



arcvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.
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Editorial

Do we have a new Pope who is genuinely in tune with the spirit of Jesus Christ? It appears so. Pope Francis from the outset has given signals that he is not going to identify with the regal aspects of a Head of State, preferring to live in ordinary accommodation and dressing in plain priestly garments. Reform of the Vatican Bank is now in his sights. A commitment to addressing the structure of the Curia and Vatican resources is a much-needed step in the right direction. However, there are powerful forces within the Vatican who will resist strongly any attempt to change the way that many things have been done since the Middle Ages. We certainly hope for him in this enormous task.

Of perhaps even greater significance is his statement that the Second Vatican Council was 'a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit'. He went on to say that the approach of those who wish to turn the clock back 'is called stubbornness and wanting to tame the Holy Spirit'. We have not heard such sentiment from a Pope in the past fifty years in reference to that event which is the highest authority in the Church. I stress that this is of greater significance because the underlying principles that Pope Francis needs to give further substance to his outward show of identification with Jesus Christ are to be found in the documents of Vatican II. From the outset Pope Francis showed that he very much wants to present a simplicity that indicates an identification with the poor of this world, as the Church should also be.

Pope Francis stated: 'I prefer a thousand times an injured Church than a sick Church, a risk-taking Church to a Church palsied by self-absorption.' Because of this statement it is puzzling that he appears to have endorsed the action of placing the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the USA under the administration of an external commissioner. Since approximately eighty per cent of the nuns in the US belong to this group, the majority of whom live out the Gospel in serving the sick, the poor, and the marginalised, one might have thought he would want to be open to a new dialogue with them especially

considering the significant decline in the number of new recruits. Perhaps we miss the intention of his words, but his statement that 'It isn't possible that a consecrated woman or man might "feel" themselves not to be with the Church . . .' appears to be an over-reaction to such a large group of women who are very much committed members of the People of God. We trust that such a good-hearted man will overcome any pressures to 'tame the Spirit' present in those who seek justice for the poor on the grounds that they appear to challenge conventional wisdom or threaten entrenched conservatism.

John Buggy

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Letters to the Editor

I wish to express my dismay at the performance of Archbishop Mark Coleridge in regard to his comments on homosexuality on the ABC TV program Q&A on the night of April 1st 2013. They were totally out of line, offensive and abusive to many people. To describe homosexuality as a warp of creation is to offend our God and the human spirit.

If the Catholic Church is to embrace all of its members it must get over homophobic, ignorant views on gay humanity and gay relationships. Jesus would be appalled at the archbishop's representation. The Church is not served by senior clergy expressing ignorant views that help to fuel the mis-treatment of gay men and women, many of whom suffer greatly due to the hate-filled opinions of others. The Archbishop claimed that he practiced his sexuality fully in a celibate condition. Apart from confounding the immediate audience of the ABC program, his statement sounded meaningless when he showed such little understanding.

I wrote to Archbishop Coleridge expressing my disappointment straight after the program. I have had no response and I fear he has no intention to respond. I feel that such rhetoric coming from eminent hierarchical Catholics, our so-called leaders, in 2013 is unpardonable. If they want the responsibility of leadership they should be made accountable for the use of their power.

I doubt that the Archbishop has understood the impact of the grave sins of the Church and its abusive consequences. That is scary and I fear the abuse will continue if we sit back and allow such ingrained thinking to permeate our sensitive, yet open, ears and hearts. Let's make no bones about it. The Church continues to be directly responsible for the suicides, deprivations, discrimination and poverty of countless human beings throughout time who have done nothing in life but wish to love according to their God given natures. That sin continues.

*Michael Gravener
Balgo, WA*

I worked my way through Fr. Peter Daly's wish list of attributes for a new Pope to fix what needs to be fixed (*ARCvoice* Issue 47; March 2013). Now that Francis I is installed, I'm wondering to what extent Peter thinks the Jesuit Pontiff will fulfil them ... or try to.

Moreover, in the series of over a dozen "I hope" statements in the piece, I was hoping Peter's assertive approach might stretch to one glaring area of entrenched avoidance: that is a strategy for obtaining arguably the most useful body of data by which to formulate the necessary institutional 'repair job' for the church.

What was not to be found, however, was a suggestion for tapping into the unsought pool of inevitable wisdom, which could not fail to be of major relevance for the fixing process ... I refer to the collective wisdom residing within the ranks of ex-priests; excluding of course those compulsorily laicised or given the option of resigning for infringement reasons.

