in 1973. However, even this is not certain. Professor Frank Graham who developed this cell line has said that, to the best of his knowledge, the origin of these cells is unclear, for they could have come either from an elective abortion or a spontaneous miscarriage.

It should be stressed that the cells which are being used now to grow this vaccine are cells which are descended from the cells originally sourced from the foetus. Thus, while their lineage can be traced back to the foetus, the cells in use today are not the cells from the foetus. Further, the vaccine itself does not contain cells or DNA pieces which are recognisably human. The cells are killed when the virus grows in them, and the process of vaccine purification removes cell debris as well as any growth reagents.

If ChAdOx1 is ethically compromised, what should be done by religious leaders and other people like myself who are concerned about this?

First of all, we should make known our moral objection to ethically compromised vaccines, and lobby governments, researchers, and healthcare systems to prepare and make available vaccines which

are not ethically compromised. At the time of writing, the World Health Organisation has identified 169 candidate vaccines, 30 of which are already undergoing clinical trials. Could the Australian government sign a letter of intent with another research team, so an ethically uncompromised vaccine could also be produced in Australia?

Second, religious leaders and people like myself also have an educative role to play — that is, a role in forming consciences about this issue. Part of this role is educating about the existence of, and problems with, ethically compromised vaccines.

Another part of this role is helping people to decide what to do if only an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine is available. Using this vaccine would involve what Catholic ethics calls very remote mediate material cooperation with the original elective abortion. Our educative role helps people to see that this very remote cooperation does not involve condoning abortion, and also does not potentially encourage further abortions. Our educative role also involves helping people to recognise the possibly very serious consequences of not being vaccinated against COVID-19. For if we are not vaccinated, we could catch the virus, infect others, and possibly cause their deaths. All up, our educative role helps people to see that if only an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine exists, the only truly pro-life decision is to receive the vaccine so as to save lives.

Finally, there is one thing which religious leaders and people like myself must not do. If only an ethically compromised COVID-19 vaccine exists, we must not in any way encourage or support people to refuse to be vaccinated. On this matter, I note that on social media, Archbishop Anthony Fisher, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, recently stated, “I have not, nor would I, call for Catholics to boycott the vaccine if it became available.” ☞



The Swag Autumn Edition

Closing date for letters and articles is Monday, 1 February 2021.

Please email submissions for consideration

to: editor@theswag.org.au

Normal Articles: 700 words | Major Features: 1,400 words.



Augustine: a letter to a saint!

JOHN RYAN

John Ryan, retired priest, writes a letter to Augustine to critique the impact of his thinking for today. Could the Plenary Council offer a space for reassessing the influence of Augustine on our thinking and embracing something more existential and relevant to our time?

Dear Augustine,
I have come to you from my earliest years seeing you as a smart thinker who tasted the depths of what is involved in being human and male, trying to understand what puzzled you. You had your human reason, a strong philosophical intuition and your Bible as your source. You appear to have been especially concerned with the source of evil, right and wrong and what is involved in living a good life. You seem to have had more than a universal concern with what we know as our sexuality and you raised more and more questions and sought answers.

Your questions are also our questions today and we have generated more. As the years have envolved your answers have needed some attention. From time to time smart people like yourself have questioned your conclusions but such is your privileged position as a Saint and Doctor that your agreed conclusions have continued to hold sway and what you taught has been, more or less, set in stone by the teaching magisterium. Currently our Pope has shot a few salvos over your bow recently by his document *Amoris Letitia* where Pope Francis enlarges on the nature of conscience in favour of reason. The way traditionists have appeared to fight to stick to your answers is indicative of how much you have taken over our lives. Sin is not found in the actions as such, as in its consequences or results.

As a student of your life and works I'm interested to trace the way you proceeded to evolve your position; what sent you on your journey? You obviously had a special attachment to your mother, and you would have been increasingly gobsmacked by thinkers from the recently discovered science of psychiatry. The discovery of the oedipal complex by Freud and the developments of Carl Jung and others would have inspired your imagination.

I cherished your Confessions, especially Book 10 where you spoke of your 'quasi' mystical, shared experience with your mother, Monica, prior to her death. I dared to use 'quasi' as a prefix in this sentence in deference to my own thesis on Richard Rollo, Mystic.

Whatever about that your sexual history was clearly evident and of particular interest/concern to you. Through our eyes you would seem to have been sexually active at puberty and even promiscuous. Presumably shame and guilt would have inspired your inquiring mind to question issues around wrong and right, conscience, nature and grace, desire in general and sexual desire and, of course, sin and its consequences.

I would think that all forms of present theological inquiry today would have been of concern for you. You came up with answers and your answers have been inherited by our Western Church. Eventually you came to equate sin with sex and our Church has taken up your assessment. Those of our church members who locked themselves into a static, classical worldview governed by essences, stayed with what you gave us. Incredible as it is, it was not enough.

So much has evolved through philosophical insights, through existentially based wisdom. To see sin as individual acts or actions as you did as objectively wrong when all that is created by the Creator is good, should have been of concern to you. Insights such as these lead us to renew moral theology. For 50 years now we have struggled to renew this moral consciousness; the powers that enslave us are evident everywhere, no clearer than in the story of *Humanae Vitae*.

I recently saw a submission to the Plenary Council which is further evidence of how morality has imprisoned us. It highlights some anomalies, one of which is our Church's treatment in the way we distinguish social sin as against the sins that came to us via the myths of the Garden of Eden and the questionable philosophy of natural law theory.

In *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying, The Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue, Chapter 16, Bringing the Church into the 21st Century*, reports on submissions received that propose a radical re-thinking of our concept of sin. The propositions are generally sound if in need of refinement. They are a necessary read.

Of course, there is much that would have to be discussed, disputed and refined in



such submissions. The mention of Original Sin reminds us of the theological knots that have been created through your teaching here, one if not the most difficult of all teachings. One commentator noted: I'm sure the bishops will consider this outside the scope of the plenary council, and it will lead nowhere. Nevertheless, I think it is critical to the effectiveness of the churches mission in this day and age. Please God his predictions will be wrong!

Clearly so many issues need attention and energy and we have the scholars to do that but the power to fight the renewal pins us into fear and subjection.

Augustine, in your thinking about sin you took up the idea of Original Sin and expounded this ad nauseum. Your stance sent out shoots that influenced such teachings as Redemption, Salvation, concupiscence, and the fact of universal sinfulness. The position so skewed the kerygma that much of our doctrine is polluted, so much so that attempts to renew the face of our church have become unworkable. Much has become institutionalised and we have become a people of morality and ideology rather than a people of love and freedom!

When the idea of a Plenary Council was mooted my personal fear was there was not enough debate and fight, because of many seeds already sown, and the neurotic fear of allowing a new theology to bloom in our days.

There's no doubt that you tackled the right questions of sin, concupiscence, sex, desire etc. You sought answers in the Bible along with your God-given, well-enhanced reason and your unique experience. You were not a Greek speaker and of course your exegetical skills were naive compared with contemporary scriptural scholarship. You were locked into a literal understanding

Continued page 30

FEATURES

where mystical understanding was required.

When it comes to your reasoning or your philosophical view it was tainted by your Manichean upbringing and you did not have the advantage of learning from the post scholastic and renaissance thinkers and their insights from the modern psychological disciplines. As I have already alluded your worldview was what we call classic and unexplored by the insights of existentialism.

It is worthy of note again that when you launched into areas of rational or systematic theology you left a legacy of seemingly difficult problems, Original Sin, unnatural and natural law and morality which blossomed to many more related problems.

There were early attempts to solve problems such as good and evil using Original Sin theory. However, Augustine, you expanded earlier views and expanded them to extremes. As your ideas became locked into dogmas as happened with original sin, we have the most difficult religious theological teaching to understand for the modern

mind and the most difficult to square with Darwinian evolution.

As an appendix may I share some words from a Bishop of Milan, a scholar, a pastor, a shepherd and teacher in the mould of your mentor, Ambrose. Cardinal Carlo Martini is a saint for our time.

James Martin sj in America: The Jesuit Review (August 2012) said: In a 2008 book-length interview titled 'Night time Conversations in Jerusalem,' Cardinal Martini said Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical 'Humanae Vitae' (Of Human Life), which taught that artificial birth control was morally wrong, led many Catholics to distance themselves from the church and from listening to and being challenged by the Catholic vision of human sexuality.

While not specifically addressing the morality of contraception, the cardinal said the church needed to take a more pastoral approach to questions of sexuality. 'The church should always treat questions of sexuality and the family in such a way that a leading and decisive role is up to the

responsibility of the person who loves', he said.

During a special Synod of Bishops for Europe in 1999, he made waves when he proposed a new churchwide council or assembly to unravel 'doctrinal and disciplinary knots' such as the shortage of priests, the role of women, the role of laity and the discipline of marriage. His carefully worded remarks reflected his belief that the church would benefit from a wider exercise of collegiality, or the shared responsibility of bishops for the governance of the church. The idea of a new council was not taken up formally by the synod.

In a November 2004 speech at Rome's Gregorian University, he told Catholics they could not understand their faith unless they understood the Jewish faith practiced by Jesus and his disciples.

With thanks and praying along with you:
O come Lord on us as restless until we rest in you.

With thanks, John. ☪

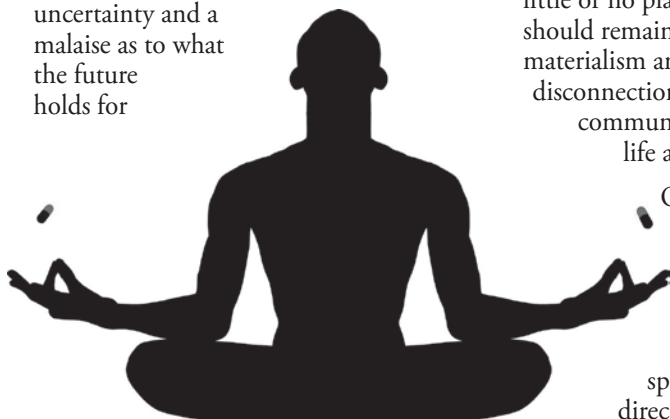


Care of the soul – search for the sacred in a time of Coronavirus 2020

GERARD SPILLANE

Gerard Spillane is a retired priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

At the present time many people are struggling to locate the sacred in their lives for a host of reasons, perhaps none more so than the world being confronted with a serious and deadly pandemic. Thomas Moore, a spiritual writer and therapist wrote in 1992 that the great malady of the 20th. Century was 'loss of soul'. If we add to that, that the malady of the 21st Century is the superficiality of modern life, we may find some answers for the dysfunctions that confront people today. The impact of the present pandemic has led to confusion, uncertainty and a malaise as to what the future holds for



communities. Society has been forced to adapt to a different way of life: to being confined and working from home, restricted travel arrangements, shopping, contact with family and friends, and limited access to churches and religious practice.

What has led to this loss of soul or search for the sacred? Some social scientists suggest a lack of compelling religious explanations for the cosmos or as Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si* appreciation of God's gift of creation, that religion has little or no place in the public forum and should remain a private affair, worldly materialism and consumerism, the disconnection of people from family and community, and the frenetic pace of life and addiction to social media.

Our life-style distracts us from the sacred. Whether you agree or not with the above many people are left with the feeling that they are missing something, a spiritual centre that could lend direction and vitality to their

lives. (K Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy* p.246) For some the solution is to seek therapy because their problems relate to depression that grows out of spiritual emptiness, anxiety due to feelings of an inauthentic way of life, and the various 'isms' of the false gods of consumerism, workaholism, narcissism, nihilism, hedonism, alcoholism etc.

People often say they are spiritual but not religious which acknowledges that spirituality is very much a part of their personhood, but due to the above 'isms' many have lost touch with their soul or feel soulless. How to reconnect with their sacred core, the spiritual centre which gives them meaning and a way to provide direction and coherence in life? Some have found a solution in Mindfulness, a generic term that refers to various forms of relaxation, chilling out, wellness, and exercises in meditation such as yoga. Mindfulness refers to a psychological state of awareness of the present moment of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Such pursuits may well be helpful but they fall short of what Pargament calls the search for the sacred.

This search embraces a desire for the transcendent, of a deep personal relationship with God as expressed in

various, religious traditions. Two areas that facilitate this spiritual experience are prayer and meditation, particularly in the Christian tradition as founded in Monasticism of St. Benedict. Such spiritual practices, as well as the use of ritual, are pathways to one's deep desire for the transformative presence of a loving God.

