

THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' PLENARY COUNCIL – TAKE TWO

The first edition of this paper, a scathing criticism of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference over the proposed Plenary Council, published on the Solemnity of the Assumption, was grounded in the belief that a list of issues put before the faithful for their consideration on the Plenary Council website had the bishops' approval. This seems not to have been the case; it was but a draft prepared from the ruminations of disaffected Catholics. The list has since been removed from the website but a copy may be viewed in the Appendix to this paper.

Hilaire Belloc was responsible for a ditty whose burden is apposite—

Am I a man or am I a mouse?

Am I hedger or a dodger?

I should bloody well like to know

Who's running this damned show—

Is it me or the top floor lodger?¹

Are the bishops in charge of their own website—and if not, why not? And if not, who is running it?

As the reader will see, none of the draft suggested 'matters' had anything to do with the bishops' responsibilities to look to the salvation of the souls of the faithful, the promotion of the faith established on earth by Jesus Christ, or the ennoblement of Christ's Catholic Church. They concerned, rather, secular and ideological matters, not to mention the disordered and perverted, as if involvement in them was a desideratum. The immersion of the list's draftsmen in the *spiritus mundi* rather than the spirit of Catholicism is patent, their invocation of Vatican II an irrelevancy. Yet the draft may serve a purpose. It provides a list of what the bishops should avoid.

Practising homosexuals are morally perverted. They do not cease to be morally perverted because their identity is hidden under an acronym. Women are, through the Divine ordination, in subjection to men. (*Genesis* 3: 16) That is Catholic teaching, opposed to the Feminist obsession. Their subjection is the reason why the sacrament of Order can never be validly conferred on a woman. (*Summa Theologiae* Suppl. Q. 39, a. 1, resp.) A woman is neither to teach nor exercise authority over man in the Church as St Paul has clearly taught (*I Timothy* 2: 12; *I Corinthians* 14: 34).

The Church's insistence on this order between women and men, *established by Almighty God*, does not operate to deny—

) the peculiar talents of women,

) their undoubted powers of intellect and of will,

) that many women are morally better than men,

) the authority entrusted to them in temporal matters. (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, op. cit., ad 1, 2 & 3)

¹ Quoted by J. B. Morton in *Hilaire Belloc, A Memoir*, London, 1955, p. 28.

Nor does it demean women or diminish the obligations of men to cherish and respect them, attitudes which are equally part of Catholic teaching (*Ephesians* 5: 22-30; *Colossians* 3: 18, 19; *I Peter* 3: 1-7; *Titus* 2: 5).

The calculated breach of the Church's teaching and practice over twenty centuries through deference to Feminist ideology has disordered the thinking of the faithful as it has disrupted the Church's liturgy. It has occasioned the loss to the faith of many. The sooner women are removed from the sanctuaries of our churches and positions of authority in the Church, the sooner will the faithful return to the right exercise of their religion.

The answer to problems in the practice of the faith is not to enlarge the involvement of the laity but to return to the priest his rightful authority. The proper place of the laity is as the faithful of Jesus Christ, subject to the priest's instruction and with the blessing of the sacraments he bestows. The Catholic Church is not a democracy. It is a monarchy with Christ as its Head. The priest is his vicar in the local parish, the one who stands in the place of Christ in His majesty. The urge to appeal to some democratic authority in assessing what is best for the faithful is another of the errors of Vatican II that sought to superimpose Protestant over Catholic principle.

Those who have drifted away from the Church have done so not because of fear of tradition but because the Church's tradition has been destroyed by the reformers of the Church's liturgy. They rightly object to the pretence of the *novus ordo* where the Mass, emasculated with borrowings from the Protestant, has been reduced to a ceremony of preaching at people while the faithful endure series of mindless and unnecessary 'Prayers of the Faithful'. The central mystery of Offertory, Preface and Canon culminating in the double consecration has been shorn of its grandeur and Divine impetus by the obsession with utility fostered by the Council's bishops. The force of this criticism is easily tested. Let the Australian Catholic bishops forbid, *ad experimentum*, during weekdays (save on the celebration of Solemnities), prayers of the faithful, 'offertory processions' and preaching (by priest or any other 'minister' or lay person) whether before, during, or at the end of Mass, for a period of six months, and note the results.

