A Golden Opportunity Missed

During a press conference while returning from Africa last November, Pope Francis was asked by a South African journalist whether a couple could use condoms if only one partner was infected with HIV. He avoided answering the question, saying that he didn’t ‘like to descend to such casuistic reflections’ and that we should not ‘ask ourselves whether this or that band-aid can be used for a small wound’. He spoke instead of the need to expand the question to include general problems of injustice - poverty, malnutrition, slavery, environmental degradation.

The question of whether it is morally acceptable to use a condom when there is the danger of AIDS transmission to an unaffected sexual partner is one that has dogged the Church since the identification of the HIV virus as the cause of AIDS. Popes and senior Church spokesmen have strongly condemned the use of condoms in the situation proposed in the journalist’s enquiry. This was greeted with approval by most. Thus, at the time of Pope Francis’ interview, his predecessor had endorsed the use of condoms in the situation proposed in the journalist’s enquiry. We can only speculate why Pope Francis chose this response. Was he concerned that endorsing casuistry in this context would encourage its use in other controversial areas? Was he concerned that hostile opponents of the Church’s general ban on contraceptives would use this as an opportunity to claim that the Church had relaxed this ban? Was he concerned that a prolonged discussion on condoms would deviate attention from his big picture of injustice towards the poor?

We may have the answer to this in his recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love). This is a ‘big picture’ document, encompassing a major review of marriage. He does not mention licit uses of condoms, but does say: ‘We often present marriage in such a way that ... its ideal of mutual assistance (is) overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation’ (para 36). ‘The verbal, physical and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union’ (para 54). ‘Every form of sexual submission must be clearly rejected.’ (para 156). I think it reasonable to infer that within the text is an indirect endorsement of Pope Benedict’s statement. Unfortunately, most Catholics will not read the whole of Amoris Laetitia, and it is a shame that a golden opportunity was missed to give a direct endorsement of Pope Benedict XVI’s concession on the use of condoms for AIDS prophylaxis in that earlier press conference.

Alan Clague
A large and extended family together with a group of close friends gathered just before Easter at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium to celebrate the life of Jim Taverne and remember the contribution that he made in a wide variety of endeavours. Jim was one of the founding members of Australian Reforming Catholics and served on the Secretariat until he was unable to continue because of failing health. His wife Margot, their six sons and daughters, and fifteen of their seventeen grandchildren were present at his farewell and gave loving tributes regarding his dedication to his family and the values that he embodied.

Jim was born in The Hague, Holland and his mother died soon after he was born. He survived the war years, avoiding being captured for slave labour by hiding in a small recess behind a painting in his grandmother’s house. His early years would have been a struggle and yet he managed to fund his way through to getting a law degree by giving mathematics tuition. His love of learning and languages gave him a broad outlook on life and he had an amazing ability to make people feel important and valued regardless of their background or social standing. With this perspective he contributed to various charities and funded an array of foster children around the world.

As one of the founders of Australian Reforming Catholics, Jim was very critical of the way Catholics are often educated in the faith. He not only believed that the Church should reform the way it is governed but also that so much of the teaching of the Church does not resonate with modern thinking and spirituality. He came to realise, of course, that dogma is not faith and that we all need to deepen our own faith by continually searching for the truth. Jim saw the need to go beyond rigid rules, concentrating on living the values that Jesus demonstrated in all that he did.

For me, when I search for one word that best sums up Jim’s demeanour then that word is ‘equanimity’. Equanimity is a state of psychological stability and composure undisturbed by emotions or other happenings that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind. Jim may not have had this in his younger very active days but, in the fourteen years that I had known him, this is the virtue that impressed me. It is a virtue extolled by other religions such as Hinduism, by yoga traditions, and it underlies the gentleness, tolerance, and selfless charity that Jim clearly lived out. When we would meet together, and when religious convictions and beliefs are discussed among a group of people, it is natural for feelings to run high sometimes. Comments from Jim would often help everyone to concentrate on what is really important.

We will miss such a kind and gentle friend but we can rejoice in the fact that we are the better for having known and spent time with him.

John Buggy
International Reform Movement

. . . where to now?

As you know, we decided over two years ago to link with Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) in an attempt to strengthen a wider global reform movement in the Church. This effort became visible when we presented position papers to the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in October 2014 and some of us from various countries were present in Rome at the beginning of that Synod. Many of you have subsequently added to that effort when you provided further input on modern marriage and relationships, gender and sexuality, and the way in which the Church should teach about issues of family life. We had hoped that we would see some significant change in the way that the Church approached these matters after the Ordinary Synod on the Family concluded last year. We particularly wanted to see a way for divorced and remarried Catholics to be included in sacramental life along with the recognition and acceptance of gay and lesbian people.

Now, in responding to the report from the Ordinary Synod last year, Pope Francis has issued his Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (the Joy of Love) not only opening the door for divorced and remarried people to receive communion but strengthening the right of Catholics to be guided by their informed conscience in a range of difficult situations. We should be very thankful for this insightful and compassionate direction he has given us.

