

Our Church or Our Museum? – Contributing to a confident, humble, listening, and questioning Church

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1. Making the Eucharist more readily available to the hungry

It is very heartening to see that over 220,000 people have already participated in the preparation for the 2020 Plenary Council and that the secretariat has received over 17,000 submissions including individual and collective submissions from many people gathered here this evening at the invitation of the Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn. We are here, as ever, enjoying the ecumenical hospitality of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Already the Concerned Catholics have hosted a number of events emphasising the need for renewed governance arrangements for our Church in the wake of the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and also the need for women to enjoy equality at all levels of leadership in our Church. I am in broad strong sympathy with all that has been proposed. I note that it is now 50 years ago that Karl Rahner when addressing the clergy of the Archdiocese of Venice said:

‘On the basis of the New Testament and the doctrinal nature of the priesthood we can however conceive of the priestly leader of a community in quite different terms. It is true that for the due exercise of his office he needs the approval of the leader of a wider regional church called a bishop, who for his part must once more live in union and harmony with the universal Church and so with the pope. This basic approval granted by the individual leader of the community is granted by the sacramental laying on of hands, which certainly in its turn requires specific prior conditions in the individual to be ordained. But the more integrated an individual community was from within itself, ie. from below, in terms of faith, communal Christian love, the energy of neighbourly love, and common responsibility for the world, the more it would in a true sense have the right to present from within itself an individual Christian known to it, living with it, integrated within it for the office of leadership, a Christian who had the necessary qualities for this position of priestly leadership and who would be recognised as such a leader by the sacramental laying on of hands on the part of the authorised bishop. Perhaps it will come about that the lack of priests which is becoming ever greater will compel us to admit the

need for priests of this special kind and to allow them to be ordained, priests who come from the specific community concerned and “from below”.’

Fifty years on, the *Kairos* for this idea might have come at the forthcoming plenary council.

2. According Women Their Place at the Table

Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, ‘The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general.’ Surely it must be even more divisive if those who reserve to themselves sacramental power determine that they alone can determine who has access to that power and legislate that the matter is not open for discussion. Given that the power to determine the teaching of the magisterium and the provisions of canon law is not a sacramental power, is there not a need to include women in the decision that the question is not open to discussion and in the contemporary quest for an answer to the question? Francis’s position on this may be politic for the moment within the Vatican which has had a longtime preoccupation with shutting down the discussion, but the position is incoherent.

No one doubts the pastoral sensitivity of Pope Francis. But the Church will continue to suffer for as long as it does not engage in open, ongoing discussion and education about this issue. The official position is no longer comprehensible to most people of good will, and not even those at the very top of the hierarchy have a willingness or capacity to explain it.

The claim that the matter ‘is not a question open to discussion’ cannot be maintained unless sacramental power also includes the power to determine theology and the power to determine canon law. Ultimately the Pope’s claim must be that only those possessed of sacramental power can determine the magisterium and canon law. Conceding for the moment the historic exclusion of women from the sacramental power of presidency at Eucharist, we need to determine if ‘the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life’ could include the power to contribute to theological discussion and the shaping of the magisterium and to canonical discussion about sanctions for participating in theological discussion on set topics such as the ordination of women. As Francis says, ‘Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded.’

3. Handing on the Faith and Church Practice/Allegiance to our Children

This evening, I want to suggest that even with changes to governance and participation, our Church remains at a cross roads between life and death, between relevance and irrelevance, between a Church and a museum in our post-modern world. After the recent Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, Pope Francis wrote in *In Christus Vivit*, ‘A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum.’

I know that many of you persevere, attending events such as this, wondering: how in God's name can we make our Christian faith and our Catholic practice and heritage translatable, communicable, and attractive to our children and grandchildren? We no longer live in a society surrounded by people, most of whom are believers. Some of the best people we know are not. Some of the most outstanding leaders wrestling with the moral, political and economic questions of the Age find little if any sustenance in religious faith. In fact, religious faith is seen to be antithetical to the moral sense of the age, whether it be equal rights for all regardless of their sexual orientation or care for the planet with its burgeoning human population.