Another writer, Gerald May, medical practitioner and therapist, captures this spirit of a deeper relationship with God when he lists the following five qualities or characteristics for a more integrated and wholesome life. They are: honesty, dignity, community, responsibility, and simplicity. As well as accentuating the individuals' desire for these qualities, they focus as well on the needs within society, particularly the central one of community.

It's worth quoting May when he puts this in a faith context. He says, 'The journey we take, if it is to be authentic, cannot be a private thing between ourselves and God; we are called not only to love God above all else, but to love our companions as our very selves. He then elaborates by noting that the power of God's grace is nowhere as brilliant nor as mystical as in communities of faith. Its power includes not just love that comes from people and through people, but love that pours forth among people, as if through the very spaces between one person and the next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power. (Addiction and Grace, pp.172/173)

Given the fears surrounding the present pandemic and the dysfunctionality of life in society, it is sobering to acknowledge such thoughts about the faith community that gathers in churches, mosques and synagogues to pray and worship a loving God. The Christian tradition is for the faith community to worship as one on the Lord's Day of the Resurrection, to give thanks to God and support one another in prayer. For Catholics, the celebration of the Eucharist is the very core of this communal journey of faith to be transformed by the grace of God, as St. Paul constantly reminds us in his Epistles. Perhaps a last word from Gerald May for those who have become disillusioned with the Sunday gathering for all sorts of reasons: One of the powers of the faith community is its capacity to provide a lasting steadiness through all the waverings of its individual members. When I cannot pray, the prayer of countless others goes on ... For some, an even greater power comes through sacramental rites of the faith community. (p.174) ☪

A story of rainforests and tall trees

JOHN DWYER

Fr John Dwyer, retired Toowoomba priest, talks about the destruction of PNG rainforests – a metaphor for the damage done to the Church of Toowoomba when Bishop Morris was removed.

When I returned from PNG, I found myself in the midst of an emerging new Australian Church, inspired by Pope Francis. He is very like Jesus Christ.

In my time in Papua New Guinea there were many things that people in Australia heard about but rarely understood their meaning.

Such was an incident that I experienced, and later, witnessed its aftermath. I was in charge of my first station (parish) called Angoram in the village that administered to the whole of the lower Sepik. Another administration centre was Ambunti; smaller than Angoram but likewise with a large airstrip on the far upper Sepik.

I was there for nine years, and took over from one of the important characters of the Wewak diocese, often a thorn in the side of some of his co-workers, and troublesome to Bishop's Arkfelds administration, including Fr. Heinamans, the business administrator and Vicar General.

After a time they pushed a coral-surfaced road through from the coast, the administration site of a fairly large town; Wewak, which included Tang Mou and later Garamut enterprises.

The town had surfaced roads, a sewerage system, a large airstrip, where Fokker friendships and like-sized planes landed. When I arrived the main station consisted of a first class large cement and timber Cathedral; two large two story male accommodation blocks; the Holy Spirit sisters Convent; a Rosary Sisters Convent; a large kitchen and a laundry; a women's lay missionary house, radio station; landing strip; timber yard; plumbing workshop; car and motorbike garage; cement works; a dairy farm; small female school; a plane hangar and workshop and an electrical workshop.

I returned with some regrets about leaving Angoram. It covered most of the needs of the diocese. Bishop Leo Arkfield had recruited many proficient workers who did outstanding work.

Later I went back to Angoram for a visit. The new man in charge, Harry Jannisen, was Dutch and was formerly in Madang



Diocese not far from the Sepik boarder. He was there for a while and built a new church while he was there.

I then also visited some of the outer villages, including one situated on the road from Angoram to the primary school on the ocean.

My story is about of one of the villages on that road with about 40 people. Before colonisation they were attacked by a village on the lower Sepik and many men were killed. I don't know if women were taken or killed.

When I met the leader of this small village for the first time, he impressed me a lot. He had a rudimentary education that came from being taught basic maths and religion in pidgin. However he had a great knowledge of his environment. He knew a lot about the animals, insects, trees, gardens, flowers, coffee growing, and producing copra from coconuts.

He told me that an Asian company had recently stripped the majority of the local rainforest for woodchips to be shipped overseas. Acres of good topsoil was washed away leaving devastation behind.

His home and the land around it was luscious rainforest, and full of wild life. I asked him to have a look at the devastation near Madang. He said he would do so.

Continued page 32

FEATURES

Let me make a comparison between the situation in that rainforest area and the Australian Church in the aftermath of Vatican II.

I have told the story of the rainforest; now I would like to write about the changing face of Australian Church. There is a lot of confusion in the church in its recent history.

Since Vatican II, I notice a growing division between right and left.

I state the obvious that that change happened only in recent years. It rose in strength and vitality with the election of Pope Francis. His appointment was a John XXIII moment.

Perhaps it is best to relate the confluence between the Catholic Church and a Rain Forest to wartime. During wartime between two opposing forces it is said one DE-FEATED the other. This means to make the other lie on his back or sit down – either dead or injured. The rainforest either died or was so badly damaged it would fail to survive. It eventually becomes desolated and trees, animals, flowers and insects are destroyed.

The church has followed this pattern in the way the people are governed; either by appearing to follow invalid traditions, or acquiesce because of threats or force. The rainforest is diminished, washed or burnt away; where flowers and fruit previously flourished. Now they are depleted, crushed, DEFEATED if you like. The rain forest

being the faithful people of God. This is a picture oft given by Christ in parables.

In this rainforest grew a great tree; tall and outstanding, seen as handsome, well flowered, looked up to and admired, always in the forefront, knew all important people and revelled in the limelight. His name was George Pell.

There is a second tree I would like to tell you about. This tree grew in the range near the city of Toowoomba. It was the tallest tree in a large area of forest and grew on the edge of that area.

This tree was surrounded by smaller trees; and a small creek flowed through the clearing with many wild flowers growing all around. It was a favourite place for people; and the local council provided toilets and a general covered area with tables and chairs in an old shed. There was a group of tables fixed to a concrete base. The people believed that this land and forest was owned by the community.

Much to their dismay it became clear it was all owned by one family. This family had fallen on hard times financially; and a decision was made that they would cut part of the forest. So they called in a group of men experienced in getting good timber from the forest.

There was a very loud and excited discussion when it was discovered they intended to cut down the tallest tree in the forest. The regulars who came frequently to

use the area enclosed the tallest tree. The picnic ground being very popular with many people.

Much disquiet was aroused when it was explained that they had signed a contract to cut a small part of the whole forest; but had included the tallest tree. This tall tree is very important as it is like George Pell in the rainforest story. It is a representation of Bishop William Morris, former Bishop of Toowoomba.

William Morris can be represented as a tall tree because it depicts what he did in his life as a faithful worker for the diocese of Toowoomba which he led so excellently for many years.

However, some of the members of his diocese, both lay and clerical, disagreed with him. This disagreement had those there in Rome believing in this misrepresentation. He was subsequently dismissed. This wonderful servant of God was dismissed after many years of faithful service. Like the tall tree in the forest, he was; DEFEATED, cut down. He had poured himself out for the Kingdom.

I could almost guarantee that he is doing so quietly all the time, such is this tall tree. William Morris, typified the kind of bishop the Church needed in this; one of its darkest hours.

You take your choice in answering this question: which of these two men followed Jesus the Christ? I have made mine. ☺



Science and religion seeking truth together

JO DE GROOT

Dr Jo de Groot, PhD (UNSW), BSW (hons), DipEd explores the emerging convergence between science and religion as science recognises the spiritual.

Guided by the encouragement of Lumen Gentium (35), as a senior catholic lay-woman I share some exciting information about current thinking in the modern world, hoping to contribute to the on-going discernment of how and where God is leading us as the Body of Christ.

There has existed a highly credible British scientific organization named The Scientific and Medical Network or SMN made up of medical academics, including psychiatrists and psychologists, who realized that based on rationalism and the positivist scientific method, their efforts for healing fell short. They realized consciousness was central and that people needed to be viewed in a wholistic manner.

Jesuit scientist, Teilhard de Chardin, offered the following remark, perhaps by way of prophecy: The time has come to realise that an interpretation of the universe – even a positivist one – remains unsatisfying unless it covers the interior of things as well as the exterior; mind as well as matter. The true physics is that which will, one day, achieve the inclusion of man[sic] in his wholeness in a coherent picture of the world. (Walach, H., Science Beyond A Materialist World View, The Scientific and Medical Network, London, 2018:8)

In over forty years of conferencing the SMN discovered there is in Science a mind-boggling truth arisen out of the hard facts of human experience, a truth they see as akin to Galileo's discovery of Earth revolving around the Sun, for the telling of which he was incarcerated. The SMN has now set up its own 'Galileo Commission' to make known far and wide that: The Scientific and Medical Network is a worldwide professional community and membership organization for open-minded, rigorous and evidence-based enquiry into themes bridging science, spirituality and consciousness. It brings



together open-minded and discerning people who are inclined to a non-materialist interpretation of the universe and who have a sympathetic interest in parapsychological and spiritual matters covered in the Galileo Commission Report. The existence of the Scientific and Medical Network is an indication that there is a significant minority among professional people who wish to take fully into account the existence of a fundamental spiritual reality and the implications of the spiritual capabilities that we all possess. (Walach-2018:60)

I want to share my joy at Science's recognition of our Soul, and the Soul of the world, i.e. God. I seem to see God working on the thinking of the world, revealing there is this all-embracing Presence. I have watched the SMN invite

Catholic speakers on Meditation alongside others. Such a discovery of truth is due principally to the increasing occurrence of Near-Death-Experiences (NDEs). The following was reported by twenty-year-old George Ritchie in 1943, just one example of our continuing existence after death: The light in the room started to grow brighter and brighter.

I stared in astonishment as the brightness increased, coming from nowhere, seeming to shine everywhere at once... It was impossibly bright: it was like a million welders' lamps all blazing at once. And right in the middle of my amazement came a prosaic thought ,..."I'm glad I don't have physical eyes at this moment," I thought. "This light would destroy the retina in a tenth of a second." No, I corrected myself, not the light. He... Then came the

stupendous certainty: You are the Son of God...He knew everything about me... Every detail of twenty years of living was there to be looked at...' (Burke, J., *Imagine Heaven: Near-Death Experiences*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015:23).

I wonder whether there is a way in which the Catholic Church can perhaps give more encouragement to the laity in their daily interaction with people who profess to be atheist and point out that significant areas of science are now starting to see the world as imbued by God's presence and people with soul. It seems God is assisting us as people of faith and lending us a hand. I wonder, too, if my brief considerations might assist in overcoming the widely held view that religion and science are opposed. ☺



Take the blinkers off – characteristics of love

KERRY CRONAN

Kerry Cronan BA BEd (Counselling) MPsych, retired priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne explores the way love is understood and the challenges presented by cross cultural and cross age realities.

Love is one of the words used in the English language which can denote for us so many experiences of life, from the deepest of physical and emotional relationships to the familiarity with which we meet acquaintances. Yet we have also culturally and unintentionally misapprehended the characteristics of love.

Advertisements in the media can tell us that instead of like we will love a food, drink, activities, or various products. Yet is that what we mean by love? Whilst it is culturally acceptable to say that we love a spouse or a child, can we confidently say that we love someone of the same sex? Imagine the frowns if we stated that we love our next-door neighbour without clarification or explanation! Of course, there are exceptions to the above in our community. Nonetheless general attitudes do exist.

We can use the word love to indicate a sexual relationship, as in making love. However, love is not made, it is experienced. Indeed, relational love still tends to imply, at least in adult relationships, some connection to sexual relationships. Thus, cultural taboos are still maintained around such experiences as expressing our non-sexual love for those of the same sex (especially for many men) or our next-door

neighbour (Love your neighbour as yourself). We find it so hard to distinguish the genital aspects of sexuality, from the emotions which live with the many dimensions of love.

Our sexuality is involved in all loving – not only with sexual intercourse or even sexual excitement. Love is usually an unspoken agreement between two or more people to enter a relationship. That is why we feel so free. We forego the many boundaries we usually put around our personal space to allow others to explore mutual experiences in trust. Such love can be found in friendships, in the accommodation between agreeable neighbours, with a child, and mutually intimate sexual relationships with life partners.

God enters a relationship of love with us through creation, both individually and universally.

Kahlil Gibran reflects on love in the book *The Prophet* (1923): Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself. Love possesses not nor would it be possessed.