However, we remain disappointed that some very important issues affecting many families still need a stronger resolution. We lament the lack of progress in dealing effectively with the world-wide problem of clerical sexual abuse. And it is also disappointing that the new Strategic Committee of CCRI prefers to pick up on the idea of decentralisation and wants to concentrate on fostering grassroots initiated forums inviting bishops and pastors to meet with the laity in dioceses throughout the world. This is good in itself but how is it going to lead to reform? Our experience in Australia is that this may bring about polite conversations over cups of tea but does little towards reform because bishops operate under their own agenda and priests simply follow along. For an international group to be meaningful we need to concentrate on the issues that the whole Church cannot ignore such recognition of the reality of homosexuality (instead of ‘intrinsically disordered’), the need to have an overall acceptance that all instances of sexual abuse should be reported to civil authorities, and a whole change to the way that clericalism and sexism dominates Church governance.

As your representative, I am continuing to provide strong input into the Strategic Committee of CCRI in an attempt to strengthen their current plan which I consider to be quite weak. It is one thing to support Pope Francis for the values he espouses but we cannot draw back from voicing disappointment over lack of progress on key issues that most people see as vital. We will remain linked with CCRI but may need to link also with more potent strategies like those of ‘We are Church’ if we are to help an international reform effort to be viable.

John Buggy
Today, Good Friday, members of ‘We are Church Ireland’ staged a dramatic presentation on Grafton Street, Dublin 2, calling for ‘Justice for Worldwide Survivors of Clerical Child Sex Abuse’ and for members of the Catholic Hierarchy involved in the cover-up of these heinous crimes through not reporting them to the civil authorities, to be brought to justice both in the Civil and Church courts. There is ambivalence and no clear direction from the Vatican on the reporting of clerical child sex abuse to civil authorities worldwide.

A training course organised by The Vatican Congregation for Bishops for newly appointed Catholic bishops from around the world held in September 2015, was told that they had no obligation to report abuse charges to civil law enforcement agencies. The Pontifical commission for the Protection of Minors set up by Pope Francis in 2014 had not been invited by the organising Congregation of Bishops to address the new bishops with their alternate view that all bishops had a moral and religious responsibility to report all child sexual abuse charges to the civil authorities.

The maintenance of secrecy for the crimes of clerical sex abuse is imposed by Article 25 of Pope John Paul II’s motu proprio, Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela of 2001 and by Article 30 of its revision by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010, which impose the pontifical secret on all allegations and proceedings relating to child sexual abuse by clerics. The footnotes to Article 25 and Article 30 apply Article 1 (4) of Pope Paul VI’s instruction, Secreta Continere, which defines the pontifical secret as the church’s highest form of secrecy, and like the secret of the confessional, is a permanent silence. Since becoming Pope, three years ago, Pope Francis has made no attempt to change this maintenance of secrecy. This makes it impossible for the tribunal set up in 2015 within the CDF to censure any members of the hierarchy involved in the cover-ups.

‘Pope Francis must lift this maintenance of the veil of secrecy and the ambivalence surrounding this crime of clerical child sex abuse by demanding that all Catholic Church authorities must be held accountable and irrespective of circumstances must report all clerics accused of clerical child sex abuse to the civil authorities’ stated Brendan Butler, We are Church Ireland.

A timely reminder of a shameful Canon Law

In 1922, Pope Pius XI issued his decree Crimen Sollicitationis, which required all investigations by the Church of clergy sexual assaults on children to be carried out in strict confidentiality ‘in all things and with all persons’, with no exceptions for reporting such matters to the police. The penalty for breaching the confidentiality was automatic excommunication, the Church’s worst form of punishment, involving expulsion from the Church community, refusal of the sacraments and participation in the liturgy, refusal of burial in sacred ground and, if you take the Church’s doctrine seriously, the eternal fires of Hell. ….

The secrecy did not simply apply to what the bishops discovered from their investigations. It also applied to the very process itself. Crimen Sollicitationis was not to be published anywhere, or commented on by canon lawyers. The few copies that were printed for bishops were to be kept in a locked safe where they and their chancellors alone had the key. The success of this venture depended on the outside world not knowing about it.

Kieran Tapsell Potiphar’s Wife p.53
Having just been to see the award-winning movie, *Spotlight*, the historian in me had myself tapping away, using two huge USA organisations called Google and Wikipedia. The reason for my searching was another huge American organisation – the Catholic Church.

*Spotlight* is about the Boston Globe’s team of investigative journalists in 2001, who exposed cases of widespread and systematic child sex abuse by Catholic priests in the diocese of that city. It’s a great movie that is really hard going, as one can identify with the story as it unfolds from the pre-Vatican II days to the present time. Sitting there in the dark, glued to the screen, at times I could not help but think of the reports of the Child Abuse Royal Commission and the journalist who ignited the enquiry. A sense of uncomfortable reality emerged realising these events happened in 2001, while it is a real-life experience in 2016.

Googling ‘*Spotlight*’ revealed associated links to the Catholic Church and ‘Priesthood movies’ which indicated that Hollywood thrives on religious themes – particularly of the Catholic religion, which is understandable, considering its history.

Three that came to mind that have connections with *Spotlight*, were: in 2006, the controversial *The Da Vinci Code* with Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou; in 2008, *Doubt*, starring Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman; and in 2014, the Irish drama, *Calvary*, with a cast headed by Brenden Gleeson.

*The Da Vinci Code* is here because it was so truthfully twenty-first century Baroque, sweeping multi-millions into movie seats, bewildered by the pomp and circumstance of the glorious settings and the daunting power of the Roman Catholic Church.