In the wake of the sexual abuse crisis, why bother with the Church? In the wake of the Church's ongoing failure to give women their place at the table, why persevere with the Church? In the wake of the Church's wrong turn 50 years ago on the issue of birth control, why expect that the Church will in our lifetime play catch-up with the social mores of those who think the strident utterances of a group of celibate men ring hollow given the prevalence of child sexual abuse by those in the ranks of those supposedly celibate men at the very time that *Humanae Vitae* was promulgated and enforced, requiring that all future bishops sign up to it, without any corresponding requirement that they sign up, for example, to John XXIII's insistence on adequate protection of human rights in all societies? Yes, Paul VI taught: 'each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life'. But five years earlier, John XXIII taught that there were three demands for the juridical structure of any state:

'The first is this: that a clear and precisely worded charter of fundamental human rights be formulated and incorporated into the State's general constitutions.

'Secondly, each State must have a public constitution, couched in juridical terms, laying down clear rules relating to the designation of public officials, their reciprocal relations, spheres of competence and prescribed methods of operation.

'The final demand is that relations between citizens and public authorities be described in terms of rights and duties. It must be clearly laid down that the principal function of public authorities is to recognize, respect, co-ordinate, safeguard and promote citizens' rights and duties.'

I'm not saying that John XXIII was necessarily right, nor that Paul VI was absolutely wrong. But I am saying that each published an encyclical which was an invitation to dialogue, an invitation to reflect on contemporary experience in the light of tradition.

There are many bishops who subscribe to Paul VI's dictum on birth control but who have no time for John XXIII's views on human rights and their best means of protection. I know that many Catholics would continue to distinguish the natural law definitions such as those contained in *Humanae Vitae* from the more contingent prescriptions contained in *Pacem in Terris*. But when the natural law is not self-evident or coherent to many of those naturally

engaged in sexual relations, it is time to call a halt to pontifical pronouncements which purport to be ultimately definitive exceptionless norms.

One of the great things about being Catholic is that one is part of a Church community with an authority structure in place to formulate teachings which can assist all the faithful to discern what it is that God is asking of them, and this can be done by drawing upon the wealth of the tradition and the competence of the present community of scholars and leaders. But it must always be an invitation to dialogue. It must always be a call to form and inform one's conscience, and to that conscience be true.

4. Committing to Dialogue

Just last Friday when addressing a group of theologians, Pope Francis said, 'Theologians have the task of encouraging ever anew the encounter of cultures with the sources of Revelation and Tradition. The ancient edifices of thought, the great theological syntheses of the past are mines of theological wisdom, but they cannot be applied mechanically to current questions. One should treasure them to look for new paths.' He repeated his observation from *Exsultate et Gaudete* that 'spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them. Nor are the Church's sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace, a gift.' Whether the issue be birth control, how best to protect human rights or how best to protect the planet, the Church with its tradition and authority provides us with very sound norms. But these are not sufficient. We need to listen, question, and then discern in the light of people's lived experience and in the light of new insights gained through the sciences. Francis leaves us in no doubt when we hear him telling theologians: 'I studied in the period of decadent theology, decadent scholasticism, the age of the manuals. We used to joke that all the theses in theology could be proved by the following syllogism. First, things appear this way. Second, Catholicism is always right. Third, Ergo... In other words, a defensive, apologetic theology shut in a manual. We used to joke about it, but that was what we were presented with in that period of decadent scholasticism.' Those days are over, or at least, they should be.

As Catholics, we are also able to participate in the key events of life with sacramental expression, liturgy and words which are sufficiently shared and known to allow us to give expression to the fulness of the human reality and a faith-filled reflection on that reality.

As our churches have emptied and as young people have felt the pull of neither obligation nor attraction, we all know the absence of these sharings. We are all now well used to attending funerals and weddings where God does not get a look in. And no matter what the grandeur, mystery or eloquence, we feel that there is something missing. We get to breathe sigh of relief when someone like Kim Beazley at Bob Hawke's funeral is able to say:

'Bob set great store by his pastor father Clem's saying, "If you believe in the fatherhood of God, you must believe in the brotherhood of man."' He still firmly held the second part of Clem's saying but no longer the first. But, for me, I am sustained by the belief he is in the arms

of a loving God. He believed he would live in the hearts or at least the minds of those who knew him. Then, when we all pass, in the history books and stories of future generations, there he will reside while ever his nation abides.'