Love is a multidimensional, emotional, and thought-provoking set of experiences that allows the dignified stand out experiences in human life. It is unfortunate that, at times, particularly in religious thinking,



love is seen as sacrifice. Indeed, there is sacrifice in human loving, but there also many other potential delightful experiences. Love belongs to all classes and races of humans, exists in age-appropriate dimensions, and relates to people of the same as well as the opposite sex. Love can be genitally sexual in committed relationships, but that is not necessarily the ultimate experience of love, though it is sexually a heightened pleasure of the love experience.

It should be obvious therefore that the relationship of love is closely interconnected with all our life experiences, particularly when they have the significance of agreeing to love. We cannot speak of one love relationship, e.g. marriage, friendships, without the opportunity of being aware of past and present relationships, even in deeper consciousness of which we may not be aware at the time (e.g. one or both parents). Of course, our memory of hurts

Continued page 34

in relationships as reflexive experiences can also linger in cautionary reflections on loving experiences. The paradox of love is that we belong and yet we belong only because we also have the freedom to be apart. Again, Gibran: Give your hearts but not into each other's keeping.

However, love essentially remains a mystery. We can hope to glean some of love's dimensions from social science research, but we will only truly know love in the freedom each of us experiences in the growth of the deeper feeling of our personal experiences. These experiences will tell us what no expert can sufficiently, the joy of freedom in knowing and being with the persons we can love. However, it would seem we are in crisis moving through a malaise of stereotypes and prejudices.

Two researchers in the area of loving relationships, Elaine Walster and G. William Walster, conclude in their

futuristic book *A New Look at Love* (1985): The underlying crisis of our time has to do with those problems of trust and intimacy that we discover in passionate love, and in the aftermath, if we are lucky, true companionship.

The divorce rate is but one crude indicator of our culture's total confusion. All our guideposts have been knocked down.

For better or worse, today's young adults have no confidence in the rules previously passed on to them by their parents ... they are instead eager for any clues that might offer a deepened experience and let them take one step beyond the painful clichés.

Another indicator relevant to the above is that we are living in the loneliest experience of human relationships in living history.

This is becoming prevalent in all cultures, even the former communal cultures. Our world is more rapidly changing, mobile,

specialised, media communicative, disruptive and confused with information overload and thereby creates a potential for distance from intimacy.

It would seem the time has come to take the blinkers off and to look anew at what we mean and want to experience in our loving.

Mother Theresa in *Words to Love By* (1983): You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other. The quality of our loving relationship with other human beings, as much as that can be possible for individuals, gears the fulfillment of the everlasting love with God. Both human love and divine love are mutual as mysteries. We also find a loving God through the insufficient satisfaction we find in the limitations and separateness in human loving because God is love. ☪



The wounded: a national day of sorrow

FRANK BRENNAN SJ

Frank Brennan SJ, Rector, Newman College, The University of Melbourne, offered this homily for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time and the 2020 National Day of Sorrow and Promise on October 25, 2020. Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-251020>



At the beginning of his new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis speaks of his inspiration Francis of Assisi as the 'saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy' who 'felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.'

Today is the National Day of Sorrow and Promise when we hold the victims of child sexual abuse in our church front and centre

acknowledging our sin, weeping in the name of our Church, and begging forgiveness for the wrong we have done.

We hope to sow seeds of peace walking alongside those wanting to invite us to accompany them on their journey of truth, justice and healing.

Understanding those who would not want us to accompany them on such a journey, we hold them silently in prayer.

What can any priest say on such a day, seeking to break open the word of today's gospel where Jesus makes love of God and love of neighbour inseparable, telling us that 'on these two commandments hang the whole law, and the Prophets also'?

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus constantly returns to this idea of the law and the Prophets being fulfilled in one.

During the sermon on the mount, he had said, 'So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets.' (7:12)

What can any of us who lived an ideal childhood oblivious to any abuse

happening in our church or society say or do, seeking to treat those who have suffered abuse as we would like them to treat us?

First we must listen. And even though we've now had years of revelations with commissions of inquiry and raised public awareness, there's still a lot of listening we need to do, particularly when it comes to the spiritual violence and hurt caused by a priest violating a child, when the child has nowhere to turn, thinking that parents would find even the suggestion of violation an impossible abomination.

Much has changed and for the better, hopefully reducing the prospect of future abuse.

But the pain, suffering, destruction and spiritual desolation of past abuse remains.

Recently a survivor Wendy Holder reached out to me. One of her brothers is an alumnus of Newman College. Wendy suffered the most appalling abuse by not one, but two priests - first when she was aged 12, having moved interstate at a time of great vulnerability and need for pastoral care after the death of her brother, and then when she was transitioning to university.

She is a psychologist. She is on a journey beginning 'to understand the impact of child sexual abuse by religious people on a child's spiritual development, and the

resultant damage to their adult spiritual formation’.

She found sanctuary at Mary MacKillop Place during Easter 2018 and then a couple of times at the Benedictine Abbey at Jamberoo the following year.

Thank God for such sanctuaries where religious women can provide a haven amidst the wonders of creation.

Wendy published her reflections of her visits to MacKillop Place and the Jamberoo Abbey: *Poetry of a Survivor*.

Wendy writes: ‘One of the most profound effects that some survivors of child clergy sexual abuse experience is of abandonment. It can appear that God has treated them like this, abused them and then abandoned them. Abandonment can leave deep wounds in the very psyche of how someone sees themselves.

It can lead to a distorted perception of God and the world and this distortion can become more apparent when they immerse themselves in a religious environment.

The more that we can understand their experiences the more we can be truly present to each other to facilitate healing.

If survivors and churches work together we can learn from the past and not despair of our future.

It is a time of severe testing for all of us and as such has the potential to produce great wisdom, understanding, compassion, healing and revelation.

Wendy has kindly agreed to my sharing a couple of her poems from Jamberoo.

In *Monster God* she describes the experience of the 12 year old child devastated by her older brother’s death wondering about his salvation, coming to the priest seeking pastoral care and theological enlightenment, venturing tentatively on to holy ground only to have this predator whisper his threat of eternal damnation:

*What happens to people like us
The ones who can't be forgiven*

*There's a Man who walks beside me
telling a story about who I am*

It's not true

*This ethereal Man made me
the receptacle of the
sins of the damned*

This made me weak

*He mocked and scorned
and with contempt
He handed me
a life-long penance*

*And if I dared to venture on Holy ground
that's when he whispered
His threat of eternal damnation*

*It broke my soul
I've lived with the pain
most of my life
It does not scare me anymore
Because now I know this Monster God
grew out of the sins of man*

*What can they do to me
that I haven't already done to myself
A million times over?*

*Now I can live a different life
and tell my story of love desired
And perhaps one day
I will find my soul
embedded in that pain*

Last year, Wendy was in the midst of nature at Jamberoo relishing the nuns attending to the Office of the Hours.

Contemplating a crucifix carved from Huon Pine by her late husband Joseph Steele Holder, she traces her own paschal mystery of passion, death and resurrection recalling the previous Easter in the poem *Easter 2018*:

*The pilgrimage began on a road that could
not be seen.*

*Transported back through a wasteland of
years to a child of utter devotion.
Upon her knees at the foot of the cross*

*You rose and fell under the cross of man.
The essence of humanity.*

*Mercy stopped you along the way
and through open wounds
You Poured your love.
The essence of compassion.*

*Even the sun and moon paused to mourn
your death
Such was scale of grief and lament.
The essence of sacrifice.*

*Shadowed in the fading light the vigil
keepers shook with fear.
The essence of abandonment.*

*With great tenderness
You embraced the child
and darkness became an endless day.*

*Oh blessed, blessed night:
The essence of faith.*

*A new day beginning a deeper communion.
The seasons of her heart have led her home.
I sit with Joy and weep for You*

Wendy experienced the Jamberoo Abbey as ‘a place where you can enter into the integrity of the authentic spirit of the Catholic Church’.

As well as listening attentively, as well as praying earnestly, we all need to commit



ourselves to being and to creating sanctuaries and safe havens where those survivors who wish can seek for fraternal love, simplicity and joy amongst the pain, loss, confusion and risk of further trauma through contorted processes of redress, compensation, and public accountability.

In today’s first reading from Exodus, Yahweh gives Moses a message for the people of Israel.

They are not to molest, oppress or be harsh with the stranger, the widow, or the orphan.

And ‘if you are harsh with them, they will surely cry out to me, and be sure I shall hear their cry; my anger will flare out and I shall kill you with the sword’.

Persons with authority and power in our Church have molested, oppressed and been harsh with innocent children.

Now that we know, and now that we have no excuse for failing to put in place the necessary safeguards, we must be committed to being those safe havens and sanctuaries should anyone be seeking rest, shelter and spiritual renewal.

And to those too scarred by us, too angry with us, and too alienated from us, let’s remain humble, attentive and respectful of all they carry for our sins as a Church so long oblivious to the cry of the abused child.

Let’s thank those like Wendy Holder at Vespers at the Abbey:

Within the silence of this night all now wait patiently for the dawn. ☪

Was Jesus a wimp?

REX HACKETT

Rex Hackett, Lismore priest, reflects on the sufferings of the crucifixion of Christ in a meditation time he experienced on a retreat.



So, Father most holy, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son, whom you led through suffering and death on the Cross to the glory of the resurrection and a place at your right hand.

Many years ago I was in the middle of an eight day directed retreat somewhere in Queensland and I was having a quiet time listening in the silence.

My mind wandered to the suffering and death of Jesus and I wondered at what had been handed down to me about the suffering and death of the only Son, Jesus.

How could a Father of love demand that Jesus suffer a violent agony and death in order to appease Him for the sin of the human family, first in Adam and then in all who shared in the humanness of the family?

The meditation which followed these thoughts lead to clarity – I thought that Jesus was a wimp.

After all he only lived 33 years and then he had a last supper with his disciples, went to the garden where he suffered agony, was arrested and all his friends deserted him.

Then off to the authorities where he was questioned and taunted. Was flogged, crowned with thorns and then the next day was rejected by the people in favour of Barabas the murderer. The governor,

Pontius Pilate, gave into the crowd, washed his hands of Jesus and handed him over to be crucified. Then as he was carrying his cross, Simon of Cyrene even helped him to carry that.

Then he was nailed to a cross, had a few things to say that were important, especially that he asked Mary to be looked after by John because he was an only child, and for her to become our mother.

He promised a thief that he would that day be with him in paradise. Then it was all over. He died.

The meditation continued and it was as if Jesus was saying, so you think that I'm a wimp. To which I answered, yes, I certainly do. After all you only had to put up with the suffering from after supper on Thursday evening until the next day, not even 24 hours and you were dead.

Seems to me you got off easy compared with all the suffering that we see in our world, both before you came and then over 2000 years since. People suffer for years.

Then the meditation continued and led to clarity where it was as if Jesus was saying, so you think I'm a wimp because I only had a few hours of suffering?

Yes, I do.

Well my disciple Rex, I'll tell you something.

God my father never demanded a violent death for me in order to appease him.

However, in the garden my Father said to me, if you are to suffer a violent death at the hands of jealous men who led other men and women to back them up, then I ask you to take onto yourself all the suffering, pain, sin and evil that all of creation have experienced and will continue to suffer.

It took me three times of saying, Father take this chalice from me, but not as I will but as you will. When, finally, I said yes, that's when my sweat became like blood.

You see, I am as human as you are.

If in some way, in one moment of time, you were to experience everything that you have experienced and suffered thus far in your life, then I think it might kill you.

Well that is what happened to me in the garden and that is why I understand all the suffering, pain, sin and the effects of evil that you have experienced up until this time in your own life. I suffered it all in the garden and I took it all onto myself on the cross and it killed me. Now, do you still think I am a wimp? ☪



Be inspired!
Visit us for faith and educational resources...
books & media including
music, audio books,
CDs, DVDs.

SYDNEY
150 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Ph: (02) 9264 8630
orders@paulinebooks.com.au

MELBOURNE
7 Denmark Hill Road
East Hawthorn VIC 3123
Ph: (03) 9882 3424
orders.melbourne@paulinebooks.com.au

www.paulinebooks.com.au

Grieving for the lost parish

ERIC HODGENS



Eric Hodgens, retired Melbourne priest, talks about a church in crisis but also in transformation. How will it take shape in a post COVID world?

Some church groups are pressing for a post-pandemic opening up, others, who have already opened up, are sounding a lament as they find it is not business as usual. There are signs of grieving for the parish – an institution on its knees.

World War II changed Western history. The post-war Catholic parish was an institutional wonder. It took off with the baby boom, reached its peak in the 1980s, started its decline in the 1990s and may well be mortally wounded by the COVID epidemic in the 2020s.