This would surely yield such an abundance of realistic appraisals of shortcomings, and proposals on the direction in which reform needs to go, that it is regrettable that even a presumably *avant-garde* 'guy' such as Fr. Daly desists from conceptually going there. To be fair – apart from the possibility of (understandable) subconscious reluctance – the omission may be one of mere equally understandable oversight.

In my (limited) experience, most of these disenfranchised men – many of them married – still carry considerable goodwill towards the church ... would that such respect were mutual! I expect enough of them would meaningfully cooperate, for the outcome to be highly worthwhile. Perhaps too much so!

I contend that such an exercise qualifies as the greatest church survey never conducted, or convocation never held. Were one to be implemented, its product would only be outdone, quantitatively at least, by a similar survey of equivalent non-priestly religious – of both genders – and non-ordained ex-seminarians; or (perish the thought!) of the vast multitude of formerly faithful.

*Anthony Martin
Mortdale NSW*

NOTE: Even computers can let us down and gremlins seemed to be at work during printing the mailing addresses for the March issue of *ARCvoice*! Some may have received two copies – others none. If you missed out, please contact the editor:

knowlden@optusnet.com.au

Tel: (02) 9449 7275

Uncharted Waters

Phoebe Basson

The resignation of Benedict took the world, secular and religious, by surprise, sparking widespread criticism, not only of his handling of the sex abuse crisis but also of his regressive policies. While science and technology continue to extend the boundaries of knowledge, the institutional church, like Lot's wife, looks back, frozen in time. But an intellectual revolt against traditional teachings that increasingly are being regarded as irrelevant has been gathering momentum. Doctrines previously considered inviolate – papal infallibility, the Crucifixion as propitiation for sin, the priesthood as exclusively male and celibate, the universal ban on contraception and the branding of homosexuality as intrinsically evil – are being questioned. Even original sin has come under scrutiny. Fr Jack Mahoney SJ, in his scholarly book *Christianity in Evolution*, examines critically the account in Genesis, the many Scriptural references and the writings of eminent theologians in relation to the theory of evolution, and concludes that it is inconsistent with the doctrine of a loving God. Historian Robert Lane Fox, Emeritus Fellow, New College Oxford and Reader in ancient history at Oxford University, argues that the foundation of the doctrine of original sin is based on a mis-translation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans 5:12-21. Be that as it may, such hitherto universally-accepted doctrines are now being subjected to critical examination. This is the challenge facing Francis. How will he respond? How much support and cooperation can he expect from a hierarchy carefully selected by both his predecessors to exclude all but the most conservative thinkers, limiting their authority to the level which cynics describe as that of branch managers. On Benedict's watch the College of Cardinals was significantly enlarged – from 72 to 170 – in a bid to guard against the possibility of change and reform.

Clericalism, with its emphasis on the separate and superior status of the clergy, outwardly displayed in lavish robes on ceremonial occasions, has long characterised the institutional church. It is even evident in the new English translation of the Mass where *our sacrifice* has become *my sacrifice and yours*. Will Francis step out of the mould? There is room for cautious optimism. Immediately following his election he signalled a new approach, appearing on the balcony of St Peter's without the ornate papal stole, bowing to the crowd in the square

below and asking for their prayers. Afterwards, returning to his hotel, he elected to travel in a bus with the cardinals instead of in the papal limousine. He continued to step out of line when, on Holy Thursday, in a local prison, he washed the feet of prisoners, not only male prisoners but women as well. Some of them were Muslims. He made no distinction.

But these are externals. His approach to doctrinal reform is yet to be revealed. I doubt we can expect any significant changes – he would hardly have received a cardinal's hat for his liberal views. Already he has made it clear that he endorses Benedict's policy of investigation and reform of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, representative of 80% of women religious in America, whose outspoken views on such controversial subjects as abortion, euthanasia and the status of women in the Church conflict with traditional church teaching. He is in fact something of an enigma. The Jesuits, whom one would expect to be supportive of him, are openly critical but he enjoys a close friendship with his Jewish counterpart, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a distinguished Argentinian religious leader with whom he has worked tirelessly to overcome racial and religious prejudice and promote inter-religious dialogue. They have co-authored a book, *On Heaven and Earth*, in which are recorded conversations during which they exchanged views on such diverse subjects as communism, capitalism, fundamentalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, same-sex marriage, abortion and a host of topics that engage 21st century minds.

