

A People not a Pyramid

Christianity: Leadership in a Society of Equals

Part I

One of the most significant shifts in theological thinking resulting from the Second Vatican Council was the movement away from the stratified, hierarchical model of Church to a reclaimed ecclesiology of the People of God. It had a decisive influence in the way that Catholic women and men conceived of the way they related to one another first and foremost as sisters and brothers in a community of equals and not as members of a highly structured organisation in which everyone ‘knows their place’. The Council also invited the Catholics to embrace their calling to evangelise the modern world from within and to conduct themselves as honest citizens of the human community in a spirit of decency, confidence and hopefulness. (Gaudium et Spes, # 1)

A Constitution for the Church in the modern world

During Vatican Council II, on November 20, 1965, Pope Paul VI spoke of a “common and fundamental code containing the constitutive law (*Ius Constitutum*) of the church” which was intended to be the moral reference and guide for the interpretation of both the Eastern and Western (Latin) codes of Canon Law. Paul VI had become convinced that the Catholic Church needed to articulate a moral vision and mission of the Church in the modern world which set out the rights and obligations of all Catholic Christians. The moral Charter he envisioned would be known as the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental* (LEF) or *Fundamental Law of the Church* which would serve to enshrine and nurture an ecclesial culture of justice, transparency and accountability in the interpretation and administration of Canon Law. ¹

Pope Paul desired that the work be completed before the revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law would be completed and effectively closed off the Fundamental Law project. He therefore appointed a group of canonists and theologians to draw up the list of moral principles which would form the interpretative core of the Fundamental Law. The project continued mostly in secret until it was finally abandoned a few years after Paul’s death.

In a 1979 article Thomas J. Green of the Catholic University of America wrote about the progress being made in the revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Those involved in this work were commissioned to make sure that the new Code conform with and incorporate Vatican II’s teaching on ecclesiology and in particular, the foundational notion of the *People of God*. Green comments on the role of the Fundamental Law within that perspective:

“First a word or two on the underlying purpose of the document. The special committee states that it is attempting to articulate the basic elements of Church order valid for both the Latin and Eastern Churches. These elements pertain to the constitution of the Church from its foundation or at least from its earliest history.

..... **The document is suitably called *Lex fundamentalis*, since it is a body of general constitutional-law principles.** Such a title reflects the committee's concern to articulate the basic theological-juridical principles undergirding all levels of the Church's organization and operation. The document is to set forth those theological principles basic to the Church's constitutional order. Yet it is not to be primarily a theological draft.

For all practical purposes, the *Lex* is to articulate briefly the Church's present self-understanding as a complex, multileveled community existing within human society and embodying divine and human elements. Its primary sources are various magisterial statements, especially the documents of the Second Vatican Council.”
(Bold added) ²

Work continued steadily and reached the approval stage in 1981 during the early years of John Paul II's papacy. Mysteriously though, the work abruptly ceased. A number of explanations have been offered: that the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* may have given the appearance of American liberal democratic style “Bill of Rights;” that the ‘legal’ formulation of the *LEF* would be an obstacle to Christian Ecumenism which was delicately balanced on the two foundations of ‘Jesus Christ and the Scriptures’ alone and that there was no need for a separate ‘Constitution’ when its key provisions could readily be incorporated in the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law. In fact, a number of them did appear as distinct Canons and are frequently referenced especially by reform advocacy groups, for example:

“From their birth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian Faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action by which they all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one's condition and function.” (Canon 208) and,

"The Christian faithful have the right and even at times 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." (Canon 212 §3) ³

Interest rekindled

Over the last couple of decades, a number of Catholic Reform groups in North America, Europe and, to some extent, in Australia have begun to revisit Pope Paul's vision of a Fundamental Law of the Church. The growing consensus is to revitalise the *LEF* in an updated form which encapsulates the revolutionary principles which underpin *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Sacred Liturgy), *Dignitatis Humanae* (Freedom of

Religion), *Nostra Aetate* (Non-Christian Religious Traditions) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Christian Ecumenism).