Only one of the frightful 'matters' in the draft list bears upon the faith, n. 6, and that in a manner deleterious to it. In the *Statement of Conclusions* that attended Australia's bishops on their 1998 *ad limina*, they were warned specifically against indulgence in the Third Rite of Reconciliation, the permission for whose abuse to their priests many had given by their silence or inaction. The endeavour to reinstitute the disorder which obtained prior to 1998 speaks volumes for the draft list's authors.

Michael Baker

22nd August, 2018—*Our Lady, Queen & Mother (forma ordinaria)*

Immaculate Heart of Mary (forma extraordinaria)

Appendix I

Matters the Plenary Council should consider

1. Focus on what was encapsulated in Vatican II, i.e., the dignity, vocation, role and responsibility of laity, and work towards being a true synodal church, with unity in diversity and structures to reflect a synodal church. Forming and empowering parish and diocesan pastoral councils should be part of this. Canon 514 (which heavily emphasises the bishop's role in diocesan pastoral councils) should be reviewed.
2. Focus on developing a more inclusive church. God's love is inclusive. The church has spent too much time excluding rather than including, e.g., women, LGBT people, the divorced, people of other religions. Except in remote dioceses, the church fails to engage with indigenous people. Many people who have drifted away from the church feel intimidated to return by past traditions of the church.
3. The church taking deliberate steps to be more visible in the community and the media, not afraid to be providing answers to the big questions about life and death and spreading the Christian messages of salvation, forgiveness and compassion.
4. Reinvigoration of parish life so that the parish is an inviting place for everyone, reflecting God's love: children, young families, the elderly, across ethnic, gender and economic lines. With the move to larger parishes, smaller communities within parishes need to be promoted, as in the early church, communities of faith which can reach out to the wider community. People yearn to belong to caring communities. Home masses and community prayer should be encouraged. Family groups should be reintroduced.
5. Whether the top-down structure of the church is right for today and whether more authority should be delegated (principle of subsidiarity). There should be greater emphasis on the role of priest as pastor, with administration to be carried more prominently by the laity. Each diocese should be required to have a Human Relations plan, based on the sacraments and pastoral care services.
6. Re-introduction of the third rite of reconciliation.
7. Taking steps to change the culture of clericalism in the church. The clergy must be required to undertake ongoing training.
8. Instituting greater openness in the process for appointment of bishops.
9. Taking steps to ensure that women are involved in key decision making roles in the church. Women deacons and women chaplains should be considered.
10. The ordination of married priests.
11. Greater focus on youth. Providing regular platforms for participation of youth in the church. The liturgy, including its language and music, should be reinvigorated to make it more welcoming for youth. There should be more talking with youth, not talking at them. In giving their homilies, priests need to be able to talk with children. Mechanisms should be explored to ensure the church is accessible to youth on line, in schools, at sporting events. The church needs to make more use of digital technology, promote peer to peer youth ministry and promote youth retreats and conferences so the

young can meet God in their hearts. Church groups, e.g., St Vincent de Paul Society, need to be made more welcoming to youth participation.

12. Supporting authentic, faith-filled teachers in schools. There needs to be greater emphasis in schools on teaching the tenets and framework of the faith.

13. A more active social justice stance from the church, more dialogue from the pulpit, more promotion of involvement by the laity in social justice matters. Church leaders should embrace and promote "Laudate Si" (sic), recognising its emphasis on the need to combat climate change as a fundamental social justice issue.

14. Ecumenism needs to be reinvigorated. Leaders of other Christian churches should be invited to provide advice to the Plenary Council, especially on matters of church governance. There should be an ecumenism commission in every diocese charged with responsibility for embracing dialogue with people of other faiths.

15. Using the recommendations of the Royal Commission as a learning and teaching mechanism to show leadership to the world. All recommendations of the Commission relevant to the Catholic Church need to be responded to. Each parish should be asked to consider making an apology to victims of abuse and their families, with a symbol of contrition, e.g., memorial plaque, planting a tree. Bishops must not delay any longer the release of the TJHC report.

16. The Plenary Council itself needs urgent consideration so that its purpose is properly articulated, its membership is understood and the role of the laity is properly explained. There is a sense in which people believe that the laity will not really be involved in meaningful decision making in the Plenary Council and will have merely a focus group role. The whole process is too long because many issues need urgent attention now. A woman should be appointed co-chair of the Plenary Council or, if this is not possible under Canon Law, a woman should be appointed deputy chair.