The parish of my wartime infancy appeared timeless. It was an identifiable part of the wider culture but, for Catholics, it was a mainstay of life. Baptisms, marriages and funerals happened there. Most Catholics started formal schooling there. That is where you ritualised being a Catholic. Lifelong personal and family friends were made. It had its social oddities such as not eating meat on Friday, the practice of confession and regular Sunday Mass. Adherence was tribal.

Post-war reconstruction for Catholics brought new vitality to the parish. With population growth came new parishes and schools. The baby boom brought not only a large new generation of members but increased vitality and vision to the whole of society. The times – they were a changin'.

Vatican II was in tune with that change. The fortress church lowered its drawbridge and out streamed the People of God on a march towards establishing a new Kingdom of God – a new world order marked by identification with the hopes and joys, the griefs and anxieties of all, mutual respect, the discarding of bygone enmities, diminished sectarianism an improved life for everybody and a fairer society.

Parishes implemented that new vision. The laity moved into active mode. There were youth groups, senior citizens groups, social justice groups, parent groups, social groups and sporting groups. And all had their formal coming together in the parish liturgy which, while led by clergy, was no longer a clerical preserve, and was in a

language all could embrace and understand.

Lay action and leadership became a top policy in the renewed Church – especially with the youth. The Young Christian Worker movement (YCW) formed a whole generation to see, judge and act. Loads of young priests were mentors of this movement.

The parish was a scene of action and vitality.

But an undertow was forming under this enthusiasm. Paul VI went along with the awakening vision but was still a product of the Ancient Regime of Christendom and a lifetime operative of its clerical bureaucracy. He feared that the new enthusiasm would get out of hand. So, he put on the brakes. He re-affirmed priestly celibacy and condemned contraception. His technique of moderating the exuberance was by appointing conservative bishops.

Ten years later, Restoration became the official church policy with the election of John Paul II.

By the end of the 1980s fault lines started to show in the church. You noticed them in the parish. The earliest pointer was a drop in Mass attendance and affiliation. Adult parishioners in their day had found their social life in the parish. But, now, the new generation found their social stimulus in a wider world. Once they reached adulthood, they dropped Mass. No longer compelled to set an example, their parents started to drift away themselves.

As society became more secular, the Church hierarchy grew more rule-insistent and less pastoral. Rather than re-discovering the core of the Jesus message and recontextualising it, the hierarchy, supported by revisionist Catholics, chose to stick more tightly to their guns only to be left irrelevant and increasingly alone. The bishop in mitre and crosier – once an image of authority – became a curio from the past.

The numbers tell the tale. Already by the time the pandemic hit, Mass attendance had dropped to about 10%. Catholic school enrolments are not as solid. Locally born clergy are dying out. Foreign priests are struggling. Parishes are being closed or amalgamated. The ranks of committed

supporters are ever thinning. The institutional decline is clear to all.

And now COVID lockdowns have hit. Large areas have not had a church gathering for months. Where religious gatherings have been resumed, only a fraction of the former congregations seem to have come back. Social distancing results in unrecognisable liturgies. It's not the way it used to be.

At a practical level, income has dropped – perilously – and with no signs of reversal. There is a critical level of income below which you cannot run a parish.

The institutional parish as we knew it is on its knees. Hence the grieving for lost glory days. Mind you, it is an institution that is being mourned – not the central vision articulated by Vatican II. The church as institution is in trouble but not the church as the People of God.

All institutions rise and fall. Visions endure and can find new institution vehicles. There are millions of true believers out there. They just find the current institution not fit for purpose.

What is the shape of future Christianity?

Synods and regional councils are institutional attempts to address the challenge.

A German synodal assembly seems to be making progress. The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMENCE) is doing its own soul searching on the problem. An Australian Plenary Council is in preparation but getting mixed support. Some, including many bishops, don't want it. Others, browned off by past efforts which went nowhere, are cynical.

One hopeful sign is the emergence of small groups of well-informed Catholics with church renewal as their shared objective. They are not well received by the institutional leadership but are persistent in their wish to re-invigorate Catholic Christianity. They are active in synod and council preparations but do not rely on them for their future. Groups of them meet regularly to remember and celebrate the Lord as the first followers did.

The institutional parish may have run its course, but the Christian spark is not extinguished. It is just taking new forms.

☪

Inclusive language in the liturgy

The respect due to God's name in the liturgy, is not the same issue as that of the inclusion of women.

God is neither male nor female. I know that when we refer to God no words are adequate. We must use metaphors like Father, Mother. But in the Psalms at the Eucharist why do we need to use wording like 'Sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked wonders' or 'Give thanks to the Lord for he is good'?

We could have instead 'We sing a new song to you O God for you have worked wonders' and 'We give thanks to you O God for you are good'.

I experience the wording in many Psalms as a barrier to prayer.

Marea Cox RSJ

Whose church is it?

In the Gospel of Matthew 16 proclaimed this year, 2020, on the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time, Jesus said to Peter: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.

MY Church. Among the people whom I believe are the prophets of today, I hear the words: But on this rock you men have built YOUR Church.

So I, the Glorified Lord, on this rock I will build MY Church.

Historically, at the time that this message was first talked about, Pope Benedict resigned, thus bringing to an end the model of the Church in which all of us living today lived out our discipleship of Jesus.

What happened at the Conclave? Jorge Mario Bergoglio of South America was elected by the Cardinals and he chose the name, Francis.

Is he the first of the rocks on whom 'I will build MY CHURCH'? This certainly is the basis of my hope and optimism for our Church today.

Rex Hackett, Yamba, NSW

Can I get involved in church again?

A couple of weeks ago I had lunch with two old friends – layperson Peter and Fr Peter. I sat and listened for a few hours to these two good men speaking of the Church they belonged to and their personal investments in trying to bring about change. Change that would bring about greater involvement and inclusion for all its members. I had spent many

years with both Peters in the seminary during the early part of the seventies. Layperson Peter left the seminary before ordination while Fr Peter, myself and five others were ordained in 1976. After working as an assistant priest in Goulburn for eighteen months. I left the Canberra diocese to join the Passionist Congregation in 1978. I remained with the Passionists until the end of 1989. In 1990 I undertook University Studies at CSU in Wagga and later at UNE Armidale. In 1994 I began my 23 years working as the School Counsellor at Marist College Canberra. I am now in my fourth year of retirement.

My meeting with the two Peters made me realise how far I have moved out of the orbit of the Catholic Church. I felt a little like an alien listening to these two caring and dedicated men. Before COVID-19, I would attend Mass in the sea side town I now live in, maybe once every three weeks. It was led by a good and caring priest, who shows, as far as I can tell, a real commitment to his fellow human beings. My personal experiences as a priest and then later working in a school where sexual abuse of young students was rife in the 1970's and 1980's, has caused me much heartache, anger and reflection. I was most troubled by the immoral activity of so many bishops and heads of Religious Orders in covering up the crimes of their Priests and Religious Brothers.

The Catholic Dioceses and Religious Orders have paid a significant financial cost for these crimes but little if any criminal cost for those who allowed these men to perpetrate their crimes for years. For Priests who questioned the Hierarchy and their use of authority and power there was also a great cost to be paid, with no court of appeal for unfair and unjust decisions.

I don't know if there are other Catholics like me, but I am not sure how many care about where the Church goes. I wonder if they care about the internal fights between the Left and the conservative hierarchy who struggle so hard to give up their perceived power and authority. A generation of young people have been lost. Maybe there are those like me, who refuse to give these 'Clerical Leaders' any power over them regarding what they believe and how they live their lives. Clerical leaders, who like Donald Trump, live in an alternative reality.

I want to believe that things can change. I want to encourage those, like my two friends, who are still in the fight to

continue their courageous efforts to bring about change, inclusion, justice and equality within the Catholic Church. My greatest fear in getting too close and involved in the Church again, is that the vision of Pope Francis for an inclusive Church, caring for all, especially the most marginalised, will turn to ashes when he dies. That those who are so opposed to his vision will elect an arch conservative in reaction to him. so that nothing really changes and lessons are never learnt.

Brian Coates, NSW

Appreciation for *The Swag*

I write to express my appreciation of *The Swag*. In many ways, I see it making a significant contribution to enabling a listening church in our country and thus, hopefully, leading to transformation in the church along the lines described in the book, 'A Call to Reset the Sails', reviewed in the Spring edition. The range of feature articles in each edition is to be commended. They are always informative and usually helpful, even if at times challenging!

May I note three regular pages I particularly appreciate and always read: Letters to the Editor, Book Reviews and Returned to God.

The Letters to the Editor usually raise a variety of issues. There are two interesting features I found in the Spring letters. Firstly, the letters reinforced what was expressed in a number of the feature articles. For example, Ted Fennessy's forthright letter appeared to reinforce what Richard Gaillardetz and Eric Hodgens had to say in their articles, especially about episcopal accountability and involvement.

On a related score might I observe that the seeming lack of consistency and consensus across the various dioceses in Australia, and the consequences, is not helpful. Two simple cases that illustrate this might be the different order for reception of the sacraments of initiation that prevails between dioceses and the variable support, if at all, for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, as approved by the ACBC in May 2003. The second feature is the number of letters expressing concern about the degree of involvement of all in parish ministry.

The Book Reviews are a winner in many respects. They draw attention to recent and relevant publications. They provide a helpful evaluation which one can follow

up. As the review of Shannon Molloy's book, *Fourteen*, observes, books can be a wake-up call for our Catholic Church. And, for someone who is a reader, they provide a good overview, leading, in my case, to the risk of purchasing yet another book!. Yet, as a musician once pointed out to me in relation to copyright, the labourer is worthy of his/her hire!

Returned to God is a timely reminder we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, an appreciation of their efforts and an inspiration to do likewise. Hopefully, all our dioceses are aware of this provision in *The Swag*.

Many thanks Peter Maher for the great work you do in editing *The Swag* every three months and to the production team at the NCP office. Finally, thank you for the little gem, re wearing masks, on the back page of the Spring edition.

Kevin Kiem, Newcastle, NSW

Recently I attended Mass in Tasmania. From the altar the priest asked 'How many of you have got the copy of *The Swag* at home, read it and passed it on to someone else to read?'

I thought this was a great idea and wondered if it would be possible for every parish in Australia to have a regular

order of a few copies to distribute among parishioners.

I will tell you why I thought this way. *The Swag* is the only Catholic publication that I know which has the courage to offer constructive criticism of our beloved but dying church.

Over my 80 plus years, questioning by the lay people was strongly discouraged and I had one priest proudly explain to me that the Church was not a democracy. It has been said that secrecy is the enemy of justice, and justice is the basis of a fair and decent society. Surely, we must encourage open discussion and encourage input from the lay people.

Currently people are voting with their feet and every member who walks away strengthens the position of those who have caused our current problems.

It must be remembered that we have always been told that we the people are the Church. Now surely is the time when some real focus be given to the opinions of the people. Having observed the voting structure of the current Plenary Council, I am not optimistic that those currently in position of power are really keen to see necessary change occur.

Vince Ptolemy, Kyogle NSW

Why don't bishops respond to correspondence?

Some time ago a group of business people came to me complaining about a decision their bishop had made which they thought was unfair.

I explained that it was useless talking to me and that they should take their concerns directly to the man himself.

They responded that they had done just that by phone, email and hard copy letter but they had never received any acknowledgement of their communications much less an explanation of the matter in question. I expressed surprise and asked if it was normal business practice to acknowledge communication by return mail and, if necessary, to provide a response or an explanation within five working days.

One of the aggrieved grunted: yea, well it seems normal business practice does not apply to the church. And so the conversation ended.

I did not share with them the view that failure to respond to correspondence, particularly unpleasant correspondence, is a tell-tale sign of a Bogan.

Harry Moore, Kyogle, NSW

NEWS

The last Our Lady Help of Christians sister dies

Sister Mary Paul, (Elizabeth Killian), the last surviving member of the Congregation of Our Lady Help of Christians, died on Sunday 16 August, 2020. Members of the Congregation cared for the priests and seminarians at the seminaries of St Columba's, Springwood and St Patrick's, Manly, as well as other ministries around Australia.



The Sisters ministered also with aboriginal peoples on Palm Island, with the St Vincent de Paul Society at Scholastica House providing crisis accommodation and on-going accommodation for aged and invalid women. Sr Mary Paul's funeral was celebrated in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney on 27 August.