The eyes of the Catholic world are now on Francis, some with hope, some with misgiving. His is a daunting task. He inherits a divided church, one that has increasingly become an inhospitable, even hostile place for those who question what they are required to believe, where there is no room for freedom of thought or speech and the Eucharist has become a trump card to be withheld in cases of open defiance of classic prohibitions. Priests are especially at risk – laicised, even excommunicated – for stepping out of line. The most recent example is that of Fr Roy Bourgeois of the Maryknoll Missionary Order in America who, after 40 years of exceptional dedication to ministry, often at great personal cost, was laicised, summarily dismissed from the Order and excommunicated for advocating the ordination of women and attending a ceremony at which a woman was ordained. The fate of the bishop who presided at the ceremony was not publicised. Presumably he suffered the same fate. Nearer home there is the dismissal without a hearing of Bishop Bill Morris who dared to infringe the total ban on the mere mention of women's ordination. The fact that he

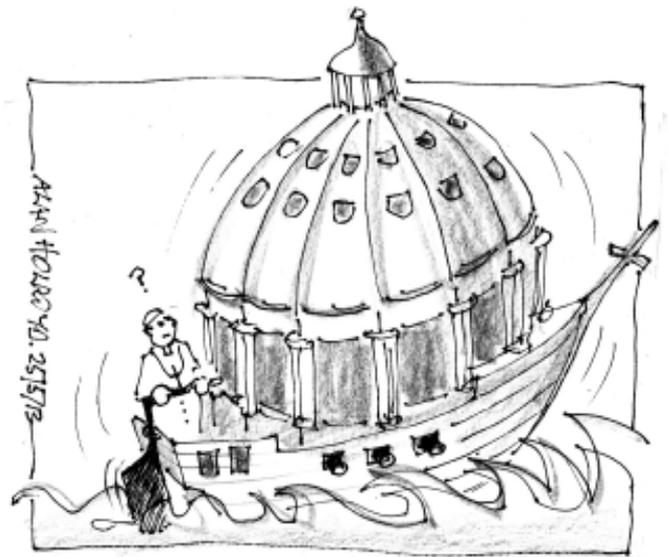
expressed support for it conditional upon the Church's permitting it was not considered in mitigation.

However, there is a fine line between reform and division. Benedict saw in the reforms of Vatican II a threat to the centralised authority of the institutional church, for centuries the cornerstone of unity. He set about reversing John XXIII's vision of collegiality and greater lay participation. So today little remains of the changes to the rubrics and the liturgy that transformed the celebration of the Mass, that made it come to life in our churches as never before, when the spectator Latin Mass, in which the priest and the altar servers alone participated, made way for a communal Eucharistic celebration by priest and people, united in worship. The new English translation, linguistically unacceptable, with archaic and obsequious overtones, approved and foisted on us by Benedict without prior consultation, has alienated clergy and laity alike. Yet not everyone welcomed the Vatican II changes. Did the Council seek to change too much too soon? Will Francis change too little too late? For the Church as we know it is unlikely to survive. This is a hard saying but we need to confront it. Those who have given up hope of reform have relinquished their place in the pews. Others, especially

Phoebe Basson arrived in Australia from South Africa 20 years ago and now calls Australia home. A librarian by profession, her professional interest has largely been in technical libraries both in South Africa and Australia. She currently manages a library serving the building and construction industry.

older Catholics, find this especially difficult and challenging. It is not easy to relinquish a faith that has shaped us and defined who we are. It leaves us rudderless, with a sense of loss – of the sacramental life of the Church, of the Eucharist above all, that has sustained us along the way. And so we hesitate, we stay, even if with reservations, outwardly paying lip service, inwardly critical, yet reluctant to leave.

What can we expect of this new Pope? Will his be a steadying hand on the tiller as he guides the barque of Peter into uncharted waters? Or will his courage, like that of Peter, fail him as he seeks to walk across the water in the gathering storm? Those of us who are still on board have a vested interest.



Orthodoxy anyone?

Carmel Maguire

At one of the entrances to the local hospital complex on a recent morning, an older woman had emerged from a car and was moving off with the assistance of a walking frame. As she did so, a younger woman called to her, 'Are you sure you are all right?' Pausing on her frame, the first woman replied 'I'm not really sure of anything these days'. And so, many of us could say. Certainties are elusive, in all the various climates that we inhabit, whether in the physical, social or religious world.

Recently a newly-installed Bishop in England set out his wishes for his flock. Most of all he wished them to

be 'orthodox'.¹ At first thought at least, it does seem an extremely modest if not stultifying aspiration for a bishop or any pastor or parent to have. Ever since, I have been mulling over the idea of orthodoxy, not in any profound way I assure you, but I am fascinated by the whole notion of who and what is orthodox. By whose orthodoxy is the orthodoxy of others to be judged, and how fixed and immutable should anyone's orthodoxy be about anything anyhow?