The power and patriarchy of the Church was certainly there at parish level in New York City in *Doubt*, with Streep starring as school principal, Sister Aloysius Beaver, and Hoffman as the parish priest, Father Flynn, whose relationship with a young altar boy is ‘in doubt’.

*Calvary* is about childhood sexual abuse by a priest and the injustice of using a big brush in apportioning blame, with Gleeson giving a monumental performance as Father James. The challenging feeling from *Calvary* is the horror of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, at the same time presenting a case for the institutional priesthood.

*Spotlight* is disturbingly provocative and compelling. People in the audience of any religious following can relate to the movie characters and the real people they portray. For Catholics today it is understandable that, like Sister James in *Doubt*, ‘I have doubts…I have such doubts.’

---

**ALAN HOLROYD** is ARCVoice’s cartoonist. He has recently graduated as a BA in art history.
Some good news from
Bishop Geoffrey Robinson

ANNE LIM
Published in Eternity *

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson was born into a world of faith. But in another life, it's quite likely that he would have been happier as a family man and may not even have been a priest.

The retired Catholic bishop is aghast when he looks at 12-year-old boys today because at that tender age his mother, a good Irish Catholic, sent him to the seminary. 'Looking back, I would say that my mother belonged to that category of Irish descent who desperately wanted to have a child who was a priest,' says the bishop, who went on to reject his mother's brand of Catholicism and campaign for a radically reformed Catholic Church. He believes his father would have stopped her sending him away so voting if he had not died from a heart attack the year before.

The young Geoffrey thought little of the consequences, though they came to weigh on him later. 'It means that at the age of 12, I was committed to a life of celibacy', he says.

It's clear that relationships are very important to this white-haired gentleman who is as much loved for his oratory and pastoral work as he is criticised by the hierarchy for his progressive views on obligatory celibacy, homosexuality, divorce and women's ordination. While he admits he would have liked to be married when he was young, it's a bit late now for the 78-year-old, who is being treated for terminal cancer.

However, there's one thing he will never regret – being a crusader for justice and healing for the victims of sexual abuse by clergy. Bishop Robinson devoted ten years of his life to fighting for fair compensation and support for adults who had been abused as children by Catholic priests. 'It should never, never, never have happened,' he growls. 'These are priests we're talking about, goddammit.'

Speaking to Eternity in his cosy cottage behind St Joseph's Presbytery in Enfield, in Sydney's inner west, Bishop Robinson says his journey to help victims was also a personal one because he too was abused as a child, although not by a priest. He becomes emotional as he remembers victims' stories. There's no doubt, he says, that his own experience made him more determined to fight for justice.

'They all touched me. I met with many, many victims right here in this room. I met with a couple of hundred together on several occasions, very stormy and difficult meetings. I spent countless hours on the phone,' he says. 'I'd been abused myself, so what I was hearing from them was my story as well.'

He had survived, he says, by putting his trauma 'up in the attic' where he couldn't see it. But while counselling victims he 'had to take it down and had to look at it, and that was a profound experience too'.

While he gained benefit from therapy, it did nothing to still the anger he felt at the church, at certain bishops, and the Vatican. He maintains that when Pope John Paul II was given a report about the widespread nature of sexual abuse by clergy in the late '80s he should have publicly declared the church would fight it tooth and nail. 'But because he was silent, the loyalty of bishops became loyalty to silence.' Bishop Robinson says he had no idea there was a problem of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church until 1987, when a talk by two priests revealed the scale and seriousness of the problem.

In 1994, Bishop Robinson was brought in to stir up the church's national committee for professional standards, which was slowly drafting a protocol to provide compensation and pastoral support to sexual abuse victims. He took over the drafting and endorsement process and, amid fierce debate, pushed through the Towards Healing protocol in 1996. 'It was very difficult because there were older bishops who had handled and mishandled cases themselves and so felt threatened by what this young upstart was bringing forward,' he says.

Bishop Robinson regrets that he was unable to achieve his aim of setting up an independent body to handle cases. 'I had to work according to what I could get out of the bishops... And they were never going to give away the power to determine how much money they paid.'

Bishop Robinson is hopeful that the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – at which he gave evidence in August – will lead to a better system: 'For example, a body that's totally independent of the churches investigating cases, levels of compensation, trying to look at factors within the church that have contributed. They are the three big things you have to do: deal with offenders, help victims and prevent abuse. All three are essential. Also the bishops are not doing nearly enough to look at things that might cause it and the Vatican is doing nothing.' While he believes payoffs are still too small, he says money will never fully satisfy victims.

'If you go deep enough with victims, what you find is
they want someone to turn history around and make the abuse unhappier, and you can’t do that. That’s why I always maintain money is not the number one priority; it may be number two but it’s not number one.’

Bishop Robinson has been on a journey of personal and theological discovery since going to Rome to study at the age of 18.

‘That was great in many ways, bad in others. It was great in so far as it was a fire-and-water experience; I was in a college with people from 45 different nations, mainly non-European, so that was very, very interesting. But I was ten years straight without getting home – that was not good.’ When he did finally come home at age 28, he found it very hard to reassimilate into Australia. ‘I had been off of my culture for those very formative years.’