Papal honours for SA leaders

Pope Francis has appointed two Adelaide parishioners, Greg Crafter AO and Bill Griffiths as Knights of the Order of St Gregory the Great.

Mr Crafter, a lawyer and politician served as the Member for Norwood and as Education Minister. He has a strong YCW background and has supported the Adelaide church in many ways.

He has also served as chair of the National Catholic Education Commission and was a director of the Little Company of Mary.

In 2015 Mr Crafter was appointed by the Bishops Conference to the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. He has also been active in civil society.

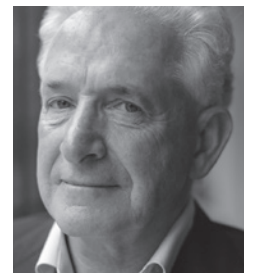
Dr Griffiths, a secondary school teacher by profession, joined the staff of the Adelaide Catholic Education Office in 1974, and was a member of the early SA Commission for Catholic Schools. He worked as Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Darwin and an executive

member of the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) in 1993.

Dr Griffiths has served the church in many ways including chair of the National Liturgical Council and secretary of the National Liturgical Music Council.

Tony Flannery's new book: *From the Outside: Rethinking Church teaching on human sexuality*

Tony Flannery, Irish Redemptorist priest, was suspended back in 2012 by Benedict XVI for his support for women's ordination among other things.



He was also challenged on his views about 'homosexual practices', gender theory and anything which does 'not correspond to God's plan for marriage and family'.

Continued page 40

While the CDF have made it a condition of return to ministry to sign a document saying he rejects these views, Flannery is clear he has no intention of doing so, particularly now many, including bishops and cardinals are talking about these issues.

Tony Flannery has recently published a new book commenting on these and other things called, *From the Outside: Rethinking Church Doctrine*.

Catholic Mission's international campaign with 'a thousand faces'

A global awareness campaign has been launched by Catholic Mission as part of World Mission Month, inspired by words from the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis highlighted his passion for the Pontifical Mission Societies, known in Australia as Catholic Mission, saying the mission is at the heart and identity of the church, and the worldwide network reflects the rich variety of the "people with a thousand faces".

Catholic Mission is part of that global network. We are with all the communities, in every corner of the world, says Catholic Mission National Director, Fr Brian Lucas.

This year World Mission Month in October focuses on the essential work of priests, religious and lay missionaries in Cambodia advocating for people with disability and providing support such as healthcare, food, financial assistance and education.

The call to remove Bishop Long Van Nguyen OFMConv

In September, a group of laypeople calling themselves 'The Heart of Parramatta', launched a change.org petition to have Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen removed from office.



They claimed on the petition website: the Bishop has denounced and threatened priests who stood up in defence of traditional marriage, disregarded the churches (sic) teachings & recently approved changes to the Parramatta catholic schools curriculum to include ideas of gender fluidity and atheism.

The petition contains no evidence of their claims. Bishop Long then invited Bishop

Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Maronite Bishop of Australia, to a meeting to pray, to offer a donation to support Beirut relief and to clear up any confusion caused by the petition.

Bishop Tarabay, on his Facebook page notes: we discussed the new Religious Education curriculum that is being developed in the Diocese ... I am confident that a process is in place which will ensure that schools in the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta will continue to deliver Catholic Education which inspires our children to Christ and teaches in line with our Catholic Church.

The program does not teach gender theory or gender studies. As clergy and laity, we all want our teachers to be equipped to answer questions that the students ask them, Bishop Tarabay continues.

We want our children to be equipped for the questions that the world is going to ask them and in the end we want to have confidence that our children will go out into the world and choose Christ and give witness to him, he said on Facebook.

Rainbow Catholics Respond to Pope's Support for same-gender civil unions



Rainbow Catholic InterAgency for Ministry, Australia (RCiA), welcomed Pope Francis' comments in the documentary, Francesco, that support the rights of LGBT people.

"Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They are children of God and have a right to a family," the pope said. "What we have to create is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered", he continued.

It reinforces the Catholic church teaching of non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. RCiA also noted that there is a long way to go for Catholic teaching to enshrine justice for LGBTIQ+ Catholics.

The Catholic catechism still describes LGBTIQ+ people as 'objectively

disordered' and 'an intrinsic moral evil'. These teachings lead to serious psychological and spiritual harm in LGBTI Catholics. The Catholic church also needs to consider blessings and sacramental marriage for Catholic LGBT couples.

The Catholic church needs to eliminate discrimination of LGBTIQ+ workers and students in its institutions, agencies and schools, RCiA noted.

Meanwhile, The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC), which supports LGBTIQ+ people throughout the world, in a press release (Sept 2) to support LGBT Catholics in Poland.

The GNRC press release expressed grave concern over a number of recent actions by Church leaders. They say that several places in the world are becoming more dangerous for LGBTIQ+ people, and that Catholic officials are fostering these threats.

The key current concern is the Poland. Michael Brinkschroeder, the European Regional Delegate to GNRC's Board, pointed out that at both church and state levels LGBTIQ+ people are being further marginalised including attempts to establish 'LGBT Free Zones' and the polish bishops' recent declaration.

The document states that official Roman Catholic teaching condemning same-sex relationships is "infallible," and calls for 'conversion therapy' centres to be made available.

The press release notes that the Vatican's official representative to the United Nations has argued that LGBTIQ+ refugees or asylum seekers should not be given assistance based on their identity.

While the UNHCR report noted the need for protection of some refugees and asylum seekers on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Carolyn Minchin, part of the Australian-based GNRC member group Rainbow Catholics Interagency for Ministry, stated, "I believe that assisting LGBTIQ+ refugees is critical to their survival, due to the intensity of the violence and discrimination they suffer at every turn in their journeys as refugees."

"Many LGBTIQ+ refugees are in the terrifying position of being threatened with death by their own families. Integration and invisibility are impossible for them, and silence on the question of how to improve safety for LGBTIQ+ refugees is costing lives on a daily basis", Minchin added.

GNRC calls on Pope Francis and Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin to withdraw the Vatican's objections to the UNHCR report.

And to assist the bishops of Poland in working with the LGBTIQ+ community in that country in a way that helps protect people from being marginalised and harmed.

GNRC calls on the Vatican and Church officials everywhere to end any support for so-called 'conversion therapy', which has been discredited as harmful by nearly all credible social science and therapeutic organizations.

Uncovering the spiritual in art

A new website called *Art and Soul* with Elio by Elio Capra SDB. He presents the ways that art has touched him and what he sees and experiences when looking at art. It is from the heart rather than from an art history point of view.

While the website may discuss the techniques and history related to an art work, the primary focus is the spiritual dimension that the work opens and the way it provokes reflection and prayer.

The length of the videos is between 3 to 5 minutes so that they can be used for prayer and reflection in a classroom, staffroom, home or any way you may like.

I hope that sharing my thoughts and ideas will prompt you to uncover the spiritual in art as you experience it, Capra said. The address is: elioartandsoul.wordpress.com

It is a free website which will offer a new video each week. Whenever possible the theme of the videos will reflect the cycle of the Liturgical Year.



BEATTITUDES FOR COVID-19

Blessed are those who have lost their life,
that they may come to know the joy of
the Risen Lord.

Blessed are those who are sick and dying,
that they may come to know healing
and peace.

Blessed are the isolating,
that they may overcome their fears
and anxiety.

Blessed are the aged, lonely
and housebound,
that they may never feel forsaken.

Blessed are the Scientists and Researchers,
that their work for a vaccine may
bear fruit.

Blessed are our Civic Leaders,
that they may make wise decisions
for the Common Good.

Blessed are our Doctors, Nurses
and Frontline Health Care workers,
that their works of service may be
richly blessed.

Blessed are People of Faith,
that they may be the Face of Christ
in moments of suffering.

Blessed are the families who have
become isolated from each other,
and the ones who sacrifice personal
well-being, may they come to know we
need not be alone in our suffering.

As the borders of our State, and doors of
our homes and places familiar to us may
be closed, may the door to our heart
remain open to all.

Beatitudes for COVID-19
written by Fr Jamie Collins
(Catholic Parish of Harristown,
Diocese of Toowoomba)
for All Saints Day Mass.

The Tablet

Non-delivery or unbelievably slow delivery of the weekly edition of *The Tablet* by Australia Post is causing great anxiety for so many of our member subscribers.

Your print subscription does give you full access to the weekly online edition so please following the instructions below if you wish to register. Go to: www.thetablet.co.uk/account/user-subscription

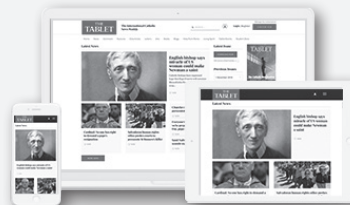
You will need the following information in order to be able to register to be able to access the online edition.

- Your reader number (1)
- Your email address
- Your Web ID (2)
- Create a new password

(1) Your reader number can be found above your contact details on the address sheet which accompanies your weekly journal.

(2) Your Web ID is usually a surname, however, if your particular mailing address details do not contain a surname, you'll find your Web ID in the box above your contact details on the address sheet which accompanies your weekly journal. You will then receive a welcome email containing a link to activate your subscription.

If you do not receive this email, please try re-registering again. If you experience a problem, please contact *The Tablet* at: support@thetablet.co.uk. Please note this is a one-time only registration process.



God is the poetry in any religion

Book by Marie Leonie Williams RSM, *Songs from My Soul*, Coventry Press 2020 and Paul Kraus, *Anointing the Soul*, Poetry, Meditation and Healing, St Pauls Press 2020. Reviewed by Peter Maher.

Les Murray, (Collected Poems, Black Inc. 2018), in a poem, Poetry and Religion, writes: Religions are poems. They concert our daylight and dreaming mind, our emotions, instinct, breath and native gesture into the only whole thinking: poetry. Nothing's said till it's dreamed out in words and nothing's true that figures in words only.

Marie Leonie Williams RSM in *Songs from My Soul* and Paul Kraus in *Anointing the Soul* have collected poems written by themselves and others to embody this thought of Murray's.

Williams' poems are personal and yet universal and indeed cosmic. They emerge from her experience of being with the Walmajarri people of Western Australia. She discovers a resonance with her Celtic tradition that breaks out in her poems exploring the wonder, depth and cosmic nature of the connections made in the various strands of her life, experience and ministry.

Williams finds in her poems an expression of the joy and sadness, the hope and fear of being in a strange land but it is also somehow familiar, filled with the mystery of her traditions. She experiences the call of the divine in the people, their wisdom, the animals and birds and in the land itself. It's not just an Indigenous journey, but we are invited to take our own journey into the mystery and the dance of the divine in our homeland. Transformation is available to all and these poems can be a catalyst for our own transformation just where we are.

On the other hand, Kraus offers us a compendium of poems and writings specifically to connect us to the meditation and healing tradition. With scripture texts and poems from such diverse sources like St John of the Cross, Mother Teresa and George Herbert, Kraus invites us to consider various aspects of the practice of meditation, how to meditate and the results of meditation. It is a valuable way of reflecting on this growing spiritual practice.



How do we engage in a conversation about God? Murray would insist on poetry as a way to touch the mystery. In another line of the poem mentioned above he says: God is the poetry caught in any religion, caught, not imprisoned. Caught as in a mirror. Williams and Kraus capture this sentiment to the reader's delight. ☪



How Mary carries shame

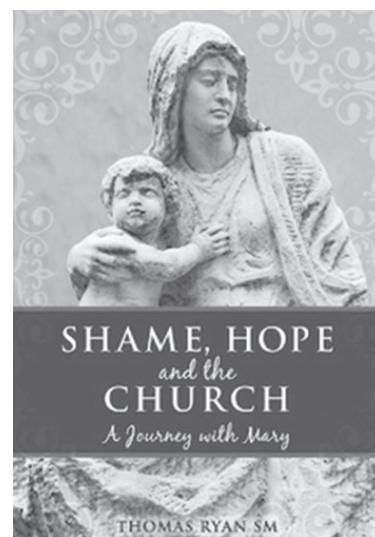
Trauma and shame are part of the fabric of church life following the sexual, physical, emotional and spiritual abuse crisis. This book follows the experiences of Mary's shame as she accompanies Jesus through life to the cross. *Shame, Hope and the Church, A Journey with Mary*, Thomas Ryan SM, (2020) St Pauls Publications. Reviewed by Peter Maher.