At the third international meeting of Priest-Associations and Reform Groups (*Church Reform Network*) in Chicago, October 2016, Fr Helmut Schüller, founder of the Austrian pastoral reform group *Pfarrer-Initiative* (“Priests’ Initiative/Advocacy”) invited eleven participants from seven countries to join him in revitalising the *LEF* project, to reproduce it in plain ethical/moral language and to focus especially on those areas of basic obligations and rights which most concern Catholics today. Schüller is convinced that reform and substantive structural change informed by the moral principle of a revived “*Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental*” are “essential for the Church” throughout the world. In a 2012 interview he explained:

"We are talking about providing basic rights for the people of God and a structure of participation in decision-making and feedback between the top, center and base of the church. We also want to establish a system of control for those who hold power and authority in the church,"⁴

Special attention will be given by the Chicago group to the processes and procedures for redress and accountability in order to deal with violations of the rights of individuals or groups of the Faithful especially resulting from the misuse of clerical authority.

Catholics for Renewal was represented at the Chicago meeting and have accepted that the moral principles of Christian equality and that the notions of obligations and rights embedded in the *LEF* are perfectly consistent with its vision and advocacy. Catholics for Renewal believes that the leadership structure of the Catholic Church and its *modus operandi* have become deeply estranged from the teachings of Jesus, articulated in the Gospels and in Paul’s Charter of Christian freedom enshrined in his letters. Just days before his election as Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio warned the pre-Conclave gathering of Cardinals that the institutional Church risked drifting away from Jesus into self-absorption and narcissism. He said:

"When the Church is self-referential, inadvertently, she believes she has her own light; she ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* [Latin, "mystery of the moon," i.e., reflecting the light of Christ the way the moon reflects the light of the sun] and gives way to that very serious evil, spiritual worldliness (which according to de Lubac, is the worst evil that can befall the Church). It lives to give glory only to one another."⁵

Ironically, this has been going on almost from the beginning of Christianity. Those called to serve as leaders have set themselves over the rest of the faithful and aggrandised themselves into a class of lords and masters (Mt 20:25-26; Mk 10: 41-43; Lk 22: 24-26; 1 Pt 5: 3). It is time for a comprehensive systemic reform of Church leadership which would include abandoning the tokens of clerical privilege and entitlement which symbolise and perpetuate a culture and style of leadership which are inconsistent with the teaching and example of Jesus.

Recovering the memory

In 1965, towards the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church officially reclaimed and re-embraced its original “Constitution” modelled on the teachings of Christ, especially his discourses on the principle of altruistic love and the dignity of all, the expanded into an ecclesiology and developed moral code by Paul. He was acutely aware that the ancient world and even Judaism, his ancestral faith, accepted, tolerated and even demanded strict legal, customary and ritual separation along the lines of race, social status and gender. As a citizen of Rome and visitor to many of the great melting pot cities of the Greco-Roman world, Paul was also deeply conscious of how glaringly obvious was the deep class divide in society: one third of the ancient world’s population was made up of free citizens, one third former slaves and the final one was slaves.

When Paul formulated his Gospel, he set out to make it perfectly clear that in the community of those freely baptised into the new humanity of Jesus, there would be no place for the determinism inherent in the culture and mores of the old pagan family, tribe, clan or city-state. In the Christian community there would be no barriers on the basis of ethnicity, social class or gender. Paul’s revolutionary Charter for the new association of free and equal human beings in Jesus was articulated powerfully and unambiguously among the Christian in Galatia, Corinth and Colossiae. The Charter of Christian life, community order and moral criteria was dangerously subversive of the foundations of Greco Roman society:

“For as many of you as were baptised into Christ, has put on Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male and female.” (Gal 3: 27-28) and “For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5: 1).

Against the background of another deeply divided community, Paul had powerfully reminded the Corinthian Christians of a similar lesson which he had taught them earlier on, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor 5: 17)

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of the same Spirit.” (1 Cor 12: 12-13)

“Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.” (Col 3: 11)

The attractive power of Christianity’s radically distinctive way of life quickly subverted the foundations of the ancient cultures and civilisations which were build on and functioned according to the principles of inequality. The genius and appeal of early Christian preaching was that Jesus

was no so far removed from the orbit of common human experience that he could not be imitated. What he taught and lived was what he had actually realised in his own humanity.