The seeds of Bishop Robinson’s progressive approach to theology and church hierarchies had been sown during the Second Vatican Council in Rome in the 1960s. ‘The big thing the Second Vatican Council did was change forever in the Catholic Church the balance between Scripture and authority, or Scripture and the Pope.’

Fairly soon, Bishop Robinson rejected large sections of his mother’s Irish Catholic world. ‘That was not for me. It didn’t mean I was a better person or a better Catholic than her. On the contrary, I think she was a much better Catholic than I ever was. She had a faith that was so deep it was daunting. I got the feeling that I could never live up to that ... But I went on a fairly profound journey there that led to ideas that would later make me controversial.’

It was those controversial ideas that brought his career to a sudden halt, he believes. It’s been speculated that he would have been the next Archbishop of Sydney but for his advocacy for fair treatment of victims of sexual abuse. But Bishop Robinson says he had blotted his copybook years before.

A couple of months after he was ordained as a bishop in 1984, a paper he had written about giving communion to divorced people came to light in Rome and ‘I was put down as never to be promoted’. As it turned out, he was happy with the freedom his position as an auxiliary bishop gave him. ‘If you’re a cardinal archbishop you can’t stay silent – it’s demanded that you speak out and say things like ‘No woman will ever be ordained till hell freezes over’. And I couldn’t say that because I don’t believe it.’

Bishop Robinson retired in 2004 after 20 years as a bishop, the second decade being consumed with the sexual abuse crusade. ‘It had taken up about 80 per cent of my time. Because it had been such a personal story as well and so many battles, I was exhausted. And I was also pretty disillusioned, mainly with the Vatican because it had not come off and taken a much stronger line against one of the most massive scandals it had ever had to face.’

He also had a few health issues, but the main reason for retiring, he confesses, was that he couldn’t work with the then archbishop, now Cardinal George Pell. ‘We were chalk and cheese’, he says, adding that he couldn’t back Cardinal Pell on his insistence that homosexuality was ‘perversion’. I thought, ‘This is impossible. My integrity is at stake over a whole lot of things that he stood for’, and I just felt I couldn’t continue, in all honesty.’

After his retirement Bishop Robinson finally had the time to put his thoughts on paper. And that’s when he really got into hot water. His 2007 book, Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church, identified obligatory celibacy as one of the systemic causes of child sexual abuse and called for radical reform of church authority and teachings.

However, he bats away the accusations bishops made against him of dangerous heresy – that was just to keep Rome happy, he insists. ‘It was a case of official disapproval from on high but enormous acceptance by any number of people.’

Bishop Robinson wants to see obligatory celibacy for priests abolished because ‘you’ve got so many people who are living an unwanted, an unaccepted and unassimilated celibacy and that has to be dangerous. There are too many priests who are not merely celibate but, more importantly, they’re living without love … no young person in his right mind should ever give up love.’

Still sporting a healthy head of hair and good colour in his cheeks, Bishop Robinson says his cancer is currently in check and he is thinking of writing another book. ‘It would be on the same theme of a passionate belief in the Catholic Church but a radically reformed church. That sums it up.’

He is not yet ready to turn his thoughts to the next world. ‘My hopes would be that the cancer will be kept at bay for some time. The oncologist is already talking about the next treatment she’s got ... My hope is that it will keep it at bay and, when it doesn’t, it will all happen quickly.’

Dear Archbishop Kurtz,

I am writing to you and to all the ordinaries in the United States to ask you to discuss at your next assembly a core issue of structural reform in our church—ecclesia semper reformanda—an issue that continues to disrespect every aspect of our identity and mission: the decision to see women as not worthy of ordination to the priesthood.

Of all the things that Pope Francis has said and done, the way he opened the Synod on the Family in 2014 was perhaps the most extraordinary: he asked the bishops to speak ‘freely’, ‘boldly’, and ‘without fear’. On the one hand, this exhortation is incredibly shocking, that he would have to ask his fellow bishops—grown men and the church’s teachers—to speak honestly with each other. On the other hand, given the atmosphere of the Vatican where honest dialogue can have such negative consequences, his exhortation was not only necessary but even a modest sign of hope in our not-very-relational church.

IF you believe that the ordination of women to the priesthood is vital for the integrity, mutuality, and viability of our church, I ask you to speak freely, boldly, and without fear.

IF you find there is nothing in Scripture or tradition that is prejudicial against women or that precludes their ordination to the priesthood, I ask you to speak freely, boldly, and without fear.

IF you know that the actual history of ordination—of women as well as men—needs to be acknowledged and carefully understood by you and your fellow bishops, I ask you to speak freely, boldly, and without fear.

IF you know that any given woman is as religiously mature and able to provide pastoral care as any given man I ask you to speak freely, boldly, and without fear.

IF seeing women and men either through a ‘complementarity’ lens or in light of precious ‘theological symbolism’ is not pertinent to women’s ordination, I ask you to speak freely, boldly, and without fear.

Women Priests—the issue that won’t go away
Letter to United States church leaders
John J. Shea, OSA
Sinful Religions  
John Chuchman

Religions that focus on a Next Life and presumed rewards that would be earned by compliance to some set of man-made rules, doctrines, and dogmas are sinful.

Next-Life focused religions end up removing people’s responsibilities for making the most out of The Gift of Life, as it is, relying on a Creator to fix the problems created by people’s lack of focus and responsibility for Creation Now.