Shame has invaded the church space more than ever in recent times. We used to see religious practice as an antidote to shame. Somehow the forgiveness and comfort of Jesus' love could heal the shame associated with sin or social marginalisation. But now the shame is at the heart of religion itself. Where we used to go to religion to free us from shame and guilt, we now are more likely to recognise religion and church as the source of shame. We no longer can trust our religious tradition to liberate us and are in fear of that very institution enslaving us.

Thomas Ryan contributes significantly to this dilemma as he draws from his theology, biblical insights, anthropology and psychology to offer a window on shame. This terrain is not new, but what Ryan brings that is new is his Marian theology from his Marist spirituality.

It is this insight that readers will find interesting and, more importantly, helpful in coming to terms with the challenges we face in the church at the moment. Ryan explores the experiences in Mary's life where she endured shame. Ryan notes Mary's empathy with women who are perceived to be morally deviant, or shamed by unwanted pregnancies, her solidarity with mothers of children who are innocent victims of war or from the tyranny of the state (p143). Mary had to learn from her misunderstandings about Jesus' mission and from her experiences of confusion and shame how to be present to the reality and stay with her calling.

Ryan explores a nice image of Mary in the Upper Room. Mary is the one who does not give up but continues to hope and trust. Mary stands as one who listens to the victims of abuse. She does not abandon the



shamed Jesus but stands at the foot of the cross, still mother of a disgraced lawbreaker.

This book offers insights into how Mary's approach to shame and guilt might offer us a way of healing and hope. Ryan suggests that Mary stands as a model of how to hold shame in a way that can be healing. In connecting with this Marian tradition, might we find a way to reconnect with the healing needed in troubled times. ☪

Dorothy Day's Australian visit 50th anniversary

Dorothy Day in Australia, Val Noone, 2020. Mary Doyle and Val Noone, Fitzroy. This book recalls the only visit Dorothy Day made to Australia in 1970. \$30 posted anywhere in Australia. Email: valnoone@iinet.net.au or by post to Val Noone, PO Box 51, Fitzroy, VIC 3065. Reviewed by Fr Kevin Burke.

In August 1970, Dorothy Day, founder of the American Catholic Worker movement, spent three eventful weeks in Australia, leaving a powerful and lasting legacy. Historian and social activist Val Noone recently published *Dorothy Day in Australia* to mark the fiftieth anniversary of her visit with samples of her life and an outline her influence in Australia. Its 122 pages are very readable and highly engaging.

I've long been fascinated with the dynamism of Dorothy Day. After an extraordinary life she died in 1980, aged eighty three. Baptized Episcopalian she lived a bohemian lifestyle; had various relationships, a traumatic abortion and broken marriage; was a journalist and nurse, jailed with the suffragists among others.

Noone notes that many 'have wondered about the way Dorothy maintained her political radicalism alongside her firm commitment to the Catholic religion [with] professed obedience to the bishops, though often critical of those of them who supported capitalism and American wars'.

On May Day 1933, Dorothy and Peter

Maurin published the first issue of the Catholic Worker newspaper to militants and passers-by at a communist rally in New York. The movement had four elements: labour newspapers, hospitality houses, round-table discussions and agrarian communes. They aimed to return to the teachings of the gospels, especially the works of mercy.

In his 2015 speech to Congress, Pope Francis listed four great Americans he admired, another Catholic radical, Cistercian priest Thomas Merton, Abraham Lincoln and Dorothy. The Vatican have declared her 'Servant of God' and her canonization case is being energetically pursued. Dorothy laughed off any talk of being a saint quipping 'You can't dismiss me that easily'.

In August 1970, already in her seventies, Dorothy spent three weeks in Australia, two in NSW and one in Victoria. She gave public lectures and met people including many young from peace and justice movements. Noone stresses that during the 1950s and 1960s when the Bob Santamaria-inspired Movement and conservative politics dominated Catholic life, 'Dorothy Day was a beacon and an



encourager to those who stood for an alternative commitment to gospels and the church's social teaching'.

Dorothy Day's influence on Australia is widespread; the Melbourne-based Catholic Worker newspaper lasted from 1936 to 1976; various peace movements, Pax, in 1966 and then Pax Christi. Priest historian Edmund Campion maintains that 'Dorothy Day kept together in one whole non-violence, personalism, opposition to state power, traditional religious devotions, orthodox theology and deference to church authority'. The book is well illustrated. ☺



Life and death experiences bring hope

Bless you Heart Attack for being in my Life (2019), Bruce Wilson, Coventry Press. Reviewed by Peter Maher.

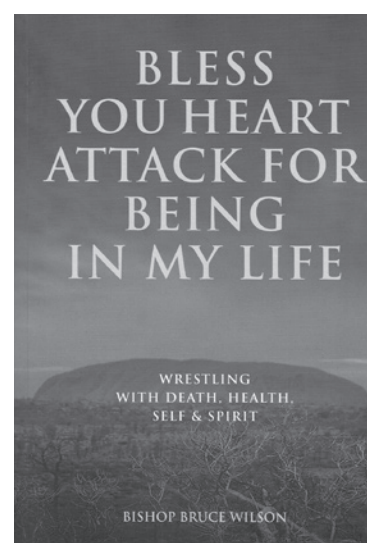
Having recently been diagnosed with a very serious illness and learning to live with the reality, I found reading Bruce Wilson's account of his diagnosis or misdiagnosis, as it was, to be quite challenging and encouraging.

Bruce Wilson, a retired Anglican bishop, writes with some ambiguity about his experience of serious illness and that it is not an exact science, confirming my own assessment of medicine in the face of serious illness. The process of diagnosis, emergency intervention and on-going treatment in complex and critical serious illness is a balancing act says my oncologist. I think this book explores this reality primarily from a personal and spiritual perspective, but Wilson also considers the

medial and psychological. In these litigious times, it's nice to see someone explore the reality and the humanity of the process of discovering and living with a serious illness, accepting that things are complex and medical professionals are human and fallible.

While Wilson is concerned and angry about the botched diagnosis, he is also philosophical and, more importantly, reflective and theological. Where is God in all this and how does that question impact on the existential reality of illness and medicine.

It's a book that will interest those who are either living with serious illness or living or working with someone with serious illness and for whom religion and spirituality play



a part in that dynamic. Pastoral carers and hospital chaplains will be challenged and blessed by Wilson's personal and theological reflections, much as he has. ☺

Proof of God's existence

Fragments: A Theological Story, Peter Cavallaro, 2020. Independently published. Reviewed by Rev Jason Grisafi, Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Diocese of Rockville Centre in New York.

There is a crucial moment in the life of every convert to religion, and indeed everyone who is raised in a religion, when that person, for the first time, holding the doctrines of that religion in their mind, realizes that they pass the scrutiny of his reason and thus personally accepts them as true. In the case of Christianity, such assent is aided by the gift of faith. In all theistic religions, this set of doctrines includes the statement, God exists.

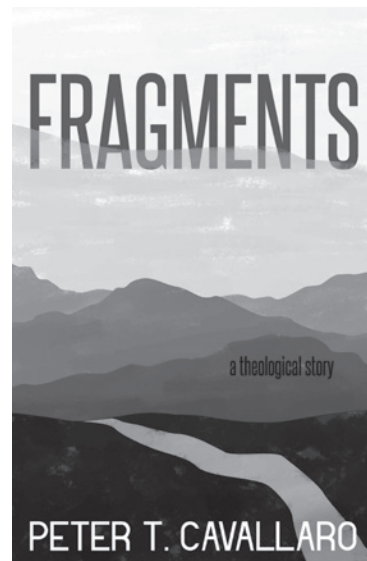
Fragments presents the reader with an imagined universe in which this statement needs no proof, for the gods have chosen to live in human form within the world they created. Despite that, the existence of evil has created a demand for theodicy. God-slayers, having come to the conclusion that any such omnipotent, omniscient being that is permissive of such evil must be malevolent, search for, and destroy, these gods. Employing a variety of literary forms, *Fragments* takes us on the journey of one renowned god-slayer and his search for answers, and even salvation, among the last remaining gods.

Most of the book adopts a form of dialectic between the main antagonist and three different divine figures. However, the book also adopts a poetic form in its early chapters to present a view of creation

from the perspective of its creator. It's final chapter evokes memories of Joyce's *Ulysses*, as it strives to capture the dynamic of a human's internal dialogue with a divine being.

The intention of *Fragments* is clear: to provide four cogent arguments to prove the existence of God. The arguments, themselves, are multilayered, having overtones of philosophy, theology, aesthetics, sociology, and anthropology. However, instead of looking to argue from metaphysical categories, *Fragments* bases its arguments upon universal human experiences: beauty, creativity, morality, and love. There is something very attractive about the numerous examples invoked by *Fragments*, all of which direct the reader to reflect attentively upon some very common occurrences.

If the reader is a person of faith, they will certainly see a presentation of some of their own reasons for assenting to belief in God. For the reader who does not believe in any deity, they will encounter an appeal to some of the most fundamental aspects of his being, which, if they do not become a proof for God's existence, will at least serve as a profound, though brief, reflection on some of the most important aspects of humanity. Indeed, humanity is seen as the



theological key to unlocking the puzzle of God's existence. All four proofs share a common foundation: humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. Viewing that image helps us see the God who created it.

Fragments concludes by allowing the reader to decide on the question of God's existence for themselves. Instead, a new question emerges from the story: is the journey of the god-slayer one of the atheist, or one of the faithful, who banishes all false depictions of spirituality from their life? Perhaps the unexpected union of this human dichotomy is evidence of a fifth proof. ☺



NCP MEMBERSHIP DUE 17 MARCH

Before you begin your St Patrick's Day celebrations, please make sure your 2021 NCP Membership is in the mail!



Fatima revisited

Peter Malone reviews the film *Fatima*, US/Portugal, 2020, 113 mins, directed by Marco Pontecorvo.



Who would have anticipated a version of the apparitions at Fatima, 1917, in 2020? There had been a Hollywood version in the early 1950s and the British version, *The 13th Day*, in 2009. reverential portrayal of the three children, their experience of the apparition of Mary, opposition, devoted pilgrims, the miracle of the sun (including some photographs of the event in October, 1917, and the glimpse of someone filming the event).

Older Catholics were brought up in the period of the popularity of Our Lady of Fatima, especially in the 1940s and the early 1950s, with the touring statue, devotions and processions. By this time, Catholics took Our Lady of Lourdes and the apparitions to Bernadette for granted (and the popularity of the film, *The Song of Bernadette* in 1943). But, Fatima was nearer to our own times, just before our own times, devotion for the post-World War II years. And, of course, Fatima has become one of the major shrines, Marian shrines, in the world.

Lourdes had its sceptics and critics. Fatima has had its sceptics and critics. While there has been a recent increase in popularity of faith-films, audiences who don't respond to faith-films will not be impressed by miracle stories like this. Interestingly, while the Internet Movie Database has many responses, some of them ridiculing the story as superstitious, many of those responding are older Catholics who are complaining about quite a number of details, old favourites for them, the three secrets, the conversion of Russia, the consecration of the world to Mary which have not been explicitly included.

The value of this version of Fatima, for Catholics of a later generation not so familiar with apparitions (except, perhaps, with Medjugorje), is that the story is well situated in the political climate of Portugal in 1917, Republic, secular-minded, oppressive of religion and the Church. It is also well situated in the climate of World War I, the deaths of Portuguese soldiers and those missing in action (including Lucia's brother). Memory suggests that back in the 1940s and 1950s, we were not so conscious of these real/actual settings.

The other aspect, important for many contemporary audiences, for younger Catholics, are the questions about Mary appearing to 3 small children, in the context of devotions of the time, the responses of the time. The screenplay provides a 1989 framework, a professor (Harvey Keitel) visiting Sister Lucia at the Carmelite convent of Coimbra, Lucia in her 80s played by Sonia Braga. The Professor asks the expected questions which might be rising in the minds of questioning audiences: the reality of the apparitions in the language and iconography of the visionaries, of the period, the image of Mary and statuary, the language of rosary and prayer. There is also the issue of the penitential aspects of devotion at the time, self-inflicted penances in reparation for sinful offence or for emphasising prayers of petition. The professor also raises the issue of the effect of little children being the instrument of preaching peace and prayer rather than an adult appeal.