Or when the charismatic African American preacher Michael Curry can say at the royal wedding of Harry and Meghan: 'French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was arguably one of the great minds, great spirits of the 20th century. Jesuit, Roman Catholic priest, scientist, a scholar, a mystic....(He said) that if humanity ever harnesses the energy of fire again, if humanity ever captures the energy of love - it will be the second time in history that we have discovered fire.'

This evening I speak as a Jesuit who is about to leave Canberra after 11 years living and ministering in your midst. And that's on top of another 17 years when I have been coming and going here in Canberra either to the ANU or to do business up at Parliament House. I take away wonderful memories of these years. I take great delight in remembering the first item of substantive business in the new Parliament House in 1988 recognising the place of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in our polity. I well remember the adrenalin flows during the native title debates in 1993 and 1997-8. I was privileged to chair the National Human Rights Consultation for the Rudd Government in 2009 and to serve on the Religious Freedom Review Panel for the Turnbull Government in 2018. In recent years a group of us has gathered religiously on the first Tuesday of the month in the Jesuit residence at Yarralumla to discuss the issues of the day, in our Church and in our society, in the light of our faith and of our religious tradition. For many years, I was privileged to assist Tony Frey as pastor at Curtin and Garran.

Your children and your grandchildren look at you and our Church today and they ask: what difference does faith really make in your life? How does your religious practice really change your life? How does your religious belief really change your understanding of yourself and our world? Where's the value-add? Where's the added hope, joy, and glory? Where's the added capacity to confront sadness, evil, suffering, and death?

Even if up and coming generations are to believe in Jesus of Nazareth, why the need to be active members of a Church which espouses tradition and authority especially when as a social institution, the Church has been shown to be ill adapted to so many of the changes in the modern world?

5. Keeping the Ship Afloat

I am preparing to take over as Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne next year. So I have started a little reading on John Henry Newman and Henry Edward Manning, two of the great churchmen of Victorian England. Newman came across to Rome on 9 October

1845 and Manning five years later on 6 April 1850. Each of them in his own way wrestled with the place of tradition and authority in the life of the faith community. They both became cardinals, and they both had a bundle of human foibles. I do like the comparison of the two provided by Manning's most recent biographer, Robert Gray: 'Whether one prefers Newman's whingeing or Manning's cringing, that is, whether one estimates the higher Newman's integrity or Manning's obedience, is a matter of taste. There was no question, however, which attitude found more favour at the Vatican. Newman had his answer to that, too: "I suppose saints have been more roughly treated at Rome than anyone else.'

The last straw for Manning with the established Church of England was when the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was required to deliver a definitive and unappealable judgment on the evangelical views of the Reverend George Cornelius Gorham who found himself in conflict with his High Church bishop over the issue of baptism. On 24 January 1850, long after Newman had made his move to what he called 'the one true fold', Manning told Samuel Wilberforce: 'it is indifferent which way the judgment may go. Indeed a decision in favour of the true doctrine of baptism would mislead many. A judgment right in matter cannot heal a wrong in the principle of the Appeal. And the wrong is this: "The Appeal removes the final decision of a question involving both doctrine and discipline out of the Church to another centre and that a Civil Court".' Robert Wilberforce was worried that Manning might be headed down the same path as Newman. He suggested that Manning might look offshore for a sympathetic colonial bishop and establish a Free Church, spared any prospect of state intervention. Manning replied, 'No. Three hundred years ago we left a good ship for a boat; I am not going to leave the boat for a tub.'

Nowadays, many of us see that the ship is full of holes. Could it be that it is sinking? And many, especially the young, wonder about the need for any ship, boat or even a tub? Why not simply believe what one chooses and on one's own, letting a thousand flowers bloom, floating alone on the open seas, clinging to the occasional piece of driftwood should it be to hand in choppy waters, while happily floating unencumbered when the sea is calm and one is close to port?