Ignoring Jesus’ revelation that The Kingdom of God is at Hand, those instead focused on a next life trade the great Joy of the Precious Present Moment in the hope of some future reward in a next life.

Sad and Sinful.
Sin!

George Rippon

My Irish Catholicism shines through again — Sin was a major element in Catholic education; we had Mortal sin, Venial sin and Original sin:

Sin is any willful thought, word, deed or omission contrary to the Law of God.

All sin involves awareness that the act or omission is wrong and contrary to the law of God. Mortal sin requires very grave matter with full knowledge of the evil of the act or omission and full consent. Venial sin arises from less serious acts and omissions. In the end it is God who judges but first let us have a look at where it all began.

In past articles I often speculated on why God established Creation. He had no beginning, in itself beyond our comprehension, with great respect, tongue-in-cheek, I see Him orbiting around Himself in space. Again with respect, He might have felt some need for beings with whom to relate. So here we are! I hope He forgives me for trying to read Him. One thing is clear in His Creation. Angels and humankind would be free to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. Otherwise He could have made us like robots with no challenge for us to live good lives.

The mess created by our choices...

So angels and humankind were free to do what they decided and looking round what a mess we have made of our God-given freedom of choice! First, there was a great war in Heaven [Rev 12:7] under God’s nose between the angels — goodies and baddies. Working through Revelation I could find no direct reference that Hell was created for the baddies who lost. In fact the Concordance to the New Standard Revised Version has no reference to Hell in Revelation. Human failure started in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were put to the test, a test of obedience. Both Adam and Eve failed although Adam tried to blame it all on Eve and both had the penalty of earning their daily bread by the sweat of their brows, now extended to us all. Theologians have defined this as ‘Original Sin’ with which we are all born. Again my Irish Catechism:

‘What are the effects of Original Sin?

Original Sin darkens our understanding, weakens our will and gives us a strong inclination to evil.’

So as I have said on previous occasions. We start behind the eight ball!

School-level understanding...

My awareness of ‘Sin’ started at home followed by the Irish nuns up to age eight followed by lay male teachers up to age 14 when we could leave school or go to the ‘Tech’ to learn a trade or go to the ‘College’ like me for the ‘Intelligentsia’. Looking back now I never came under the control of Religious Brothers, not that we escaped the school discipline of the thirties and the forties.

After explaining sin, Sister would go round the class seeking examples of serious sin.

Murder always headed the list. To her credit Sister always stressed occasions when killing another might not be a serious sin such as: Self defence or in a just war.

Robbing a bank. In this day and age banks are more likely to rob us. Financial bodies set up to steal people’s life savings—a growing business today often with tragic outcomes.

Worldwide, Hitler, Stalin and other dictators murdering millions of innocent people.

As I said above, our God-given freedom has been abused all down the ages. So sin abounds.

The Ten Commandments:

Our first classification of sin lies in the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai [Exodus 20:1-18]. Detailed explanations follow but apart from brief references to subsequent events I will stick to the sin aspects. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai conferring with God the Israelites got tired of waiting and they got Aaron to make a golden calf.

Many of the Israelites worshipped the ‘calf’ and God alerted Moses as to what was going on. Moses went back down the mountain and when he saw the rejoicing he threw down and broke the tablets on which the Commandments were written. Then Moses asked the classic question, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side?’ [Ex 32.26] Then the sons of Levi came and Moses, told by God, commanded them to take their swords and go through the camp killing those, even friends and relatives not on the Lord’s side. While about 3,000 died that day, God
later sent a plague as further punishment. So when His people sinned God did not spare them.  

Back now to the Commandments starting at Exodus 20:2... 

This follows from the above where God makes it clear that idols and other Gods will not be acceptable. After all from God’s point of view how could people benefit from Gods that did not exist? It is worth noting here that the ancient Romans and Greeks had their own gods. The Second Commandment forbids wrongful use of the Lord’s name. (See later under the Eighth Commandment). In the Third Commandment we are to Keep Holy the Sabbath Day, as God rested on the seventh day after Creation. We have no way of knowing that all Creation did not occur in a twinkling of an eye but the story of Creation had to be told in terms understood by humankind then and now. 

The collision between different commandments...  

Here two of God’s commands collide. Adam and Eve’s sin led the way for all of us to earn our bread by the sweat of our brows. Keeping Holy the Sabbath Day can be difficult when many businesses today work seven days a week so employees have to front up on the Sabbath to earn the daily bread to feed themselves and their families.  

The Fourth Commandment advises, mainly the young to Honour their Parents. 

Commandments Five to Ten get me to the nitty-gritty of my article on sin.  

The Fifth Commandment: ‘Thou shall not kill’... 

Theologians have taken this to includes all forms of major physical violence against another. An example of a ‘just war’ would be the UN response to Saddam Hussein when he invaded Saudi Arabia on the way to take over the oil-rich Kuwait. The second Gulf war was an attempt by the US, the UK and Australia to punish Saddam for having non-existent weapons of mass-destruction. In all the local wars from Korea to Syria millions of young soldiers and civilians have been killed. 

The Sixth Commandment: ‘Thou shall not commit adultery’... 

The Sixth Commandment I will comment on below with the Ninth: ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours wife’. 

The Seventh Commandment: ‘Thou shall not steal’... 