The decision of Pope Benedict XVI to retire from office at the end of February could alert us that six hundred years of a practice does not insure its eternal

orthodoxy. One commentator in the media described the Pope's resignation as 'the most courageous and definitive action of his career'.² Hyperbole perhaps, but at least the decision is startling in relation to the widespread perception of Benedict as a bastion of orthodoxy. An editorial in *The Tablet* points out that the resignation 'revealed an important but almost forgotten truth – that a pope could resign'.³ Indeed, far from dispelling questions about orthodoxy, the resignation can throw them to the top of the agenda.

Theologians have long discussed the distinction between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*. Mighty Google led me first to simple definitions: orthodoxy means 'right beliefs' whereas orthopraxis means 'right living'. My mind threatened to enter then into the *faith* and *works* conundrum but I was rescued in the serendipitous *milieu* into which Google delivers us, when I happened on an address given by Pope Benedict when still Cardinal Ratzinger at a Eucharistic Congress in Italy in 2002.⁴ As a scholar he presented both sides of the dilemma. On the one hand: 'The will without knowledge is blind and so action, orthopraxis, without knowledge is blind and leads to the abyss'. On the other hand: 'Doctrine alone, which does not become life and action, becomes idle chatter and so is equally empty.' The then Cardinal went on immediately to point out that 'Knowledge and action are closely united, as are faith and life'.

I find the idea of knowledge-based orthodoxy very appealing. Knowledge is an individual phenomenon and not a passive beast. Data might be its raw material, but in processing the inputs of our senses, our impressions are formed based on life experience, and all the effects of our nature and nurture come into play. Our belief systems are not stock size, not interchangeable with one another. If buying clothes online to fit our bodies can be fraught with problems, so much more difficult are attempts to slot ill-fitting ideas into our individual knowledge bases. So I argue for acceptance of the inevitable, that is that our orthodoxies will not be identical, they will move and change over our lives. And it is no heresy to point out that the Church's

organisational orthodoxies have moved, over the times.⁵ The fact that they have not necessarily moved with the times has called for the intervention of great helmsmen, such as the peasant Pope John XXIII who called the Second Vatican Council into being.

In the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Vatican II, it is great that the Australian Dominican Province has had a large hand in publication of Cardinal Yves Congar's *My Journal of the Council*.⁶ Viewed with considerable suspicion by the Roman *curia*'s conservatives, Congar lived out an orthodoxy akin to that of John Henry Newman whom he admired. Happily for the Council and for us, this suspected firebrand from the beginning saw the reunion of Christians as the ultimate aim of the Council and never let either frustration or physical exhaustion dilute his vision for the people of God and his respect for the *sensus fidelium*. Reading his *Journal* deals us into the urgency and excitement of the Council's work and a feeling for the all-star cast whose personalities and sometimes idiosyncrasies emerge from his writing.

May Francis prove to be a Pope whose orthodoxy will be equal to the challenges presented by the needs of the people of God, among whom are numbered all the people of the earth, for all of whom Jesus lived and died.

1. Unfortunately I have mislaid the issue of *The Tablet* in which this report appeared.
2. Barney Zwartz, *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 February 2013, p.4.
3. A bold step and an opportunity' *The Tablet* 16 February 2013, p.2.
4. Joseph Ratzinger, 'Agape, pax, orthodoxy, orthopraxis': an address at 'Eucharist, communion and solidarity' a Eucharistic Congress in Italy, 2 June 2002. Reprinted from *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 November 2002. Accessed as a link from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com>, on 13 February 2013.
5. For example, some scholars have interpreted frescoes in the Catacombs as evidence that there were women priests in the early Church.
6. Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*. Translated from the French by Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding. English translation edited by Denis Minns. Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2012.



Carmel Maguire taught and researched in Librarianship and Information Studies at the University of New South Wales and these days enjoys being both a Vatican II Catholic and an occasional commentator on matters of faith.



Three Australian Bishops Initiate A Petition Calling For A Council Of The Whole Church

On Tuesday 4 June 2013, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, author of *FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, End Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church ... for Good*, and Bishops Pat Power and Bill Morris called for a council of the whole Church, including lay-persons, to deal with the factors contributing to child sexual abuse and the poor response of the Church. A global petition has been set up at www.change.org/forchristssake which, after just two weeks had already attracted 10,000 signatures, many of them from around the world including the US. According to Robinson, Morris and Power, structural and cultural changes within the Church are needed.

In Australia the various state government hearings and the Federal Government's Royal Commission are investigating the sexual abuse of minors within institutional settings where the Catholic Church will feature prominently.