Those of us who remain Catholic, and who espouse our faith, our doctrine and our practice as a commendable way of life do so because we just don't see how we can live a complete life on our own, following our own star unaccompanied by the community of saints who went before and unaccompanied by the community of believers with us now. Gifted with the tradition and with the authority of the Church, we believe that we can be more attentive to all possibilities and more attuned to truth and to the poor. We see the value in being on a ship, and especially a ship with its own museum. A museum can be a very educative place, but you don't look to the museum as the place from which to steer the ship or as the cabin in which to abide for the course of the voyage.

A year ago, if you'd said to me Cardinal Pell will be in prison, Notre Dame Cathedral will be in flames, and 50 people will lie dead, soaked in their own blood, having been gunned down while attending Friday prayers at their mosque – gunned down by one of our fellow

Australians, I don't think I would have believed you. I'd be asking for proof. And when these things did come to pass, I, like you, was left wondering what room is left in our world, and even in our Church, for the joy, hope and glory of the Easter message which is the key to our Christian faith and the centrepiece of our Catholic mission to the world.

Cardinal's Pell imprisonment is part of a legal process as we seek truth, justice and compassion for all, especially the victims of sexual abuse, during a time of great uncertainty and change. We wait for the law to do its work. We are faced with two awful options. Perhaps Cardinal Pell is a paedophile who has effectively groomed the Church as an institution all the way to the top. But then again, perhaps he is not a paedophile and it has reached the stage in Australia that 12 of his fellow citizens were prepared to convict him of offences beyond reasonable doubt despite all manner of improbabilities because they don't trust him or our Church, no matter what we say or do.

In the streets outside Notre Dame, Parisians gathered and sang *Ave Maria* in the dark as the flames engulfed their cathedral. I had the good fortune to be there a year ago after conducting the wedding of a nephew in Paris. On one of the majestic pillars beside the sanctuary I read the inscription:

'I was born Jewish. I received the name of my paternal grandfather, Aron. Becoming a Christian by faith and baptism, I remained Jewish as the apostles were.

I have for my patron saints Aron the great priest, St John the Apostle, and Saint Mary Full of Grace.

Named the 139th archbishop of Paris by St John Paul II, I was inducted into this cathedral on 27 February 1981 to exercise all my ministry.

As you pass by, pray for me

Aron Jean Marie Cardinal Lustiger

Archbishop of Paris'

Last week the US Supreme Court delivered its decision in deciding that a memorial to the dead of World War I in the shape of a large cross was not in violation of Article 1 of their Constitution. Justice Alito writing for the majority stated:

'With sufficient time, religiously expressive monuments, symbols, and practices can become embedded features of a community's landscape and identity. The community may come to value them without necessarily embracing their religious roots. The recent tragic fire at Notre Dame in Paris provides a striking example. Although the French Republic rigorously enforces a secular public square, the cathedral remains a symbol of national importance to the religious and nonreligious alike. Notre Dame is fundamentally a place of worship and retains great religious importance, but its meaning has broadened. For many, it is inextricably linked with the very idea of Paris and France. Speaking to the nation shortly after the fire, President Macron said that Notre Dame "is our history, our literature, our imagination. The place where we survived epidemics, wars, liberation. It has been the epicenter of our lives.'"

After the shootings in Christchurch, Jacinda Ardern recalled the story of Hati Mohemmed Daoud Nabi, the 71-year-old man who opened the door at the Al-Noor mosque saying, ‘Hello brother, welcome’. These were the last words he uttered before he breathed his last. Prime Minister Ardern said, ‘Of course he had no idea of the hate that sat behind the door, but his welcome tells us so much — that he was a member of a faith that welcomed all its members, that showed openness, and care. ... We open our doors to others and say welcome. And the only thing that must change after the events of Friday, is that this same door must close on all of those who espouse hate and fear.’