Political philosopher Larry Sidentop strongly argues that Christianity's doctrine of the primacy of conscience, free association and comprehensive social equality stands strikingly apart from all other religious traditions. Sidentop goes on show that Christian society and its moral principles are the authentic foundations of all free, independent liberal democratic societies. ⁶

It was no wonder that the International community which had just ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 recognised that the teachings of Vatican II represented a revolutionary Constitution of the Catholic Church. ⁷ Secular society came to recognise that this Constitution earned the Church's fresh international credibility. The international community was attempting slowly to recover from massive social dislocation, spiritual nihilism, collective trauma and despair after two world wars, realised that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was genuinely engaging with modern society and modelling a moral pathway out of social dislocation and moral paralysis into a future of hope, justice and reconciliation. ⁸

Institutional Amnesia

History is very instructive in providing evidence of the way organisations change and adjust over time to internal and external challenges. The history of Christianity demonstrates the veracity of a sociological axiom that it takes only a short time for a revolutionary idea to attract a rule book, a team of managers and a board of directors. This is what has happened to the Jesus Movement and their original charter, the Gospel. The process of domestication and containment of the original genius of an association of free Christian persons in society of equals began within decades of Jesus and Paul of Tarsus who wrote its primitive constitution.

This essay attempts to tell at least part of the story of how Paul's Gospel of human freedom and equality in Christ was practically neutralised over time by the leaders of the Christian Church. In a twist of extreme irony, the hierarchy has succeeded in re-establishing the same system of tribalism, social inequality and determinism which Christianity had overthrown in the first place. Probably well by the end of the second century, a regressive form of elitism and sectional interest of the old pre-Christian order took hold of the Church's leadership and virtually crushed the spirit of the Christian religious and social revolution.

Some Christian communities very early on reverted to a state of compliance and conformity with the ethos and social order of the Greco Roman society. Evidence can be found, for example, in Col 3: 18-23; Eph 5: 29 - 6: 9; 1 Tim 2: 8-15 and Titus 2:1-10 which reflect the fundamental structures of the *Roman Household Code* which was the very foundation of Roman society. The

Paterfamilias was not only husband and father, he dispensed justice and was the domestic priest and keeper of the household's sacred flame and shrine to the ancestral gods. The *Household Code* sets out exactly these roles, duties and expectations in Roman family life.⁹ Further social regression and deconstruction occurred when Christian neo-Platonist misogynists began to edit women out of the New Testament narrative and when the local community Overseers (*episkopoi*, bishops) stumbled upon the genius of primitive ecclesiastical identity theft and fraud by appropriating to themselves the title and function of 'apostle.' From the end of the first century, it was the presbyters (*presbyteroi*, later "priests") who constituted the 'college of apostles.'¹⁰

A thousand years of regression

In the 10th century, Gregory VII formally excluded the clergy and people of Rome from the process of electing the bishop of that city and the bishop of Rome is the Pope. Gregory also laid the foundations of what later came to be known as the Roman Curia. In 1587, Pope Sixtus V reformed the Gregorian body and established 'congregations' now known as *Dicasteries*. That system of government became the Church's central bureaucracy whose function was to administer the temporal and spiritual affairs of the Holy See.

In 1198, Pope Innocent III made it known soon after his election that although he was "lower than God, he was higher than man (sic)" and above the Law (*super Ius*). Innocent demonstrated his supreme authority over Church and State in 1208 when he placed the entire Kingdom of England under a general Interdict which denied all its citizens the benefits of a sacramental life and even Christian burial. Innocent's collective punishment lasted five years. He even followed up with a similar punishment on the Kingdom of France but was much more lenient. In a show of graciousness he imposed that Interdict for an eight months' duration. Brian Tierney writes that both these punitive actions demonstrated emphatically that papal power could be projected with few if any restraints.

"..... Innocent went on to reaffirm what Gregory VII had claimed before him that the Pope enjoyed the fullness of power, not only over the Church but over the whole of civil society. According to Innocent III, the Pope's *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power) not only set him above all other prelates but also above the law, *super Ius*...Innocent IV went still further, asserting that the possession of *plenitudo potestatis* enabled the Pope to exercise temporal power as well as spiritual power ... The ground was thus well prepared for the concept of as an illimitable, all embracing sovereignty"¹¹

Succeeding Popes continued to teach that papal authority over both Church and State, *plenitudo potestatis*, was according to the express Will of God (*Ius divinum*, Divine Law). Boniface VIII, for instance, in his 1302 statutory decree, *Unam Sanctam*, extended papal power and authority to

cover jurisdiction over the entire human race. In Dante's *Inferno*, Boniface is, ironically, assigned to Hell, the ultimate state of exclusion from divine and human connectedness.

As time passed, Catholic people, kings, princes, theologians and Canon Lawyers became increasingly uncomfortable with the outlandish claims of the papacy, its reckless presumption and its unwillingness to listen and be attentive to what was fermenting in both the Church and secular society and consequently to act responsibly. For the Popes and their courtiers, listening to voices other than those of their inner circle and genuine pastoral accountability were almost non-existent. The papacy was playing the risky game of political dominance at the very time the Church's claims were being disputed and challenged. More dangerous than all of that was the compounding effect of a Church leadership creating a society of inequality that has become so profoundly estranged from the original grace of Christ and the Apostolic community.