These enquiries and the Commission will hopefully bring much light to bear on all the ways in which the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia have responded and failed to respond to revelations of sexual abuse over the last thirty or so years. It is hoped that it will then make strong recommendations for the future. Bishop Robinson explains his recommendations in more detail in his new book.

According to Bishop Robinson: 'No matter how well it does its work, the Commission will not eradicate abuse from the Church. It is not equipped to investigate and remove all systemic causes of abuse, such as clericalism – where the status of the priest is higher than that of

the people – and it has no jurisdiction over the Church worldwide.

'Catholic people all over the world are sick of the scandal, and this is a chance for them to speak up and join a collective voice that will be heard in Rome. Change is possible.

'There are only two forces in the Church that have the authority to make the changes necessary to banish sexual abuse: the Pope and the bishops sitting in an Ecumenical Council. Experience over the last fifty years shows that, while a Pope alone can prevent change happening in the Church, a Pope alone cannot bring about profound change and he needs a Council in order to do this (e.g. Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council).

'Pope Francis needs the support of the Catholic people of the world in order to bring about this Council. Millions of good Catholics have been deeply disillusioned, both by the revelations of widespread abuse, and even more by what they have perceived as the defensive, uncaring and unchristian response on the part of many who have authority in the Church and claim to speak in God's name.

'The petition offers an opportunity to all these people to speak up and call for more radical and comprehensive action. It is an attempt to give them a voice and to enable their collective voice to become so powerful that it will be heard loud and clear in the Vatican. It is their children who have been abused or put at risk, so they have every right to make their voices heard.'

Among the suggestions for consideration are greater inclusiveness for lay people (including a greater role for women), issues around obligatory celibacy of the clergy, the Church's attitude to sexual morality and the passion for secrecy and hiding of faults within the Church, especially in the Vatican. This petition is worth signing because it is so rarely that lay people get a chance to speak, and perhaps, with a new Pope, this is a small window of opportunity. The petition is on line. Click on change.org and on the home page you will find a number of petitions. It is under 'For Christ's Sake'. another reference is change.org/forchristssake It is proposed to launch it in Europe and the US soon. You may not wish to sign the petition, but in any event it is well worth reading about the issues raised.

Editor

Bishop Robinson's book,
*For Christ's Sake End
Sexual Abuse in the Catholic
Church ... for Good*

available from

Garratt Publishing:

RRP \$19.95

Sophia Online: \$14.36

Free Call: 1300 650 878

The Petition for a Council

Pope Francis
 Vatican City
 Rome, Italy

We, the under-signed members of the Catholic Church, have been sickened by the continuing stories of sexual abuse within our Church, and we are appalled by the accounts of an unchristian response to those who have suffered. When so many people either offend or respond poorly, we cannot limit ourselves to blaming individuals, but must also look at systemic causes. The situation is so grave that we call for an Ecumenical Council to respond to the one question of doing everything possible to uproot such abuse from the Church and produce a better response to victims. An essential part of this call is that the laity of the whole world should have a major voice in the council (for it is our children who have been abused or put at risk), and that the following subjects be included.

1. Seeking to remove all elements of a religion based on fear;
2. Immaturity in moral thinking;
3. The teaching of the Church on sexual morality;
4. The part played in abuse by celibacy, especially obligatory celibacy;
5. The need for a strong feminine influence in every aspect of the Church;
6. The idea that through ordination the priest is taken above other people (clericalism);
7. True professionalism in the lives of priests and religious;
8. Unhealthy situations in which priests and religious may be required to live;
9. Right beliefs being seen as more important than right actions;
10. Secrecy and the hiding of faults within the Church, especially in the Vatican;
11. Ways in which the protection of papal authority has been put before the eradication of sexual abuse;
12. The provision of structures to make a reality of the “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*) of all Catholic people;
13. The need for each Conference of Bishops to have the authority to compel individual bishops to follow common decisions in this matter.

If you do not have access to a computer to support the Petition on line, you can collect signatures (noting name, Post Code, Date and signature) and post your list to:
Tony Biviano PO Box 2881 Rowville Vic 3178



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Does The Bible Really Condemn All Homosexual Acts?

Alan Clague

The Church now accepts that some humans have a sexual attraction towards the same sex, and may have no heterosexual attraction. It is the performance of homosexual acts that is condemned. In part, this condemnation comes from an interpretation of statements in the Bible. Modern biblical scholarship, changing community values, and improved scientific understanding have led to a re-appraisal and rejection of a number of traditions previously based on biblical statements (e.g. the Bible does not condemn slavery). The evaluation of any historical text necessitates consideration of the exact translation of the ancient language (for the Bible, Greek and Hebrew), placing the text in its historical context, and attempting to discern the intended meaning of the author and its interpretation by the intended audience of that author. Our knowledge in all these areas has increased greatly over the last century. In this article I review some modern interpretations of texts used to condemn homosexual acts.