At the first Easter, the women stand outside the tomb terrified. The stone has been rolled away. The door between life and death, between heaven and earth, has been opened. The two men in brilliant clothes say to them, ‘Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he is risen.’ The women go and tell their story to others including the apostles, ‘but this story of theirs seemed pure nonsense, and they did not believe them’.

To non-believers, our story of ultimate hope, with meaning beyond suffering, and life beyond death seems pure nonsense. We do believe that ultimately there can be truth, justice and compassion for all. We do believe that a cathedral can be the embodiment of faith and culture from century to century, and can be rebuilt to reflect the glory of humanity and the presence of God in our midst. But the cost and energy expended on bricks and mortar need to be matched by our commitment to those who are poor and on the edges, feeling as if they don’t belong inside any grand structures.

We do believe that the tomb can be opened and the door of welcome made inviting for all if we carry with us the belief in the Risen Lord showing openness and care to all and offering forgiveness to those who espouse hate and fear. Paul tells the Romans that Jesus’ life is now with God; ‘and in that way you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus’.

We are people of the resurrection. Our hope is real in the midst of the mess and complexity of our world and of our lives. We are sent forth from the empty tomb remembering what Jesus told his followers in Galilee about being handed over to the power of sinful men, being crucified and rising again on the third day. This is good news not just for us who remain committed to our Church, but for us always, and for everyone in our world. Not everyone needs to be on the ship, or on the same ship. But we do believe that it is good for everyone, including those clinging to the driftwood in turbulent seas and those floating happily in calm waters, that there be a flotilla of ships ferrying those with religious faith differently informed and led by tradition and authority underpinned by respectful dialogue with all.

We go forth from the darkness bringing the light which we continue to see, the light which emboldens us with hope to do as Prime Minister Ardern told her Parliament. Let me recall her words but render them without the understandable tinge of New Zealand nationalism: ‘Our challenge now is to make the very best of us, a daily reality. Because we are not immune to the viruses of hate, of fear, of other. We never have been. But we can be the people who

discover the cure. And so to each of us as we go from here, we have work to do, but do not leave the job of combatting hate to others. We each hold the power, in our words and in our actions, in our daily acts of kindness.’

6. Being Proximate, Articulating Principles, and Finding God in the Mess and Complexity

Last month, I was in the Philippines. I was there to teach a one week intensive unit on Catholic social teaching and human rights. I walked into the lecture theatre at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila and met 50 students. They were from Tanzania, Kenya, South Korea, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Macau, Hong Kong, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji. They had a range of proficiency in English. They had a range of pastoral experiences and a wide range of educational qualifications. What to do? How to teach? How to engage everyone for many hours a day for a full week in this learning tower of Babel?

I realised that Pope Francis had already visited several of their countries – South Korea, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and the Philippines. I asked people from those countries to share with us their experience of the Pope’s visit to their country. The presentations during the course of the week were very moving. Pope Francis, like all popes, always meets with the big wigs. But he also meets with those who are poorest and most marginal in society. He loves getting close to them. It’s that proximity to the poor that gives his visits such colour and poignancy.

When he went to Myanmar, everyone was waiting to see how he would deal with the military leaders and what he would do or say about the Rohingya – the Muslim refugees who were being displaced across the border in their hundreds of thousands by the military. Pope Francis gave a very measured address to the military leaders speaking about all the right ideals – democracy, peace, justice and human rights. He said that no one should be excluded. But he did not mention the Rohingya by name. His critics, especially those in the western media, said, ‘There you go. He is a leader with feet of clay. He dare not offend the military because he wants to protect his own Christian minority in this largely Buddhist country under military rule.’ He then went next door to Bangladesh. He asked to meet with some of the Rohingya refugees. He openly wept. In company with other religious leaders, including some imams, he prayed with them. His last words in his last public appearance were: ‘The presence of God, today, is also called Rohingya.’ The spirit of God, the spirit of Pentecost, is found in the poorest, in the most marginalised, and in the most complex, messy and irresolvable situations.