Within centuries of the Church's foundation, its leaders began to believe that they were superior all earthly authority, that they were answerable to God alone, that they were divinely endowed with the 'grace and wisdom of office' which in turn admitted them to the inner counsels of God. This elitist conceit led eventually to the excesses of Ultramontanism and its flow on effects to papal couriers and the Vatican bureaucracy. This probably goes some way in explaining the clerical culture of resentment and contempt for civil authority for their encroachment into the domain of religious privilege and entitlement. What this clerical subculture despises most about secular authority in the modern world is that it demands 'accountability' and transparency.

Addressing an audience of priests in Auckland, NZ late in 2014, Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane spoke about the wake up call the bishops received when Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* was published and the Royal Commission into Child sexual abuse began to discover its extent and history. Coleridge conceded that,

'. . . there is a "whirlpool effect" in the Australian Catholic Church, and the two powerful cross-currents at work are: the Royal Commission, and Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. A strange point of convergence [between the two cross-currents] is . . . what is often called clericalism. [Clericalism] is somehow central to the cultural difficulties, or the cultural phenomena that enabled abuse to happen. Somehow, **we thought the law doesn't apply to us.** (Bold added) ¹²

Not surprisingly there is no word in Latin or Italian for 'accountable.' In the Church's governance structure the Pope is answerable only to God, maybe also to an Ecumenical Council, the bishops are only accountable to the Pope; diocesan priests are accountable to their bishops and the laity are answerable to all three. They are not accountable to the laity and this pattern of relationships has little or nothing in common with Christ's teaching or Paul's gospel of equality and freedom.

Pope Francis has describes the subculture of self-serving clericalism as "one of the greatest distortions affecting the Church (in Latin America)" and "a mistaken way of living out the

ecclesiology proposed by the Second Vatican Council.” He went on to say that “we’d do well to recall that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated people, of bishops but all of us make up the faithful and Holy People of God.” Clericalism, has the effect of trivialising and diminishing the laity and their baptismal dignity. Clericalism “forgets that the visibility and the sacramentality of the Church belong to all the people of God and not just to an illuminated and elected few.” Clericalism continues to have the devastating effect of diminishing the Church’s foundational reality as an association of free and equal women and men in the body of Christ.¹³

The Sensus Fidei Fidelium: a brief reappearance of equilibrium

Both the General Councils of Constance (1414-1418 AD) and Basel (1431-1445 AD) sent strong signals to the papacy and the Roman Curia that urgent, systematic reform of the Church needed to be undertaken without delay, to address widespread, systemic abuses and renew itself if it wanted to retain its rapidly disappearing credibility. Both Constance and Basel attempted to effect key structural reforms which the papacy was reluctant to do and also declared that, in lieu of this inaction, General Councils of the Church enjoyed a higher authority than that of the Pope. Constance made known its intentions in the 1445 decree *Haec Sancta Synodus* by which it claimed the authority to resolve the Western Schism which involved three contending popes. *Haec Sancta* also stands in direct contradiction to Vatican I’s dogma of papal infallibility. Sometimes the Magisterium finds that amnesia can be quite convenient. But where necessary, those with a memory intact and deeply devoted to Pius IX’s dogma of Infallibility take their refuge in dismissing a General Council of the Church as ‘heretical.’ Many have maintained the same ideological stance in their ongoing condemnation of the Second Vatican Council fifty years after its close.

Conciliar oversight and governance of the Church by the reformist bishops at Constance continued until unity and stability were finally restored. The Council had struck terror into the hearts of the Roman bureaucrats by issuing its decree *Frequens* which stipulated that popes were henceforth bound to convoke a General Council of the Church regularly and in perpetuity, beginning with the first sessions at five years apart then at periods of every ten years. *Frequens* continues to generate nightmares among the controllers and regulators in the Roman Curia who abhor change of almost any kind.