I said above that in this day and age banks themselves were likely to do the stealing, by excessive charges; by rewarding staff who conned customers into putting their cash into investments beneficial to the bank and prejudicial to the customer. The number of class actions against banks confirms this. In this age when morality has gone out the window any way of making a bob cheating another seems to be fair go. 

Cheating on a grand scale is now reflected in tax avoidance by major multinational corporations. Part of the business is allocated in a low tax regime like Ireland, glad to have tax revenue. The profits otherwise returned to the US as tax paid. A recent report on a major corporation earning billions in Australia paid 1% tax in Australia. Business normally pays 30% on taxable income. So much for corporate sin. Imagine how much health and education budgets would benefit if big earners paid their correct taxes? 

The Eighth Commandment: ‘Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour’... 

Clearly this refers to a serious matter in a Court. False evidence sworn under God’s name and accepted by a court could condemn an innocent person to be sentenced to many years in jail. I remember a wise old priest telling us to ‘have a passion for the truth’. Also another old saying: ‘The truth will set us free’. Or the Irish Catechism, ‘A lie is always sinful and bad in itself’. 

The Ninth Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not covet the neighbour’s wife’... 

I was always intrigued by the term ‘covet’, little used today. It seems to reflect a perverse obsession relating to the wife of another man either to take her away or perhaps to have an affair with her, Adultery, bearing in mind the sanctity of marriage, is a serious matter. 

The Tenth Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s goods’... 

Here again a resentment at another’s possession’s including a desire to get hold of them. Maybe I need some theological instruction on ‘coveting’? 

The Commandments get to the basics: no adultery, no stealing, no deceiving and no ‘coveting’. Observing these in life could see you on the way to Heaven.
Jesus when He came greatly enriched the law as laid down in the Commandments. Positives replaced negatives. Love your neighbour, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Be a Good Samaritan to those needing care as others pass by. The Gospels are full of Instances where Jesus enlarged on the teachings of the Commandments but at present I wish to keep to the effects of sin and the retribution that follows.

As a Christian I accept there is an afterlife where we will all be accountable for the way we have lived. Bearing in mind the effects of original Sin, God will be merciful to all who have done their best to lead good lives. I believe there is a Hell but I am not convinced that there is anyone in it. How could a merciful God condemn anyone, however bad and evil, to endless torture?

However in Matthew we read that after rewarding the good, Matthew at 25:41 said. ‘Then He will say to those at His left hand, ‘You that are accursed depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels ‘For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty you gave me nothing to drink and drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick or in prison and you did not visit me’. When they asked how they had failed, He responded: ‘Truly I tell you just as you did not do it to one of the least of these you did not do it to me’. Harsh words indeed but both parties setting off in different directions.

As I reflected there was no reference to Adultery, Violence, Deceiving, Stealing or Coveting, only stress on the way we treated others. At that time there would have been little, if any, social assistance. Nevertheless the principles are the same. We will be judged on how we treated the needy and deprived in our midst. As we go down the street today, we won’t find the hungry or the thirsty, but there is a lot of hidden distress just out of sight.

There are two real and active charities in Australia: the St. Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) and the Salvation Army (Salvos) both with op-shops and quality secondhand clothing for the ‘naked’ — also furniture if required. Both these bodies rely on charitable donations and with a lot of voluntary help the maximum amount of cash is there to help those in need. As a volunteer I often, with my wife, responded to a Vinnies’ distress call late on a Friday to a single parent often with a child and nothing in the fridge for the weekend. We would give food vouchers for the local supermarkets and review furniture and bedding. Help with petrol was also available. Cash donations for these two bodies would qualify as ‘feeding the hungry’ and ‘clothing the naked’. ‘Visiting the sick or imprisoned’ is normally done by friends and relatives. And ‘strangers’ can often be met sharing voluntary work or in church activity.

So, according to Matthew. Jesus’ harshest punishment is reserved for those who fail to help the hungry and the thirsty and also fail to greet the stranger and ignore the sick and imprisoned. Our world would be a much better place if we all ‘got this message’ and acted upon it.

After 2,000 plus years since Jesus our world is in a real mess with wars brutality, injustice, oppression and starvation in many countries. I do at times wonder where God is in the mess we have made but as He tested Adam and Eve in the Garden He is still challenging us all to do better. For all who have tried the answer maybe the following from Paul, 1 Cor. 2:9:

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.

After a gloomy article on sin and retribution I like the note of hope for all who have cared for those in need. Maybe scope for another article on another day?

George Ripon came to Melbourne from the UK in 1968 and settled in a parish in a south eastern suburb. Thrilled by the freedom of Vatican II, he relished the changes particularly in liturgy, reading, giving out communion and preparing para-liturgues. In his own words, he ‘interfered’ in most areas of parish activity for the next 40 years. Saddened by the closing of the Vatican windows under JPII and BXIV he has written a lot in recent years about ‘fixing’ our Catholic church.
My mother was a very special lady. The eldest daughter in a large family, she married a farmer and raised ten children in Hillston, NSW, in what was then, in the 1920's and 30's, an arid western area described in one history as a place, ‘Where the crows fly backwards lest the dust gets in their eyes’. A staunch Catholic – heaven help us if we tried to excuse ourselves from the Rosary at night – she was nevertheless far from naive in accepting all that the priests preached. They were men, after all. Bishops didn’t always fare any better in her estimation. Not long before she died, at 88, she was visited by a bishop. Mum had by then lost my father and six of my siblings, one brother to war, the others in their early fifties to a variety of illnesses including cancer. In an attempt to console Mum the bishop said, ‘Mrs Ryan, God must love you very much to have sent you so much sorrow’. Mum replied, with some acerbity, ‘If that is love I could have done with a little less of it’.