On the plane on his way home to Rome, Pope Francis gave a press conference. He told the journalists, ‘I knew that I would be meeting the Rohingya. I knew neither where nor how, but that this was a condition of the journey’. When asked why he did not mention the Rohingya when in Myanmar, he explained, ‘I saw that in the official address [in Myanmar] had I said that word, I would have been slamming the door in someone’s face. But I described the situations, the rights of citizenship, “no one excluded”, to enable myself to go further in private meetings. ... I did not have – so to speak – the pleasure of slamming the door in someone’s

face, publicly, a condemnation, no. But I had the satisfaction of having a dialogue, of allowing the other person to speak, of saying what I had to say and in this way got the message across.’ The spirit of God alive in us as the Church community allows us to bridge gaps and to speak and listen respectfully even with those with whom we passionately disagree, and for the best of reasons.

When Francis visited the Philippines, he celebrated mass for the largest crowd ever to gather in human history. But he also met with 30,000 young people. At that meeting, a young girl described a life of poverty and deprivation marked by violence and drug abuse in her family and in her neighbourhood. The Filipina woman in our class wept as she told the story of the young girl weeping as she asked the pope: ‘Why did God let this happen to me?’ The pope did not pretend to have an answer. He told her: ‘The nucleus of your question almost doesn’t have a reply.’ He went on to say, ‘Certain realities in life we only see through eyes that are cleansed through our tears.’ On the way home on the plane, journalists quizzed him about his inability to answer the little girl’s question. He replied, ‘We Christians must ask for the grace to weep. Especially wealthy Christians. To weep about injustice and to weep about sins. Because weeping opens you to understand new realities or new dimensions of reality.’ The spirit of God alive in us as the Church community allows us and strengthens us to confront the injustices and sin in our world. Some situations seem so immune to justice, truth and compassion. But the spirit empowers us to hope and to work for justice, truth and compassion in precisely those situations which bring us to tears.

Like the Romans, we hear Paul’s message that we have not received ‘a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, “Abba, Father!”’ In the spirit of Pentecost, we celebrate that we are all children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – enduring the suffering of injustice, lies and hostility but with the hope that there might be justice, truth and compassion for all. In John’s gospel, Jesus promises that the Father will send us the Holy Spirit both to teach us everything and to remind us of all that he told us.

I am just concluding my term as CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia. It has been a great posse from which to view the Church’s national mission. To be an organisation fit for purpose we need to deliver cost effective, dignified services to all whom we serve. We need to be focused on wrestling with the big moral questions from the perspective of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. We have the tradition and the authority to assist us form staff animated (and not simply weighed down) by wrestling with the big moral questions, knowing that together as Church we are at the cutting edge making a difference.

In the way of Pope Francis, we are able to build a sustainable mission-driven future by being grounded in proximity to those who are poor and marginalised, by participating in policy and advocacy work with competence and compassion, by feeding the soul through relationships, prayer, respectful dialogue across difference, and ritual, and by working creatively, constructively and with an eye to the ‘value add’ with the limited resources and the unique connectedness we have as Church.

7. Being Ourselves in the Public Square and Making our Full Contribution

As Church we are able to evoke the sacred, respectfully in the midst of the secular. The challenge for us religious folk today is that we inhabit a public square which is not just neutral. The public square is no longer a place where all are welcome whether or not they have a God. It is no longer simply a 'no God' zone; it is increasingly an 'anti-God' zone. So how to conduct ourselves? Let's recall that great example of Pope Francis when he gathered in the Aula with the international corps of journalists after he was elected. He said, 'I told you I was cordially imparting my blessing. Since many of you are not members of the Catholic Church, and others are not believers, I cordially give this blessing silently, to each of you, respecting the conscience of each, but in the knowledge that each of you is a child of God. May God bless you!'