End Notes

- 1) The *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* Canonical Constitution of the Church proposed by Paul VI would be “a common and fundamental code containing the constitutive law (*Ius Constitutivum*) of the church.” On November 20, 1965 near the close of Vatican II Pope Paul noted “...the opportunity to provide a ‘constitution’ for the Church should be seized while the 1917 code of canon law was being overhauled in the light of Vatican II”

bonusres rosios, “lex ecclesiae fundamentalis. canon law” in *Prezi* on 7 September 2012 Accessed 20/01/2017 <https://prezi.com/p-lbo24hboh/lex-ecclesiae-fundamentalis/>; see also Massimo Faggioli, *The Rising Laity. Ecclesial Movements since Vatican II* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016) 21.

- 2) Thomas J. Green, “THE REVISION OF CANON LAW: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS,” *Theological Studies*, vol. 47, 4 1979: pp. 617-652.. p 603 (Accessed 22/01/2017 <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/40/40.4/40.4.1.pdf>)
- 3) Code of Canon Law (1983): THE OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF ALL THE CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL. Cann. 208 – 223. (Accessed 22/01/2017 http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PU.HTM)
- 4) Sarah MacDonald, “Austrian priest: Dissent reflects church leaders' lack of answerability,” *Catholic News Service*, 8.30.2012. (Accessed 02/02/2017 <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2012/austrian-priest-dissent-reflects-church-leaders-lack-of-answerability.cfm>)
- 5) “Bergoglio’s Intervention: A diagnosis of the problems in the Church,” *Vatican Radio*, 2013-03-27.(Accessed 08/02/2017 <http://www.news.va/en/news/bergoglios-intervention-a-diagnosis-of-the-problem>)
- 6) Larry Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual. The Origins of Western Liberalism* (UK: Random House/Penguin, 2014) provides probably the best account of Christianity’s unique status of becoming, not only potentially but actually, the only *Society of Equals* in history . See also Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church. Receiving Vatican II in History* (Fortress, 2015); harder going is Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1989); In his 2016 Christmas message Pope Francis said,

“The manger invites us to break with the logic of exceptions for some and exclusion for others,” he said. “God himself comes to shatter the chains of privilege that always cause exclusion, in order to introduce the caress of compassion that brings inclusion, that makes the dignity of each person shine forth, the dignity for which he or she was created.” - John Allen, “Closing year of ‘Amoris’ row, Pop rejects ‘narrow-minded’ stance,” *Crux Now*, December 31, 2016 Accessed 14/01/17 <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2016/12/31/closing-year-amoris-row-pope-rejects-narrow-minded-stance/>)

- 7) John Courtney Murray, S.J., “The Issue of Church and State at Vatican Council II,” *Woodstock Theological Library at Georgetown*, December 1966. (Accessed 27/01/21017 <http://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/murray/1966h>); Gregory Baum, “Vatican II: The Church in Dialogue with the Modern World,” *Newman Rambler Vatican II Special Edition No 2*, 2015.(Accessed 25/01/2017) http://newmancentre.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Rambler_2014_Gregory_Baum.pdf)
- 8) Pat Morrissey, “Cover story. Vatican II: 40 years later,” *National Catholic Reporter Archives*, October 4, 2002. (Accessed 25/01/2017 http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/100402/vaticanII.htm); Dulles, Avery. *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).
- 9) Felix Just, S.J., “Household Codes in the New Testament,” *catholicresources.org* (Accessed 25/01/2017 <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Epistles-HouseholdCodes.htm>)
- 10) Ignatius of Antioch, “Let all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and *the college of presbyters as the apostles*; respect the deacons as you do God's law. Let no one

- do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop.” *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1; *To the Trallians*, 2: 1-3 around 110 AD. (Bold added)
- 11) Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory* (Cambridge, 1955; 1968 reprint) 147.
 - 12) Rowena Orijana, “Australia Archbishop links Clericalism to Abuse,” *New Zealand Catholic*, Sept 2014. (Accessed 24/01/2017 <https://www.nzcatholic.org.nz/2014/09/10/australian-archbishop-links-clericalism-to-abuse/>); Cardinal Sean O’Malley of Boston chairman of the *Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors*, admits that: “This (CSA) has been caused in large part by the perception of a lack of accountability on the part of our leadership, causing many people to lose their trust in us and in the church,” he said. “We cannot fail to do all that is possible to restore our credibility.” in “Pope Francis’ sex abuse point man urges bishop accountability,” *Daily News/Associated Press* report, February 16, 2015.
 - 13) Pope Francis, “Clericalism distorts the Church,” *Vatican Radio* 26/04/2016; Eric Hodgens, “Celibacy – Icon of Clericalism” *Pearls and Irritations*, 18/12/2014. (Accessed 20/01/2017 <http://johnmenadue.com/blog/?p=2948>); Marie Keenan, “A Priesthood Imprisoned. A Presentation by Marie Keenan to the AGM” *Association of Catholic Priests* (Ireland), November 17, 2016. (Accessed 20/01/2017 <http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2016/11/a-priesthood-imprisoned-presentation-by-marie-keen-an-to-the-agm/>)