That was Mum. She also had a wealth of sayings to cover a multitude of occasions, but her favourite was: ‘God helps those that help themselves’. I thought of her in Mass this morning, as we were asked once more to pray for vocations in the diocese of Broken Bay. Surely the answer to this problem is blindingly obvious. Allow priests to marry, ordain women as priests and deacons, and appoint elders of the church as our more far-seeing colleagues in other religions have done. ‘God helps those that help themselves.’

The consequence of our lack of priests has been the employment of priests from other countries, in our parish primarily from the state of Kerala, in India. These are good men, many I am sure homesick for their own country, many also with very limited English skills, dropped into a culture that is utterly alien to them. And, as Shakespeare said, ‘Ay, there’s the rub!’, for they seem to come with a missionary’s zeal to take us back to pre-Vatican II and the simplicity of the old green Catechism.

So they choose the archaic form of the Confiteor where we are expected to beat our breasts as we say, ‘Through my fault’. The plenary indulgence has been resurrected for attendance at Benediction and, most dangerous of all, free expression and discussion has been ‘gagged’ in our parish newsletter. Where once we had sometimes very lively debate and incisive, thought-provoking editorials from our editor, we now have an editorial team subject to the opinion of our Parish Priest who decides on the grounds that ‘I need more study’ or ‘If I publish it I will get some complaints’. Instead we are given accounts of visions by mystics and stories we were taught in Primary school.

Pope Francis said, ‘If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then he has nothing’. In his reflection on the leadership of the Church, John Chuchman said, ‘The Catholic Church hierarchy is tied to the unordained mindlessly following its every word, failing to comprehend that its antiquated theology and doctrines no longer motivate or serve as a guide for people’.

An adult Church engages in genuine dialogue. Overseas priests, obviously trained in pre-Vatican II values, seem unable to rise beyond their ‘antiquated theology and doctrines’. So as I sit through Mass on a Sunday I often think of Mum, of how – despite her deep and abiding faith – her intelligence led her often to question, ‘what the priest said’. She welcomed Vatican II as a breath of fresh air through the Church and believed that many things would change. I can imagine, if she were sitting beside me, the wry smile she would give that, more than forty years after her death, in our parish we still have Catholic guilt, unquestioning acceptance and the banning of freedom of speech.

Pray for vocations? No, pray rather for the wisdom to seek alternative solutions to our lack of priests!

NOELENE UREN is a retired primary school principal. Attending the same parish church as your editor, her frustrations echo the sentiments felt by so many other parishioners who yearn for the enlightened days when the Passionist priests were in charge.
Pope Francis resets the moral agenda of the church

KATHLEEN MCPHILLIPS

Jan. 21, 2016, 10 p.m.

Pope Francis’ new book provides an insight into the theology that underpins his unorthodox approach to the papacy.

Last week Pope Francis released his first book *The Name of God is Mercy*. The book provides an insight into the theology and life experiences of Francis that underpin his unorthodox approach to the papacy, and his push to re-fashion the public face of Catholicism to more compassionate Gospel-based values.

It comes from a pope who has, arguably, had the most significant impact on Catholic faith and secular-church relations since John XXIII instituted the second Vatican council in the 1960s. That Council guided the Church and its one billion adherents into an easier relationship with the modern world and humanistic values.

Under recent popes that relationship took a backward step. John Paul II and Benedict XVI took hardline positions on the moral stance of the Church towards social issues, particularly homosexuality, divorced Catholics, married priests and gay marriage. Indeed John Paul II famously called homosexuality ‘part of a new ideology of evil’. While human rights agendas moved forward, the church went backwards and many Catholics left the fold, disenchanted.

The election of Francis in 2013 marked a shift in papal attitudes to controversial social issues. Francis has demonstrated both compassion and theological liberalism in his treatment of marginalised Catholics as well as speaking widely on issues including capitalism and climate change.

In *The Name of God is Mercy*, Francis recounts his views on the role of the church, the importance of compassion and forgiveness and the place of mercy in faith. The heart of his thinking comes from a deep sense of humility – who am I to judge? he states over and again.

For Francis, mercy is at the heart of Christian practice and can only come from an engagement with one’s own experience of wretchedness and acknowledgement of wrongdoing. The Church should not sit in judgement but rather reach out to those who suffer most. Good words, but will this translate to real change? Is it merely a softening of harsh doctrinal language?

There are two issues here. Firstly, no matter how much Francis wants to reach out to marginalised Catholics, the idea of mercy is premised on the recognition that only by admitting to our sinfulness is the door to forgiveness opened. That means that gay and divorced Catholics must acknowledge their wrongdoing to receive forgiveness and be included in the Catholic community. This sits against humanist values that understand sexuality as an authentic expression of selfhood, and not a sinful lifestyle choice and, likewise, of divorce as a process of adult maturation. In short, they are not examples of sin, but of human experience.