I served on the Ruddock Committee set up after the same sex marriage plebiscite. We provided our expert panel report to the Turnbull government in May 2018. The Ruddock committee conceded that in theory there is a major lacuna in the array of anti-discrimination legislation. If you legislate to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, race, or disability, why not on the basis of religion? Our report was not released until December 2018 by the Morrison government. We recommended both a tweaked tightening of the exemptions for religious bodies in the *Sex Discrimination Act* and the introduction of a *Religious Discrimination Act*. The delay in release of the report and the shambolic handling of its publication highlighted the political problem with our recommendations. The Turnbull wing of the Liberal Party favoured the tweaked tightening of the *Sexual Discrimination Act* provisions but not the introduction of a *Religious Discrimination Act*. The Morrison wing of the Liberal Party were troubled by the former but attracted to the latter.

I constantly meet well educated, compassionate human rights advocates who view religion as a hangover from a long past era. While conceding that human rights are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, they basically think that freedom of religion is more trouble than it is worth, a hangover from a past era. They find religious belief and practice marked by notions of tradition, authority, ritual and permanent commitment mystifying and counter-productive. They prize individualism, freedom, personal autonomy and non-discrimination. They not only welcome increasing manifestations of the secular with a strict separation of church and state. They also relish increased secularisation of society with less reliance and respect being shown to the religious inclination which is quarantined to the sole preserve of the individual's private life – not to be shared in polite company and not to be aired on the public airwaves. Or if aired ever so briefly, to be silently tolerated or publicly declaimed.

Both sides of politics are agreed that it is time to repeal section 38(3) of the *Sex Discrimination Act* which allows a religious educational institution to discriminate against a student on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy provided

they discriminate ‘in good faith in order to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed’. I welcome this bipartisan commitment of the parliament.

Religious schools should not be able to discriminate against students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. But religious schools should remain free to teach their doctrine respectfully and reasonably, in season and out of season. And the law should make that perfectly clear. We all need to concede that some religious teachings can be confronting and upsetting. But it is not for the state to rewrite the Bible or the Koran.

Let’s consider an example that has nothing to do with sexuality. Jesus was fearless in his condemnation of wealth: ‘Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ (Matthew 19:23-24) Church schools have to remain free to teach this doctrine even to the wealthiest children privileged to attend private schools with high fees. This doctrine can be taught respectfully and reasonably even though it is in stark contrast to the lifestyle of many of these students and their families. So too, the teaching of Jesus about marriage and divorce. Yes, there is a large number of students from blended families who have experienced divorce, and there will be an increasing number of students from families with same sex married parents. There’s no doubt that Jesus’ teaching on divorce has been counter-cultural for a long time; so now, his teaching on marriage. A Christian school must be guaranteed the freedom to teach what Jesus taught, respectfully, reasonably and counter-culturally – respectfully because the dignity of all persons must be affirmed, reasonably because a school has a fundamental educational purpose, and counter-culturally because many of the things Jesus taught will never appear in the political manifestos of the Liberal Party or the Labor Party.

Are human rights truly universal, being enjoyed by all those with innate human dignity or are they to be enjoyed only by those attributed human dignity because they are sufficiently like us? And are human rights truly universal, being enjoyed by all at all stages of the life journey, with particular attention to their protection at moments and in situations of greatest vulnerability, or are they to be guaranteed only at those stages of life most likely to permit contribution to the more material aspects of the common good, most particularly, the economic strength of the state?

The American academic Samuel Moyn has observed in his latest book *Christian Human Rights* ‘human rights today, it is increasingly clear, also offer preprofessional paths for the young engaged in resume building. But unlike Christianity, human rights do not give much of a chance for spiritual transfiguration for the rare authentic seeker of transcendence.And one doubts that human rights will ever move true believers to self-sacrifice or even martyrdom, giving themselves as witnesses to the truth of their faith. Secular nationalism found ways to win that level of devotion from its followers, but secular post- and supranationalism so far has not.’ Moyn opines, ‘Human rights activism has transformed the nature of idealism to an impressive extent over a short space of time but has left the world more similar than one might hope.’

8. Humbly Taking on the Big Issues as Church

Our religious faith lived out and animated by Church participation helps provide us with food for the journey, a sense of true north amidst mess and complexity, and the intellectual and spiritual framework for shaping a human life fulfilled by optimal engagement with the world seeking to shape that world as a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

Visiting an exhibit of Early Rubens paintings last week, I was struck by the way in which Rubens when painting in Antwerp, a bastion of Counter-Reformation Catholic faith in the face of Dutch Protestantism, was fond of displaying sheaths of wheat in his religious paintings suggesting that in the Eucharist the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus was truly present as was the life experience, hopes and dreams of the communicant.