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A People not a Pyramid

Christianity: Leadership in a Society of Equals

Part II

A Ghetto Church and the problem of nostalgia

One of the last defenders of the immutability of the Church's doctrine was Pius X the next to last of the militant anti-modernists. In his 1907 Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* the Pope condemned Modernism as a pernicious internal threat to the Church's orthodoxy and orthopraxis. He charged that the Modernists erroneously taught that "ecclesiastical government requires reformation in all its branches, but especially in its disciplinary and dogmatic parts ... a share in ecclesiastical government should therefore be given to the lower ranks of the clergy and even to the laity, and authority be decentralized. The Roman Congregations, especially the Congregations of the Index and the Holy Office, are to be reformed." Modernism in the mind of Pius X was "the synthesis of all heresies."

In his 1906 Encyclical *Vehementer Nos*, Pius X wrote to the French clergy and laity instructing them that the hierarchical organisation of the Church involves "a society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock." The latter are directed by the former who are endowed with the authority of God. Therefore, Pius concluded that "the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors." ¹

Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani was probably the most famous of the last ones standing. His motto was *Semper Idem* ("ever the same")! Ottaviani and his Curial colleagues made sure that the intrinsic tension and discontinuity in the Council texts between two largely incompatible Christologies and Ecclesiologies would ensure that confusion, controversy and conflict would never cease possibly until another Council sorted out the residual mess.

Ultimately, Ottaviani was triumphant because he achieved stalemate on a documentary level but was resoundingly defeated on the level of the practical application of Vatican II. The bishops went home, consulted their people and applied those teachings, liturgical and structural reforms they discerned were the right ones for their people. In the view of some commentators, there is a pressing need for another Council to sort out the unfinished business and inconvenient legacy of confusion that Vatican II left.

Dismantling the barriers of alienation is top priority in the process of bringing about deep, systemic reform of the structure and life of the Catholic Church. This kind of profound rethinking and restructuring will address in a significant way the profound disenfranchisement and loss of their citizenship in a society of equals. The Magisterium of Vatican II that was interpreted and applied in practical by Pope Paul VI and the overwhelming majority of the Council Fathers has ensured

that Catholic doctrine has shifted decisively from the stasis, appalling hesitancy and indecision of the Tridentine era to embrace a renewed presence and vision in the modern world.

There remain, however, some particular areas of Vatican II teaching which require fundamental correctives and reforms in the way Catholicism is structured, lead, how all its members share in its animation and governance and how it presents itself as moral community in the world. Banned Irish Redemptorist priest Tony Flannery explains:

The Second Vatican Council has put the People of God back into the centre of its teaching about church. Pope Paul VI wanted to give back fundamental rights to the People of God and commissioned the creation of a *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis*, a constitution for the church. That project was stopped by Pope John Paul II. But a church without respect for the conscience of each of its members, without appropriate participation on decisions in the church and without an obligation for those who are leading the church to give account, such a church lives in contradiction to the message of Jesus Christ and of the bible concerning each human being and to its own teaching about society. ²

Incompetence, failures of nerve and opportunities wasted

Despite the actions of the reform minded Councils, the papacy demonstrated an intrinsic weakness in its failure of nerve, courage and sufficient resolve to purge the Church of the widespread endemic corruption among bishops and courtiers in the Roman Curia. Even the last ditch attempts by Fourth Lateran Council (1512-1517 AD) to accomplish ungently needed systemic reform, it could not head off the voices of protest and discontent from all quarters of the Church. In the same year that Council ended, Luther affixed his 95 theses to the chapel door of Wittenberg Castle, an act which triggered the Protestant Reformation. The leaders of the Church showed that they lacked sufficient moral will and institutional flexibility to adapt quickly and confidently enough to challenges confronting them.

Unfortunately too, the papacy acted in a reactive way which only led to an even higher level of insularity and assertion of absolute authority. Papal reluctance and resistance to convoke a General Council finally gave way when Paul III convoked what has come to be known as the *Council of Trent* which, after a string of delays, began in 1545. A significant reason for the resistance and procrastinations by the Pope and the Roman bureaucrats was the ingrained fear that a General Council would take on a life of its own and turn out to be beyond control. If this fear had a name in psychology it would be “Horror Concilii.” ³ Vatican II proved this in dramatic form and much to the chagrin of the unnerved and rattled bureaucrats of the Roman Curia.