Two related important texts about homosexual acts occur in the Epistles: 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. The first was written by Paul, the second by an unknown author two generations after Paul's death. Each of these comprises a list of evil people, and each includes men performing homosexual acts. There are problems with the translation of two words pertaining to homosexuality, and a variety of English words have been used to translate the Greek. In Corinthians, Paul uses a word, *malakoi* which literally means 'soft ones'. Its specific translation was omitted from the New Catholic Bible (1970) and the Revised Standard Version but elsewhere it has been translated variously as 'male prostitutes' or 'effeminate'. In Paul's time, male prostitution was commonplace and the prostitutes were often young men dressed up in a feminine (soft) way. Paul follows this word with *arsenokoites*, literally 'men-bedders', and translated as 'perverts' or 'sodomites'. To help put this in context, 1 Timothy needs to be considered. Here, the author groups 'men-bedders' with fornicators and slave-traders or kidnappers. The latter were men who kidnapped others for sale into slavery – including sexual slavery. The author, a leader of a Pauline

community, is repeating the thrust of Paul's list of condemnations, so that together they condemn fornicators, male prostitutes and their clients, and those who procure sex-slaves – real moral problems for those times. These exploitative relationships are not in harmony with the justice for the oppressed in the Kingdom of God promised by Jesus, and they are quite different from a loving homosexual relationship.

Paul also condemns homosexual activity in Romans 1:26-27 as part of a general condemnation of the ungodly and wicked: 'The women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another'. The context of the total passage is a condemnation of idolatry leading to various degradations, including the abandonment of their natural heterosexual relations – a fair representation of pagan religious orgies. Once again, this is not a condemnation of a loving homosexual relationship.

The term 'sodomy' is used as a synonym for anal intercourse, based on the account of the depravity of Sodom, as recorded in the 19th chapter of Genesis. Yet the sin desired by the men of Sodom was the pack rape of Lot's visitors (who should have been made welcome) and of Lot's family, not consensual homosexual intercourse. Pack rape, used as a psychological weapon of war, is well recorded in ancient times, including in the Bible (eg Isaiah 13: 16). Based on the actual biblical text, it is clearly wrong to identify the sin of Sodom, 'sodomy', as homosexual anal intercourse.

Those opposed to homosexuality always quote Leviticus 18:22: 'You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination'. The interpretation of this as a blanket prohibition of male homosexual intercourse ('You shall not lie with a man') is complicated by the addition of 'as with a woman'. Is this a repetition to reinforce the statement or is it a qualification? Of particular contextual importance in the Old Testament is the pervading presence of inequity and injustice in the patriarchal societies of that time. The father of the family was superior to everyone else. Wives and slaves were grossly inferior to men, and considered to be their property. Elsewhere in Leviticus, the value of women and slaves to the patriarch is protected by forbidding their sexual debasement by male kinsmen, other men, or non-owners of the slave. Viewed in this light, the addition of 'as with a woman' may be explained as forbidding homosexual sex associated with domineering debasement of one of the partners, such as occurred with heterosexual sex.

In addition to the Bible, the Church has two thousand years of tradition to influence current teaching on homosexuality. There has been a change insofar as it now accepts that sexual attraction to a member of the same sex is innate in some people. However, it maintains that, if this attraction is present, its expression as sexual intercourse must be suppressed. It is doubtful that this

has a biblical basis. Perhaps the Church should take more notice of Paul. Even though he believed that the return of Jesus was imminent, he understood the driving force of sexuality, and advised the Corinthians who were unable to remain celibate until Jesus' return 'It is better to marry than be aflame with passion' (1 Cor 7:9).

Alan Clague is a retired Chemical Pathologist. He holds a Master's degree in Theology. He is a member of the ARC Secretariat.

We need a pope able to think, willing to learn

John Wijngaards

We need a saintly pope, many people say. Perhaps. But I can't forget the advice of Teresa of Avila, doctor of the church. Given the choice between a saintly confessor and one who is a good theologian, trust the theologian, she wrote. Piety is skin without beef if it lacks understanding. That is why the recent Catholic Scholars' Declaration calls for intelligent leadership in the church, as I will explain.

I was teaching sacred Scripture in the major seminary of Hyderabad, India when, in 1968, Pope Paul VI issued his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Its condemnation of artificial means of birth control was a devastating blow to married couples and their pastors in India. I was all the more appalled when I found out that this decision had been taken in spite of the papal commission's findings. A majority had recommended allowing the responsible use of contraceptives. How could a pope be so unwise, I thought? Three months later, I understood.