JUDGEMENT: For Francis, mercy is at the heart of Christian practice and can only come from an engagement with one’s own acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

Secondly, even if Francis was determined to welcome gay and divorced Catholics into the fold, he is politically stymied. Indeed, it has been widely reported that Francis has made enemies within the Vatican and the broader Church. He is hated by conservatives who want to maintain tradition as inflexible. His liberal stance has exposed church politics as rife with ideological sectarianism. And, no matter how much Francis wants church reform, the decision-making bodies of the church remain with a celibate male gerontocracy where real power resides in the hands of the cardinals, most of whom are profoundly conservative.

Pope Francis has shifted the language of Catholicism and a door of hope has opened. Whether he can translate this to meaningful social change remains to be seen.

Kathleen McPhillips is a sociologist of religion, and lectures at the University of Newcastle.
The relevance of priestly celibacy

The Catholic Herald

04 March 2016

As the concept of celibacy becomes ever more marginal, it becomes much harder to persuade young men to accept it as a lifelong commitment. The Church is once again embroiled in arguments about its place in the Catholic world.

As Catholicism in most Western countries faces a rapidly ageing priesthood, a severe shortage of vocations and declining congregations, abolishing or at least relaxing the ancient rule has become a major item on the agenda of those who advocate large-scale change in the Church. Moreover, the very idea of requiring perpetual celibacy from the clergy seems odd to today’s secular society.

The recent BBC program on Pope John Paul II’s collaboration with the Polish-American philosopher Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka brought this up in a rather tenuous way. Although there is no evidence that John Paul was unfaithful to his vow of celibacy, and quite a lot of evidence to the contrary, the innuendo surrounding the program did illustrate how alien the idea of celibacy has become in today’s culture. As Catholic blogger Melinda Selmys has pointed out, it seems to be taken for granted that close, intense friendships cannot exist without a sexual component. Denying oneself gratification seems strange to most people now.

The traditional idea of the celibate priesthood has been undermined in other ways too. The sexual revolution did its work in the 1970s, when an enormous amount of priests left to get married. Numbers have never recovered, and the resulting shortage of priests has become one of the main pragmatic arguments for relaxing the celibacy rule.

There has also been the long-term effect of the sexual abuse scandals, which have widely, though not very convincingly, been blamed on the practice of celibacy. Probably more important is that the Church has been so defeated and demoralised by the endless scandals that it lacks the confidence to stand by its traditional teachings. So something like priestly celibacy, which was once so commonplace as to be unremarkable, will find outspoken critics among the clergy and few loud defenders among the laity.

While priestly celibacy is a law rather than a doctrine, it is still a very ancient one. It is true that the universal requirement of celibacy in its present form dates from the First and Second Lateran Councils in the 12th century, but its desirability as a requirement for the priesthood is a subject discussed by early Church Fathers, and was well established by the early fourth century.

Enforcement of the norm was sketchy for much of the intervening period, but then so was a good deal of Church government at the time. Celibacy as a norm, however imperfectly applied in practice, has a very long heritage in the Western Catholic tradition.

There are, it is true, exceptions to the rule. Those Eastern Churches in communion with Rome which derive from the Byzantine tradition have retained the practice of having married parish priests, though the requirement for bishops to be celibate remains. More recently, room has been made for married Anglican clergy converting to Catholicism; some observers expected this to be a temporary measure, but no time limit has been fixed.

Letter to the Editor

It was with great relief to know, after reading ‘Through my most grievous fault’ (October ’15) that I wasn’t the only ‘protestant’ refraining from thumping my breast and declaring my guilt in archaic language with the other parishioners. Our Polish priests in East Gosford are enthusiastic and tireless in promoting a vibrant community, interacting participating parish events. Yet Vatican II vision seems to have drifted away and our sermons seem still to be pitched to the children we were rather than to the adults we have become. We have been quite right in exposing and condemning past abuse and wrongdoing of clergy, but I believe the greatest challenge to the future of the Church is how we imagine ‘God’ and what it is to be successfully human.

It is always stimulating to read the newsletter.

Adele Cunningham
Have your say!

ARCVoice is a report of news, opinion and reflection on the renewal and reform currently experienced in the Catholic Church

Your contributions, letters, articles or comments are most welcome

The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of ARC

Please send material to:

The Editor
ARCVoice
Unit 68/28 Curagul Road
NORTH TURRAMURRA NSW 2074
OR (preferably) email: mknowlden@bigpond.com
Tel: 02 9488 7927

ARC Website: www.e-arc.org
contains all back copies of ARCVoice
+ indexes of subjects and authors

-----------------------------------

Annual subscription (from 1 July to 30 June): $30

Concession: $20 for Religious & Pensioners (NOT Seniors)

Renewal [ ] New Member [ ]

Name ........................................................................................................................................................................

Address ........................................................................................................................................................................

............................................................................................... Postcode ......................................................

Telephone (…) ......................... Mobile .................................

Fax (…) ............................... Email ........................................

Subscription $ .............

Donation (always welcome) $ .............

TOTAL $ .............

Payment can be made by cheque, money order, cash or by direct deposit to ARC’s Westpac Account
BSB 032-089 Account No. 14-7944 (Record your name at the bank and let us know)

Would you like to share in the work for ARC in any way? circle: YES / NO If yes, please let us know what you would want to do.

Send to ARC c/- Rob Brian 28 Lancaster Road, DOVER HEIGHTS, New South Wales 2030