The underlying mentality of authoritarianism which governed the behaviour of the monarchical popes over time assumed a kind of creeping gradualism of its own and was absorbed into the lower echelons of Church government and governance. Advancing clericalism acquired and embraced this mentality which became embedded in the subculture’s makeup. Many of its various forms

continue to manifest themselves to the present time and wreck havoc both inside and outside the Church as Gaillardetz and Huels observe:

“The attenuation of the bishop’s relationship to the local church generally coincided with a gradual shift in the church’s ecclesial self-consciousness. The bishop’s integral relationship to his local church was obscured because the church moved away from its theological identity as a communion of Eucharistic communions and became structured as a universal, corporate entity governed by a monarchical power.”⁴

Most of the challenges Vatican I faced but rejected were what Vatican II, for the most part and with some success, attempted to embrace. Instead of the formulaic, dogmatic style of Scholasticism used at Trent, Vatican II adopted the modern language of Christian humanism and, with it, a new semantic framework in which to frame and articulate the Catholic faith. The humanists made an concerted attempt to do this at Trent but the Scholastics with their fixed idealised cosmology and amorphous ‘deposit of Faith’ theology prevailed. At Vatican II it was a very different story. The vast body of scholarly research carried out by eminent Catholic theologians during the decades leading up to the Council provide to be a decisive factor in persuading the bishops that there was solid justification to embrace major shifts in Church doctrine and practice. Most of this ‘new’ theology was expressed in the plain language of modern Christian humanism not in the bloodless categories of Scholasticism. John O’Malley explains what an enormous conceptual struggle this was:

“The three words overlap in their meanings, but in general they look, respectively, to present (*aggiornamento*), the future (development), and the past (*ressourcement*). They all are concerned with change and, in the context of a reluctance to change, operate as soft synonyms for it and of synonyms for reform. They signal the abandonment of the so-called classicist worldview that saw human living in static, abstract, and immutable terms.”⁵

During almost four decades of the John Paul II – Benedict XVI papacies, the Catholic church entered a mini ice age as major reforms of Vatican II such as collegiality, subsidiarity and *synodalism* were pushed sideways, rejected or ‘re-interpreted’ out of meaningful existence.

This is a classic reversion to the safe, predictable and controlling governance over an unequal society. The casualties of this kind of authoritarianism are community identity, communion and the bonds of trust. All are either compromised or shattered as a patronising elite assumed the baptismal gifts given to all then proceeded to dole them (spiritual ‘substances’) out again like presents as if these were a privilege and not a right.

It is becoming increasingly evident that Catholics throughout the world are dissatisfied, even scandalised, with the way the Leadership has failed them and diminished Christ.

Catholics have come to the conclusion that, collectively, their bishops are the real problem and not the key to the solution. Brendan Hoban, a co-founder of the *Association of Catholic Priests*

(Ireland) captures something of this in a recent article protesting the dysfunctional and irresponsible system of Church leadership which has treated its clergy and laity with contempt:

“With adults distraction, annoyance and resentment are not the half of it when they feel that someone somewhere has decided that they don’t need to know (or aren’t able for) what some authority decides is (or is not) ‘good’ for them. Because once they find they have been deceived their allegiance is compromised. It’s what adults do.

Which is why openness, transparency and respect are prerequisites for sustaining loyalty. Adults will only give their loyalty if they are respected as adults.

Which is why infantilism – treating adults as children – no longer works in the modern world. And which is why the Catholic Church, in a more open and questioning society, is struggling so hard to maintain the loyalty of its members.

. Catholics no longer automatically accept direction based on the word of church authority. What pope or bishop or priest says is no longer regarded as authoritative. It has to pass through the sieve of reason and experience. It has to make sense.”⁶

In a recent article in the Australian Fairfax press, Michael Kosiol writes of national and global loss of trust placed in public institutions including religious bodies:

“(Social Researcher) Hugh Mackay says there are good reasons for the collapse in Australians' trust. A multitude of scandals including politicians' travel rorts, *sexual abuse in the church*, trade union corruption and misbehaviour by the banks has seriously tainted the country's major institutions, he says.