As a delegate of the Indian Catholic Biblical Association, I attended a meeting in Rome. Pope Paul VI granted us an audience. I stood close to him. I saw his haggard face and read the anxiety in his eyes. The pope was riddled with fear. It dawned on me that Paul was mentally paralysed: unable really to grasp the intellectual reasons for changing the church's traditional stand on birth control.

His fear would lead to more disasters. At the Bishops' Synod of 1971, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops asked for a study of women's ministries in the church. The question also arose in India. In a research paper for the All India Consultation on New Ministries

in 1975, I concluded: 'It is the social "myth" of women's inferiority that has kept women out of the ordained priesthood'. Unknown to me, the Pontifical Biblical Commission had, during the same year, reported to Paul VI that there are no scriptural objections to ordaining women as priests. Other churches began to ordain women. True to form, Paul VI panicked. His encyclical *Inter Insigniores* of 1976 tried to slam the door shut. It was accompanied by a document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that listed the traditional arguments: Jesus did not want women; it has never been done before; women cannot represent Christ; and so on. Now what is significant in all this is that Paul VI made such a crucial pronouncement on women's role within just five short years: between 1971 and 1976. And he made it against the advice of his own appointed experts.

The discussion truly was a new question at the time. When I explored the issue in 1975, researching libraries I found that up-to-date publications hardly existed. It was a case of theology having to re-examine the sources. I do not blame Paul VI for feeling surprised, even alarmed. Ordaining women as priests would imply major changes. He was right to hold back before committing the church to a definite course. His unforgivable mistake was to refuse to give time for more study and refuse to keep an open mind. Because he did not grasp that he might be wrong, he resorted to suppression. It was a path two of his successors would follow: overly single-minded John Paul II and medieval thinker Benedict XVI. I am one of the 160 theologians who endorsed the recent Catholic Scholars' Declaration on Authority in the Church (see www.churchauthority.org). We

represent more than 100 universities in more than 20 countries. We have come to the conclusion that, at the root of today's lack of reform in the church, lies an abuse of authority inspired by fear and by lack of what may be called collective intelligence.

In today's world, we have to depend on the wider intelligence of others. We submit ourselves to surgery trusting the knowledge of doctors, nurses and medical researchers. We fly from one city to the next relying on the competence of pilots, aircraft engineers and air traffic controllers. This is why Vatican II told leaders to involve the intelligence of the wider community of faith – which has not happened. To quote the declaration: 'Bishops should be elected democratically; the laity should be involved in decision-making; bishops' conferences should be given more autonomy; a Synod of Bishops should exercise real authority.'

The academic scene in the church is littered with cases of pioneering theologians being censured and dismissed from their teaching posts. They include moral theologians, Scripture scholars, feminists, liberation theologians, church historians and ecumenists. But these are the very professionals whom we as a believing community need to map out new paths in a complex world. The systematic persecution of our professional thinkers endangers the survival of the church. Leaders also need flexible intelligence. They should be able to cope with what scientists call a 'paradigm shift': looking at facts from a totally new perspective. When Galileo

proved that the Earth moved round the sun, he was silenced. The stumbling block was the literal interpretation of Scripture: 'The sun stood still in heaven for a full day' (Joshua 10:13). Darwin's theory of evolution was rejected because it contradicted the six-day creation story. The conflict was only resolved by the paradigm shift of appreciating 'literary forms'. New scientific insights demand a revised approach to sexual ethics. Hanging on to medieval concepts, such as a fixed 'natural law', blocks new creative responses. Flexible intelligence re-examines traditional views and grasps that a fresh perspective on ancient questions may hold the answer.

The last thing the church needs in our time is the dogged tenacity of closed minds. Intelligence involves searching, reasoning, discovering unexpected relationships. Intelligence means learning. That is why, while others may call for a saint, I pray for an intelligent pope – whose integrity and courage will make him a saint.

<http://ncronline.org/issues/march-15-28-2013>

print issue under the headline:

'A pope able to think, willing to learn'.

Johannes Nicolaas Maria Wijngaards is a Catholic spiritual author and controversial theologian. Since 1977 he has been prominent in his public opposition to the teaching of the Catholic Church on the impossibility of ordaining women to the priesthood.

'Tainted by radical feminism'?

More like 'living the Gospel'

Joan Chittister

National Catholic Reporter 24th April 2013

The BBC just called – an incident that in itself may well be a measure of the larger import of the situation. It's a strange moment in history. Suddenly everyone in the world, it seems, wants to know what is happening to the nuns and what they can do next. 'Next', of course, means what they can do now that the Vatican is back to questioning both their intelligence and their faith.