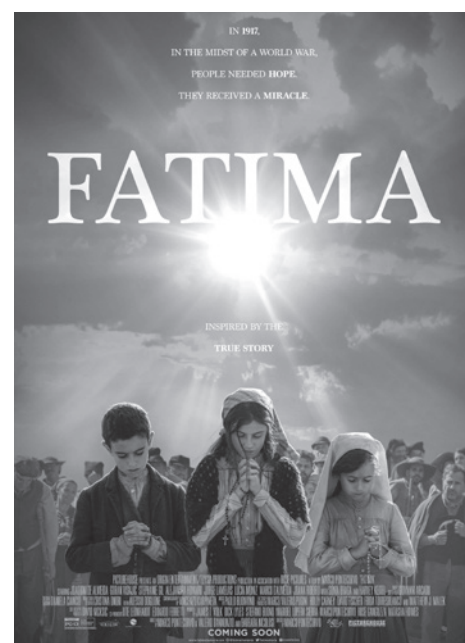
Stephanie Gil is very convincing as Lucia. And the two actors for the smaller children are also very effective, Jacinta and her spontaneous talk, Francesco and his not hearing the words of Mary. This is shown

in the context of their village, poor and hard-working, and of the deaths and injuries during the war, the family support, Lucia's mother harsh, her farmer father supportive. The local priest does the expected questioning, fearing that they are making everything up, but eventually believing them. It is much harder for the Mayor, with orders from Lisbon, with his anti-religious and anti-clerical stances (despite the challenges from his wife), trying to suppress the pilgrimage mentality. People from the village are at times sceptical, hostile, believers. They are desperate for miracles. And, even then, there was commercialism, children with their trays of rosary beads for sale to the pilgrims!

There is an odd evocative, nightmare sequence where Lucia dreams of a Pope and bishops walking through the devastation of the battlefield with guns firing at the Pope.

The 21st-century seems to be an age more sceptical about this kind of religious experience, so hallowed in the past. Here is an opportunity to give some consideration to the credibility, the question that there are more events and experiences than matter-of-fact realism believes in.

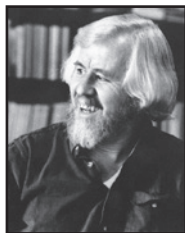
A number of photos appear during the final credits, a reminder that Jacinta and Francesco died during the Spanish flu epidemic, that Lucia spent many decades as a Carmelite nun, that the Popes have been enthusiasts of Fatima with their visits, that Pope Francis canonised Jacinta and Francesco and that Lucia's cause is under consideration. ☺



Returned to God

ANTONY (TONY) FRANCIS CAMPBELL SJ

24/08/1934 – 02/08/2020



There is a stereotype of people from New Zealand's South Island as homely, bluff, rugged and plain-speaking people who abhor hypocrisy and call a spade a shovel. A colourful, boisterous character, Antony Campbell did nothing to dispel this. Born and schooled in New Zealand, he crossed the Tasman after high school to join the Jesuits at the start of 1954.

After some experience teaching secondary school students, he studied Classical and Semitic languages at Melbourne University before moving to Lyons for theology. He furthered his interest in Old Testament with a biennium in Rome and a PhD in Claremont, California. He taught briefly in Berkeley before returning to Australia.

Back in Melbourne, Tony joined the community and faculty at Jesuit Theological College, which was still in its early years, and quickly became a force to be reckoned with, modernising the awards taught and preparing new curricula. The idea of an ecumenical theologate was still relatively new and much of his work, first as dean of studies and then as academic principal, involved both ensuring high standards in the new institution (part of the ecumenical Melbourne College of Divinity) and reassuring ecclesiastical authorities at home and abroad of its standards and orthodoxy.

A night owl, Tony wrote voluminously – 14 books on his own and three in collaboration with his close friend, the Dominican Old Testament scholar, Mark O'Brien. He rapidly established himself as a world specialist in the "historical books". He also wrote a great deal on the Pentateuch, on Job and on literary aspects of Old Testament scholarship. Tony brought all the rigour of the new disciplines of text criticism and literary analysis to his work and dispatched generations of accumulated sacred cows in Old Testament scholarship. Probably most controversially this included the sources theory of the composition of the Pentateuch.

Beyond his immense scholarship, Tony sought to integrate the spiritual and pastoral with the academic. His book *God First Loved Us* is a meditation on the nature of God revealed in both life and Scripture. A man acquainted with sorrow and loss (a brother died in childhood), he had no time for philosophical or Scriptural theories divorced from the messy reality of humanity. He was a gifted spiritual director.

When Tony was granted Emeritus status upon retirement from teaching in late 2009, a testimonial document said in part: "His teaching has combined evocation and provocation in the best sense of those terms. He has mentored research students with scholarly exactitude and personal care. He has published books of the highest scholarly quality, of engaging readability, and of passionate conviction".

Growing ill health forced Tony to leave the theologate in 2008. Initially, he moved to Campion House, which cares for senior Jesuits in Melbourne, then to Nazareth House nursing home in Camberwell, where he died at the age of 85.

May he rest in peace.

NEVILLE MICHAEL DUNNE MSC

08/07/1932 – 25/07/2020



Born in Dalby Queensland on 8 July 1932, to a prayerful family who believed in God's love, Neville felt a calling to be a priest since primary school, encouraged mainly by his mother, the Annals and Saints Life stories. Inspired by the good example of friends and priests while studying at Downlands College, he eventually made the decision to be an MSC priest.

Always wanting to work in foreign missions, he believed God granted his wish, as his first posting after Ordination in 1959 was to Papua New Guinea and it was there that he spent his entire ministry life for the next 60 years.

His first mission in 1960 was as a teacher and headmaster in high schools in Sideia and Hagita. He was then appointed Parish Priest in Fergusson Island and then Vicar General, followed by Superior in Sideia and Alotau from 1980-1985.

He was elected Pro-Provincial of the infant Papua New Guinea Province in 1986 and remained in that role until his term ended in 1992. For the next 25 years from 1993, he actively helped deepen the faith of the laity through retreats and directed seminars in charismatic renewal movements and Life in the Spirit seminars throughout the Rabaul area and at Chevalier Retreat Centre in PNG.

May he rest in peace.

DONALD (DON) HUGHES OMI

13/08/1939 – 20/07/2020



Donald Oswin Hughes was born of a well-known Fremantle family and was educated there. Seeking to answer God's call, he first went to St Charles diocesan seminary in Perth before going to the Oblate novitiate in Sorrento, Victoria. As was necessary in those years before the opening of an Oblate seminary, he went to Co Kilkenny in Ireland to complete his studies and was ordained there. After a brief pastoral experience in Liverpool, Don was appointed to Australia.

Over the years he accepted many and varied appointments with great faith and enthusiasm: parishes, mission preaching, serving in VIC, NSW, NZ and WA. In 1961 he joined the staff of Iona College, which the Oblates had opened in bayside Brisbane in 1958. As well as teaching the boys, he helped to develop the finances and supervised a building program and, with great enthusiasm led the parents in working-bees and fund-raising in the days before much government funding and growing enrolments. He became well-known in the diocese for supplies and regular help with parish appeals for the missions.

In 1966 he was sent to WA to be the founding Principal of Mazenod College in Lesmurdie and under his leadership developed it as a fine Day and Boarding College. His next appointment was to the Oblate seminary in Victoria, first as Novice Master, then as Rector, next to Adelaide as PP of Tea Tree Gully followed by returning to his own beloved Fremantle as PP of St Patricks, then to Lesmurdie. His life achieved full circle when he was asked to return to St Charles Seminary in Perth – he had always retained a great affection and friendship for the Archdiocese and its priests and was very much at home there helping with formation of new priests. He spent his last years back at Lesmurdie and enjoyed the company of students and staff.

Clearly Don was a generous, pastoral and faithful priest to the end and greatly loved and admired by his family, those he had ministered to and by his brother Oblates of Mary Immaculate. His requiem and burial took place in St Patrick's led by his seminary contemporary Archbishop Barry Hickey, with Bishops Sproxton and Bianchini present as well as many priests, religious and friends.

May he rest in peace.

THOMAS KEEGAN

13/04/1928 – 25/07/2020



Thomas, one of nine children of parents John Keegan and Bridget (Daly), was born at Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath, Ireland and died peacefully at St Vincent's Care Services (Lourdes Home) Toowoomba.

Thomas attended Ballinagore National School Primary School and completed his secondary school studies at St Mary's Christian Brothers School Mullingar and St Theresa's Carmelite College at Catlemartyr, Co Cork. He entered the seminary in 1948, studying at St Patrick's College in Thurles, Ireland. Thomas attended the seminary on a bursary provided by Bishop James Byrne, the first Bishop of the Toowoomba Diocese who had also studied at the seminary at Thurles.

Thomas was ordained to the priesthood on 14 June 1953 by Archbishop Jeremiah Kinnane at the Cathedral of the Assumption, Thurles. On 25 November 1953, he set off by sea to journey to Australia and start his ministry in the Toowoomba Diocese.

He arrived in the Toowoomba Diocese on 7 January 1954 and over the following years became very well-travelled, spending time in the parishes of Warwick, Cathedral, Goondiwindi, St Theresa's Toowoomba, Chinchilla, Dalby, Pittsworth, Cunnamulla, Texas and Killarney. However, Holy Name Parish Toowoomba is where he spent an almost equal amount of time. He spent three years in the parish in the late 1960s, then returned in July 1987 where he remained until June 2016 when he moved to St Vincent's Care Services (Lourdes Home).

Despite his time spent in Australia, Thomas always celebrated being Irish and kept a strong connection with his family. He is remembered for his hospitality, love of his parishioners and strength of faith. "In all of my associations with Fr Keegan, I was in total awe of his tremendous faith in God, his zeal for the spread of the Gospel," said Sr Margaret Noris, a long-time friend who spoke at the Vigil Service was held at St Patrick's Cathedral 30 July 2020, and Funeral Mass, also at St Patrick's Cathedral, was held 31 July 2020.

May he rest in peace.

CHARLES MCBRIDE

26/09/1927 – 02/10/2020



Charles passed away at St Catherine's Aged Care Facility, Balwyn, VIC, aged 93 years.

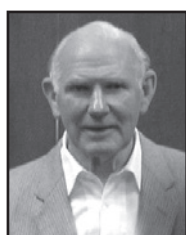
Born on 26 September 1927 in Scotland, Charles was ordained at St Patrick's Cathedral, East Melbourne on 19 August 1972. He was appointed Assistant Priest at Frankston (1972), Ferntree Gully (1976), Bentleigh (1979), Wattle Park (1980), Mooroolbark (1982), Seaford (1985), Bennettswood (1985) and Mentone (1987). Further appointments included Parish Priest of Langwarrin (1987), Assistant Priest at Mentone (1987) and Administrator of Box Hill North parish (1998).

Charles retired in 1991 and was appointed Pastor Emeritus. Charles served the Church in a very positive and pastorally enriching manner, giving fine example to both his brother priests and the community. The Archdiocese of Melbourne is most grateful for the untiring service to the Church of Melbourne of this fine and gentle man.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

JOSEPH MCGEEHAN

09/07/1936 – 14/08/2020



The middle child of Joseph and Edith McGeehan's three children, young Joe's early days were spent in Atherton, North Queensland. The family then moved to Esk, and finally to Banyo.

While living at Esk, young Joe boarded at Downlands College in Toowoomba where his popularity saw him named School Captain, as well as leader of a number of its premier sports teams.

He began studying at Banyo Seminary in 1956 and was ordained in 1963, one year later than most of his original cohort. Joe's first posting was as a curate at Cannon Hill parish followed by Childers and Dutton Park. His first appointment as Parish Priest was in Murgon, followed by two stints at Gympie, another foundational role at Birkdale and a final posting to Wavell Heights before retirement. Retired Rockhampton Bishop Brian Heenan, a seminary classmate, first met Joe as an opponent on sporting fields, but well understood why people were drawn to him. "Joe had a profound love and respect for absolutely everybody so I think that's how he'll be remembered," Bishop Heenan said. "Nobody was left out, everybody

Continued page 48

RETURNED TO GOD

was special; whether that be his school friends, the parishioners he worked amongst or religious brothers and sisters. "He also had an extraordinary memory for names and for people and it's no doubt why he retained so many friendships. "I think his special focus though was always the priests, something he probably took from the MSC Fathers at Downlands."

With Archbishop Francis Rush's blessing Joe took on a fulltime role in Ministry to Priests for 12 years, visiting clergy as a support or arranging retreats and seminars to underpin their pastoral roles.

Joe was also pivotal in founding the St Peter's Centre for Priests Renewal in Canberra, which operated from 1982 -1993 and saw more than 300 priests participate in the three-month course.

Although Joe had battled cancer for some time, he still enjoyed reasonable health and remained living at home where he died. He will be remembered as a loving brother, caring friend and a gentle, humble servant of God. His Funeral Mass took place at St Stephen's Cathedral on 20 August, 2020.