"It's not as though this is just a strange stage of history," Mackay says. "I don't think there's any mystery about why it has happened. Institutions are just like individuals in this respect: **if they become too powerful, they will be corrupted by their own power and they will start to become inward-looking.**" (Bold added)⁷

This is exactly what Jorge Bergoglio said to his fellow Cardinals shortly before they elected him Pope and that’s probably what Archbishop Coleridge was referring to in his address to the priests in Auckland at the end of 2014.

A concluding remark in his own words

There is an emerging acceptance by Catholics that the age of Church entitlement and special consideration are over. Church leadership is now under unprecedented pressure to accept its civil obligations to present as a trustworthy citizen of the State and to commit to unprecedented openness, transparency and accountability in relation to the Catholic Faithful.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge in his *Knox Lecture* in Melbourne in 2016, announced that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference had after discussing for years the possibility of holding a

national synod, had finally decided to convoke a National Council (Synod) to take place in 2020. He said that the tipping points for the bishops were the continuing dramatic decline in active participation in Catholic Church life and the forthcoming report on the Catholic Church the by Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In August 2016, Archbishop Coleridge made further reference to this National Council/Plenary in what he sees as its historical, social and theological context:

‘Archbishop Coleridge said bishops had agreed a plenary council or synod was needed because “we are at a time of profound cultural change. Not only in the wider community, but in the Church.” “I think we have to accept the fact that **Christendom is over – by which I mean mass, civic Christianity. It’s over. Now, how do we deal with that fact?**” Archbishop Coleridge said. (Bold added) ⁸

The Catholic community and the rest of the population of Australia will soon find out, possibly much sooner than 2020. One certain way of dealing with “that fact” is to make the National Plenary Council fully inclusive, to make sure that its not just an episcopal talkfest but that all give given equal voice because they are all sisters and brothers in Christ. As the Archbishop Coleridge has affirmed, “It has to be an assembly of the whole Church and not just the bishops.” That’s what the *Sensus Fidelium* is all about.

End Notes

- 1) *VEHEMENTER NOS. Encyclical of Pope Pius X on the French Law of Separation* February 11, 1906. (Accessed 12/02/2017 http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html)
- 2) Tony Flannery, “Goal of Working Group on Fundamental Rights in the Church,” *Tony Flannery’s Blog*, Feb 08, 2017. (Accessed 12/02/2017 <http://www.tonyflannery.com/goal-of-working-group-on-fundamental-rights-in-the-church>)
- 3) John W. O’Malley, *Trent. What Happened at the Council* (Harvard, MA: Belknap, 2013) 49-76.
- 4) Richard Gaillardetz and John Huels, *The Selection of Bishops: Exploring Canonical Alternatives*, Wordpress files p. 17. (Accessed 22/01/2017 https://richardgaillardetz.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/election_of_bishops.pdf)
- 5) John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Harvard, MA: Belknap, 2008).
- 6) Brendan Hoban, “Thinking for Ourselves” *Association of Catholic Priests*, 28 November, 2016. Hoban goes even further, drawing attention to the enormous damage that is inflicted on the Faithful as a result of the Church hierarchical culture of patronising, condescending and infantilising authority:
“..... As Gabriel Daly points out, perhaps the worst effect of enforced conformity is that it weakens conscience. Accordingly, it diminishes an individual’s capacity for personal conviction and moral growth. In simple terms, if we insist in treating people like children,

how can we expect them to respond as adults?” (Accessed 21/01/2017
<http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2016/11/thinking-for-ourselves>)

- 7) Michael Kosiol, “Distrustful Nation: Australians lose faith in politics, media and business,” *The Age*, January 21 2017.
- 8) Mark Bowling “Brisbane Archbishop calls for first synod for entire Catholic Church in Australia since 1937,” *The Catholic Leader*, August 17, 2016. (Accessed 21/01/2017
<http://catholicleader.com.au/news/brisbane-archbishop-calls-for-first-synod-for-entire-catholic-church-in-australia-since-1937>)

In the next *Catholics for Renewal* Newsletter:

Part III of this essay will offer some further observations about the current state of the Catholic Church’s leadership, organisational structures, the exercise of authority and governance practices, the laity and a more detailed examination of what the fundamental rights and obligations of all Catholics would look like and operate in a revitalised Fundamental Law of the Church. Areas of special attention will be the autocratic, unaccountable exercise of papal and episcopal authority; the urgent need for a system of redress in cases of the violation of the dignity and human rights of the Faithful; the measures necessary to correct and remedy the Church’s system of governance which tolerates secrecy and self-interest over transparency, accountability and justice for all the Faithful.

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