In fact, what self-respecting journalist could possibly skip the story? After thousands of years of life-giving service to the church at poverty level – building its

schools, its orphanages, its hospitals, its missionary outposts, its soup kitchens, its homes for the indigent, its catechetical centers – the nuns are told the problem with their work is that it has been 'tainted by radical feminism'? And that by a group of men whose chance of knowing what the term 'radical feminism' even means is obviously close to zero.

So what is going on? Especially at what seems to be a moment of the great change in the church of the autocrats and monarchs to the church of the Jesus who walked among the people and loved them?

Well, for one thing, what's going on is the same thing that's been going on for more than 1,500 years: Nuns everywhere are working with the people, hearing their stories, attempting to meet their needs, having a presence in their lives, simply intent on being the caring face of a merciful church – their ministers in the midst of confusion. Not their dogmatists, not their judges, only witnesses to the Gospel of unconditional love.

At another level, what is going on now is a mysterious work-in-progress. This so-called 'evaluation' of the life of women religious and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States is a process begun long before the present papacy and so, perhaps, difficult to stop midstream.

It may be difficult to halt the process for reasons of personal papal politics. Or perhaps it's difficult by reason of the amount of work already expended. Or maybe it's difficult to stop without resolution for fear of leaving festering sores likely to erupt again, by whim and fancy, without either cause or warning. In which case, the whole renewal of these efforts may well be benign and without issue, strengthened by increased understanding, and the first sign of a 'These-are-my-beloved-daughters-in-whom-I-am-well-pleased' verdict the sisters have not heard since the Second Vatican Council.

On the other hand, the announcement has some very worrisome dimensions. Instead of planning to 'complete the evaluation' or 'continue the dialogue', the report says this new pope has reviewed and condoned the present 'plan of reform'. So it seems the plan is for the church to set up a dummy receivership that leaves a woman's organisation of 57,000 women being run by three men. Case closed. Spiritual criminality determined. Hostile takeover complete. The membership disenfranchised. The body merely another extension of Rome. Its creativity suppressed; its blinders secured; its study of new issues and ideas monitored; its voice for the poor muted by the personal agenda of three men.

So why bother to have an *avant-garde* among the people if the church does not really want to know the needs of the people to begin with? If the sisters have been anything in these post-Vatican II years, they have been, at very least, a bridge between the people on the streets and the people in the sacristies.

And what is the reason given for continuing the external control of the LCWR? Because, they say, the work of the nuns has been 'tainted by radical feminism'. Well, if working to elevate the role and status of women around the world is tainted work, then we are obviously guilty as charged. After all, nuns were the first people in the church to set up schools to educate Catholic girls.

The only difference is that we don't do it because we're 'tainted by radical feminism'; we do it because it is at the centre of the Gospel.

It is modelled by the Jesus who walked with women and saved the woman taken in adultery and cured the Canaanite woman and raised a little girl from the dead. He brought back to life a little girl who by very reason of her femaleness was considered worthless in that society – and in many societies now, and in all of them to some extent. How better to demonstrate the real value of a woman than to raise her, despite the despise around her, to life again? And when that kind of Gospel work becomes unacceptable in the church, why bother with any of it?

'Do you have any hope for any of this?' the BBC reporter asked me. And I answered without hesitation: 'Absolutely, I do'. But how can you? the reporter went on. 'Easy', I said. 'The church now has as its model, it seems, a man who is committed to the poor.'

And what does that have to do with this issue? Everything, I think. After all, who are the poor?

It is impossible to say you are committed to the poor and not know that two-thirds of the hungry of the world are women who get only the leftovers after their husband and children have eaten; two-thirds of the illiterate of the world are women enslaved by their lack of education as the chattel of men; two-thirds of the poorest of the poor, according to UN statistics, are women. And all of them ignored, rejected and omitted even from the language and the official theological development of the church. So much for life; so much for baptism.

It is simply impossible to be really committed to the poor and not devote yourself to doing something to change the role and status of women in the world.

As the developing *The Shriver Report* on women, to be released in January 2014, demonstrates with sobering clarity, that to invest in women is to strengthen their husbands and children, their families and nations, their economic level and social status, their institutions and their intellectual contributions to the world-at-large.

From where I stand, if that's what it is to be 'tainted by radical feminism', then finally, finally, let the Gospel begin in this entire church.

Sister Joan D. Chittister, O.S.B. is a Benedictine nun, author and speaker. She is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, where she served as prioress for 12 years, Sister Joan is an author and lecturer.

Have your say!

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