May he rest in peace.

JOHN NAUGHTON

29/08/1934 – 02/09/2020

✠ John was born in Shepparton, VIC where his parents Hugh and Catherine conducted a drapery store. In time two brothers, Peter and Michael, arrived.

John's early education was at St Brendan's Primary School and then to St Coleman's Boys' School before a short stay at Assumption College, Kilmore. A short stint working in Melbourne followed by National Service only increased his desire to test a vocation to the Priesthood. Latin was the 'rub' and John found himself with several other young men at St Stanislaus College, Bathurst for a crash course in Latin. John joined a team of Sandhurst students at St Francis Xavier Seminary in Adelaide in 1958 and arrived at the Altar for Ordination on 27 June 1964.

John began his pastoral ministry at St Kilian's, Bendigo in 1965 and his last appointment was to the same parish in 1989. He had special responsibilities for the Catholic Hospital where he served as chaplain for nearly 20 years.

John is fondly remembered for his gentle and caring work and his special care for patients and staff. In 2009 John retired from full time ministry and took up residence in Shepparton at Ave Maria, a residential home, where for some time he was able to minister to the residents.

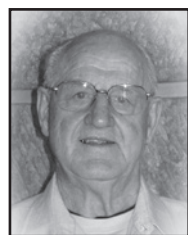
John's health deteriorated in early August and he passed away on the 27th of August, 2020.

The funeral Mass was held at St Brendan's Church, Shepparton, in which he had been ordained in 1964. COVID-19 regulations prevailed and the congregation of 10 was led by Bishop Shane MacKinlay with long-time friend Mgr Frank Marriott reflecting on John's life and priesthood. John ran 'the full distance...kept the faith' and ministered gently to God's people.

Rest now in peace, John.

SYDNEY JOHN NUGENT SM

19/02/1928 – 08/08/2020



Sydney John Nugent was born in Junee, rural New South Wales to John Brendan and Mary Amelia Nugent. Syd attended St Joseph's Convent for his entire primary schooling and boarded at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, for his secondary education from 1940-1945.

After his secondary education, Syd joined the Marist Fathers in 1946. Novitiate was at Armidale in 1947 and profession was made on 2 February 1948. Seminary studies were undertaken at Toongabbie and ordination took place in Junee on 25 July 1953.

In 1954, although he had been appointed to Japan, Syd was asked to go to assist at the new Marist parish of West Sunshine in Melbourne and he worked there for three years.

In 1957 Syd eventually headed for Japan and began two years of language studies. When these were completed in late 1959, he was stationed in the parish of Nara. Syd was to remain at Nara until 1971 during which time he successfully negotiated with the city for land and help to build a church, presbytery and kindergarten after the council had resumed the old Nara church.

In 1971-72 Syd attended the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, Philippines. On his return to Japan he went to Gose as parish priest. Here he helped to give new life to a struggling kindergarten and St Joseph's Old Peoples Home at Kuzu. Syd also built the church and presbytery in Kuzu.

As a combination of hostel care and nursing home care for the elderly was identified as a great need for the mission of the Church in Japan in 1991, Syd moved from Gose to Suzaku in Nara city and began to undertake the building and running of Santa Maria Nursing home.

Syd retired from the Nara mission in 2012, returning to Australia and residing at Montbel, Hunters Hill. After a year of declining health and a brief period at St Anne's Nursing Home, Hunters Hill, Syd was called to God on 08 August 2020.

May he rest in peace.

NORBERT PITTORINO OFM**21/10/1931 – 23/06/2020**

Norbert (Ermanno) Pittorino grew up in Sydney's eastern suburbs, close enough to hear the noise of the Japanese bombing in Sydney Harbour as a ten-year old boy in 1942. He joined the 1954 Franciscan novitiate and may have struggled a little with seminary studies before ordination in 1963, but his life can be summed up in two words: education and mission.

He taught primary school grades at Padua College, Kedron (1963), then went to Oakhill Teachers College, Castle Hill, and subsequently returned to Padua (1966-1978).

There, he wrote a primary school maths curriculum, adopted also by other Queensland schools. He enjoyed teaching but desired to go to the New Guinea mission.

Norbert's wish was granted in 1979. He went firstly to Lumi parish in the Torricelli Mountains of Aitape diocese, then his preferred and enduring contribution was to formation of local candidates for the Order. He was a popular formator for the postulancy year and the Brothers' post-novitiate program at St Didacus friary, Aitape.

He was appreciated too as a patient English language teacher and good cook. He read widely on Franciscan sources and spirituality and shared his knowledge for the benefit of the friars and Poor Clare Sisters. Norbert was an inquisitive researcher, prolific writer and confident teacher.

He continued this commitment after returning to Australia: at Kedron friary (2002-2007), Maryfields friary, Campbelltown (2008) and Star of the Sea friary, Waverley (2009-2019). He wrote and printed Franciscan formation and spirituality programs for the Papua New Guinea friars and for the Secular Franciscans in Australia for whom he was a loyal, hard-working spiritual assistant.

He was the Province animator for missionary evangelisation (2008-2016) and director of the Franciscan Missionary Union (2009-2019) whilst also editing a quarterly Franciscan Missions newsletter for friends, benefactors and former lay missionaries; he was an educator who never retired from the keyboard.

Norbert died with respiratory and kidney issues after only four days' stay in Sacred Heart Hospice, Darlinghurst, aged 88 years. His funeral was held in Mary Immaculate church, Waverley, where he had been ordained 56 years earlier.

Norbert was buried in the friars' section at Macquarie Park Cemetery, Sydney.

May he rest in peace.

THEOPHANE RUSH OFM**21/05/1929 – 31/05/2020**

A young Paul Rush from Melbourne entered the 1946 Franciscan novitiate at 17 years of age and was given the name Theophane. Ordained in 1953, he was sent to Rome for study at the Antonianum (1959-1962), earning a doctorate in Canon Law. He later gained an Australian degree in Jurisprudence. From 1963 to 1972, he taught canon law at St Paschal College, Box Hill, and Maryfields, Campbelltown; he was student master (1966-1968).

Theo took a break from formation work, firstly as a chaplain to the aboriginal community on Palm and Fantome Islands, off Townsville (1972-1973) and then a sabbatical in the United States. There he engaged with the Charismatic Renewal which led to a 23-year residency with the Mother of God covenant community in Washington DC, as priest leader and spiritual advisor.

He returned to Australia in 1996 and took up weekend parish work and lay/religious retreat work based at Campbelltown. He was also a spiritual companion to the Poor Clare Sisters. For 2003-2005, Theo was novice master for the Singapore/Malaysia novices while each group lived for a year at Campbelltown.

From East Melbourne and Box Hill friaries (2008-2010, 2011-2019), he helped with Sunday Masses in Melbourne parishes and on King Island for Easter and Christmas. Since 2009, he was a chaplain at Mercy Place Aged Care, East Melbourne. He had high energy and mental alertness for his years and kept himself fit by regular swimming.

He researched and wrote about Franciscan history in Australia. He was respected by his confreres for his zeal and Franciscan identity and was elected as a delegate to the 2019 Franciscan Provincial Chapter at 90 years of age.

Diagnosed with a brain tumour while in Sydney on vacation in early 2020, Theo accepted the news with typical calmness, faith and optimism. He died in St Joseph's Aged Care, Kensington NSW, five months later, on Pentecost Sunday.

He had just reached his 91st birthday and 70 years of solemn profession. The funeral Mass was held in Mary Immaculate Church, Waverley, near to where the young Paul Rush had attended the 1945 juniorate prior to joining the Order.


It was the first Franciscan funeral to be restricted in attendance but live-streamed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theo's body was later taken to Melbourne and, in the presence of his extended family, buried in St Paschal Cemetery, Box Hill.

May he rest in peace.

ANTHONY KEVIN TOMS

21/03/1938 – 25/09/2020

 Anthony was ordained at St Patrick's Cathedral, East Melbourne on 25 July 1964. In February 1965, he undertook missionary work in the Vicariate Apostolic of Thare-Nongseng, Thailand. Returning to Australia in 1979, Anthony served in the ADF Service at Kapooka, NSW (1979-1980), Puckapunyal (1980-1985), Brisbane & Canungra area (1985-1988) and Melbourne area (1989-1992).

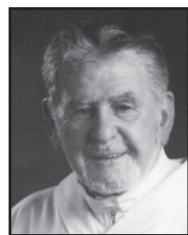
In 1993 he became the Principal Army Chaplain – Catholic and in that same year was appointed Monsignor. He retired from his role as Principal Army Chaplain in 1995 and then served as Parish Priest at Seymour from 1996.

In 2016 Anthony retired and was appointed Pastor Emeritus.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

MICHAEL (MICK) WHEELER

21/12/1937 – 11/08/2020



Mick Wheeler was ordained for Melbourne on 22 May 1971. Appointments followed as assistant priest at Belmont, Collingwood, Jordanville, Manifold and Newport, then as Chaplain to the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. In 1986 he became parish priest of the new parish of St Justin's, Wheelers Hill, a community he built up and served for thirty years before his retirement.

Mick came to the seminary at 26 from being state secretary to the YCW, and the principles and work of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn remained an inspiration throughout his life.

The mark of his ministry was that he had a heart for people. People mattered and they had a dignity and worth that was to be protected and encouraged.

As founding parish priest at Wheelers Hill (not named after him!), he brought to the task a pastor's zeal and enjoyed the challenge.

He was practical and hands on.

The presbytery has a large dining room, because it was important to be able to offer hospitality joyfully and generously. "Pasta with the Pastor" was a way to build the parish as a community. Mick was always an encourager of the young. There were long-remembered trips with young people up the east coast of Australia and young priests recall his interest and ready acceptance. As one young Vietnamese parish priest observed, "He was inclusive."

Mick enjoyed being a priest of the archdiocese, sharing the company of other priests. There was also a quick wit and sense of humour to keep you on your toes.

At Justin Villa, the priests' retirement home, one was called to task after celebrating Mass for the community. "Hey, Robbo, why did you celebrate Mass with your back to us?" "What?" "Yeah, well you had your chasuble on back to front!"

Thomas Merton once said, "I think today it's more important for us to so let God live in us that others may feel God and come to believe in God because they feel how God lives in us."

That's what priests and people saw in Michael Wheeler, good and faithful priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Returned to God, we hold them in prayer.

† Joss Breen OP (Dominicans).....	07/07/2020
† Liam Floyd (Archdiocese of Hobart).....	14/10/2020
† Frank Gibson (Archdiocese of Hobart).....	04/10/2020
† John Langtry (Archdiocese of Sydney).....	05/09/2020
† Donal Madigan OMI (Oblates).....	14/08/2020
† Jim Shelton (Archdiocese of Perth).....	29/07/2020

Please email obits to Sally at: national.office@ncp.catholic.org.au

Specifications: **Text as a Word Document (max. 350 words)**

Digital photos not less than 300 KB sent as a separate .jpg file (not to be included in the Word Document).

NCP working for our members



NCP Memberships 2021

Invitations and renewals
will be sent in January.
Memberships due
17 March 2021.

The Tablet

Greatly reduced
subscription rates
for NCP Members
(\$AUD139.00).
Contact the
National Office.

Websites

[www.nationalcouncil
ofpriests.com.au](http://www.nationalcouncil
ofpriests.com.au)
~
www.theswag.org.au

The Official Directory Website

catholicdirectory.com.au is
updated daily to ensure
current information is
always available.

Ordination Dates

Another free search
on the directory
website.

**Find A
Catholic Church**
findacatholicchurch.com.au

Prayer Calendar

The deceased clergy
listing is updated
regularly and is a free
search on the directory
website.



The National Council of Priests of Australia (NCP)

The National Council of Priests (NCP) is an Australia-wide organisation of Catholic Clergy (Bishops, Priests & Deacons) and Associate Members (Lay, Religious & Seminarians) who join together to support each other in their ministry in the Church.

Founded in 1970 in the Spirit of Vatican II, the NCP is committed to the fraternity and further education of clergy and to representing clergy in the public forum.

The Objects and Purposes of the Council

- To promote a spirit of fraternity among members and other clerics of the Catholic Church in Australia.
- To devise ways and means for members and others to better serve the people to whom they are called to minister.
- To provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to promote the spirit of ecumenism and to establish ecumenical links.
- To effect a liaison with other national bodies of religious women and men and with national bodies of laity.
- To maintain contact with similar associations.
- To be a consultative body to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.