Not only we Catholics, but all people of goodwill, are the richer for living in a world where our Catholic heritage can contribute to the formulation of an encyclical like *Laudato Si'* providing some contours for wrestling with climate change, one of the great challenges of the Age.

The one-time *New York Times* columnist Andrew Revkin who has been writing about science and the environment for more than three decades was one of the experts called to Rome for consultations when the encyclical was being drafted. He is not Catholic and is no papal

groupie. When speaking in Australia after release of the encyclical, Revkin particularly emphasised this paragraph from the encyclical (#60):

[W]e need to acknowledge that different approaches and lines of thought have emerged regarding this situation and its possible solutions. At one extreme, we find those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change. At the other extreme are those who view men and women and all their interventions as no more than a threat, jeopardizing the global ecosystem, and consequently the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited. Viable future scenarios will have to be generated between these extremes, since there is no one path to a solution. This makes a variety of proposals possible, all capable of entering into dialogue with a view to developing comprehensive solutions.

Revkin was impressed at Pope Francis's willingness to listen attentively to all views and to weigh the evidence. The encyclical states: 'On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views. But we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair.'(#61)

We all know that climate change is an ongoing challenge for us all. It's heartening to be part of a Church community whose leaders can provide some moral pointers without presuming to be too prescriptive about solutions. In the lead up to the recent federal election, our own bishops issued a statement saying:

'Pope Francis appeals to all of us to start "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" and calls for a "new universal solidarity". Climate change is a complex reality of international import. It is both social and environmental, with solutions that Pope Francis says demand "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature". We in Australia must play our part. The Pope says: "Civilisation requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilisation! Coming up with an adequate energy 'mix' is essential for combating pollution, eliminating poverty and promoting social equality.'"

The Californian bishops have just released a superb document marking the fourth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. They don't just tell governments what they should be doing:

'For our part, we commit ourselves to fulfilling our calling to lead the Catholic Church and its institutions in life-giving responses to *Laudato Si'*. We pledge to work with pastoral leaders and Catholic institutions to:

1. Encourage the faithful to take the St. Francis Pledge—to pray, act, and advocate for solutions to climate disruption—and live out its tenets.
2. Support clergy, liturgists, musicians, and pastoral leaders to integrate the messages of *Laudato Si'* into our life of worship. We commit to offering priest study days and days of recollection to share practical tools, such as homily helps, music, and resources that will regularly help proclaim themes of *Laudato Si'*.

3. Examine with (Arch)dioceses their institutional operations to determine the full extent that each can adopt renewable energy, energy efficiency, and water conservation practices.
4. Explore with (Arch)dioceses opportunities for divestment from fossil fuels, whether through Diocese bank investments, oil leases, etc.
5. Cooperate with Catholic charities and Catholic health care institutions to undertake environmental health and social initiatives, with special attention to the needs of the poor and excluded.

As each of us discerns how best to live and flourish in our own social context, we look to our Church and its leaders not to provide the definitive answers but to provide us with a moral compass, food for the journey, and truly good company as we chart our course to a more promised land. We thank God for Pope Francis who insists:

‘Individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church’s praxis Naturally, every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor, and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace. Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one’s limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal. (*Amoris Laetitia*, #303)’



Rubens reminds us that we should never lose sight of the fun, the mischievous and the playful in the midst of the most divine and transcendental. Here is his painting from his Antwerp period of the baby cousins Jesus and John at play with a dove which of course is the artistic representation of the Holy Spirit.

Having learnt the lessons from our museum, let's step out, well fed and well directed, on our course as committed Catholics, members of a confident, humble, listening, and questioning Church. And let's not take ourselves too seriously. When watching the grandchildren play, let's always see the joy, the hope and glory in the midst of the despair and suffering of the time.